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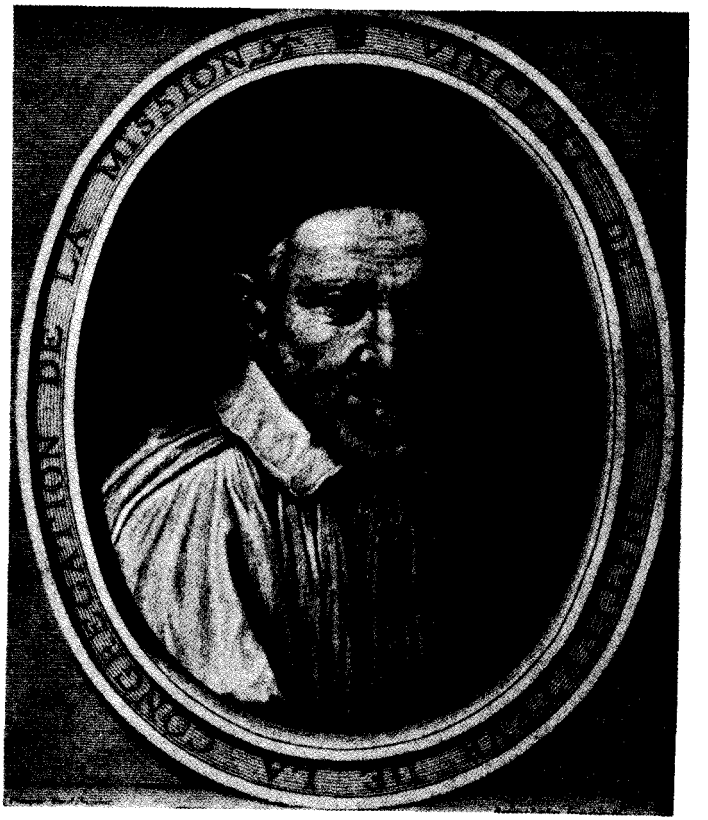
THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL



SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

THE LIFE & WORKS OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

(Monsieur Vincent: Le grand saint du grand siècle)

By

PIERRE COSTE, C.M.

Translated from the French by

JOSEPH LEONARD, C.M.

VOLUME I

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TO

THE MOST HONOURED FATHER VERDIER

SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

AND

OF THE COMPANY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY,

WHO HAS NEVER CEASED TO ENCOURAGE

THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK,

IN FILIAL HOMAGE AND DEVOTION.

FOREWORD

WE propose, in publishing this work, to give a true and complete life of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Hence it will not be a biography that is simply content with relating the most salient facts of a man's life, scarcely touching on others, or even leaving them entirely in the shade. We shall study him at work in all those fields in which he laboured, excluding nothing, and neglecting none of the new elements that have been contributed by writers, who have come across him on their path, in their various articles, essays and books.

Hence it is to be a complete life, but also a critical one, that is to say, freed from the legends which, in the course of time, may have glided into his life as they have done into all the lives of the Saints. A tendency to panegyric and a love of the wonderful, are faults that may frequently be met with amongst hagiographers. They render the task of the true historian difficult inasmuch as they constrain him to separate, in the total mass of related facts, those which correspond with reality from those which are the result of admiration or imagination, and pitilessly to reject the latter, at the risk of hurting the piety of the weak.

We shall have no surer guide than Saint Vincent de Paul himself if we wish to keep to the path of truth. His writings and discourses fill thirteen octavo volumes, and his contemporaries and immediate collaborators—Abelly, in particular, the author of his first life—have collected and preserved their testimonies.

Almost all his biographers have followed the same method: the chronological order up to the time of his foundations and, after that, his various undertakings. There is, indeed, no other possible method ; once his works were established, they should be taken up and pursued separately, unless one

resigns oneself to the sacrifice of broad, general views ; and this would present too many grave disadvantages.

A serious historical work cannot dispense with references : the reader should be placed in a position to judge for himself, no matter how excellent or well-founded the statements may be that are put before him. Quotations and references will enable him to do this, and hence they have been multiplied. Extracts taken from the letters or sayings of Saint Vincent possess the further advantage of establishing direct contact with him and, thus, of helping to make him better understood.

In a word, we have striven to compose a complete, methodical, critical and solid work, and it will be for the reader to judge if we have succeeded.

Translator's Note : The first three chapters of the second volume of Père Coste's : M. Vincent, Le Grand Saint du grand siècle, *have been incorporated in the first volume of this translation. It is hoped that, by this arrangement of the material, a more even distribution may be secured, without undue interference with the unity of the work.*

The reader may be interested to learn that, in June 1933, the French Academy awarded Père Coste's Life of St. Vincent the highest award at its disposal for historical work—the Grand Prix Gobert.

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My dear Confrère,

Exegi monumentum aere perennius regalique situ pyramidum altius ! So Horace sang and prophesied. His tone is rather exalted than modest. It is obvious the poet is quite pleased with himself, and feels confident that his name will accompany his poems in their march down the ages and attain immortality. *Non omnis moriar multaque pars mei vitabit Libitinam.*

All things considered, the poet of Venusia was no bad prophet. His name and his poetry have come down through the centuries and will traverse many more, if not to charm keen and studious Youth, at least to console old Age, after intercourse with one's fellow-men and the lessons of life have helped one to understand Horatian poetry. It is no mean source of consolation provided it never be taken apart from the higher and deeper consolation of the Christian life.

You, my dear confrère, in offering your life of Saint Vincent de Paul to the religious and erudite world might, without overmuch temerity, take the liberty of borrowing the Roman poet's words and say with him, though with greater modesty : ' *Exegi monumentum aere perennius ;* I have just put the finishing touch to a monument destined to glorify Saint Vincent which, more durable than bronze and loftier than the pyramids, will last to eternity.'

In your modesty you would not add : *Non omnis moriar.* And yet, your great and glorious labours in honour of S. Vincent, now happily crowned by this publication, will share, very directly, in the immortality of the hero they are meant to glorify. They will transmit, at the same time, the name of one who, inspired and animated by both a natural and a spiritual relationship with Saint Vincent, raised up to him an imperishable monument, that of his life and works.

For eleven years (1920–1931) of close and untiring labour you have worked at this nobly proportioned and singularly graceful monument. And indeed, these eleven years of actual toil had been preceded by many years—one may almost say a whole lifetime—of preparation, research, occasional fortunate discoveries, study, close scrutiny of the worth of the materials you intended to make use of in your projected work ; anxious, as you rightly were, to employ only the very best material.

A series of monographs dealing directly or indirectly with Saint Vincent, had at the same time given greater precision to the constantly advancing preparations of the monument on which you were at work.

You began the execution of the work in 1920. In eight successive, splendid and learned volumes you gave us all that has been preserved of the Saint's immense correspondence. I remember I then told you that this publication would be gladly welcomed both by the religious world which seeks edification in the first place, and by that world of scholars which is ever on the search for new material.

The facts, as you well know, have not belied my conviction.

Such was the preliminary foundation of the monument you have projected in honour of our saint.

Three years later, in 1923, you collected and published the conferences, discourses and exhortations of Saint Vincent in four valuable volumes.

The conferences and addresses which have unfortunately perished or which, perhaps, were not taken down whilst the Saint was speaking or exhorting, would have filled many more volumes. This is, indeed, a great and deplorable loss and one, alas, we can never hope to fill.

However, the existing collection in its actual form is incomparably useful both for all those who desire to lead an inner life and for spiritual guides, who will find therein all the elements of a rich and abundant spiritual doctrine at once theologically sound, simple and practical, far removed from all forms of exaggeration, and in perfect conformity with the directions, decisions and teachings of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

The admirable proportions of your monument were now visible, and a host of readers and admirers discovered a new and greater Saint Vincent than the one usually presented to the public.

After the letters and conferences had been published, there still remained a very fair number of papers and documents dealing with a large variety of matters, all of which were concerned with Saint Vincent's foundation and works. They supplied sufficient matter for a further volume of the greatest possible interest and full of surprises for those who had hitherto been unacquainted with the manifold activities of our saint, who was always to be found where there was good to be done—whether it was a question of encouraging some new enterprise, organising assistance, or supplying men and women of good will with a set of practical suggestions. A simple but many-sided man.

And now you are giving us, to crown the monument already so far advanced towards completion and destined to the glory of Saint Vincent, three volumes of his life. Your work is done—*Exegi monumentum.*

But this does not imply that you are now about to leave your customary field of work, and take your repose in the peaceful and quiet contemplation of a great task worthily done. No—that is not possible. When one has grown attached to a saint such as ours, one can no longer leave his company. Something always remains to be discovered or more deeply penetrated.

There are some—as you may, perhaps, have heard—who would have preferred that your labours on Saint Vincent had begun with the publication of his life as the first and solid foundation for the monument you had destined to him. They said, let us first know the workman and then we shall more easily understand his work. There is something to be said for this idea, which was Abelly's, of the Life, Virtues and Work of Saint Vincent de Paul.

But you thought otherwise, and you have not done so badly. It seemed to you that a knowledge of what your hero had said and done, of his virtues and good deeds, his labours and merits, would place his figure in a nobler light, more clearly reveal his powerful personality and form a better

preparation for the understanding of the man with his splendid, natural endowments ; of the priest in the splendour of his apostolic zeal ; of the saint in the superabundance of his merits ; of the intrepid though prudent founder of Communities ; of the creator of works that were new both in their nature and modalities. The workman was to be known by his works.

Such was your idea and you have fully realised it in your life of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Availing yourself to the full of the learned and conscientious labours of those authors who have gone before you, as well as of your own fruitful researches, you would seem to have exhausted the subject, and it seems that your work will be the definitive life of Saint Vincent de Paul. It is, in truth, scarcely probable that any fresh discoveries will be made which would modify the figure of your hero as you present him in these pages. The handling of the materials of this life may vary in accordance with the genius or talent of future writers ; it may be that another and later historian of Saint Vincent will lay more stress on the intellectual side of his hero, or use him as a sort of theme to be developed for the special edification of his hearers ; but all will have to come back to your work if they are to respect historical truth.

You would have nothing to do with a ' romantic ' life of Saint Vincent, despite the great delight taken by the general reading public in this particular literary genre, which, it must be confessed, has a charm of its own. Nor did you set out to compose a mere, dry, scholarly dissertation in which a disproportionate series of lengthy notes and quotations, load, crush down, and even submerge the text.

You have composed and written a life of Saint Vincent in which both heart and mind are allowed their due proportions : the mind, by the information you have given of those mighty conceptions and statesmanlike views which enable us to speak of the genius of Saint Vincent and give him his due place in the rank of those great men by whom France is honoured ; the heart, by the admiration it will feel when it considers how God raised up and guided this little shepherd of the Landes, by sure and certain ways to the perfection

of holiness, and placed him in the bosom of the Church as one of the most striking proofs of supernatural power.

You determined to show us a man, a Christian who was not born a saint or even confirmed in grace, but who, step by step, aided by divine grace, moved upward to perfection of the supernatural order ; you have succeeded in letting us see a saint, the light of whose holiness, imperfect at first, gradually increased until it reached a splendour that was the forerunner of Heaven. And since a saint is not a man without father and mother and country, you have shown him, in the course of your work, as the ideal representative of the French soul with its love of generosity and self-sacrifice ; as an exemplar of those virtues which Gallic and French ancestors, and above all, twenty centuries of Christianity, have enshrined deep down in the hearts of the children of the land where Vincent de Paul was born and reared, lived and laboured, where he became a great saint and where his precious relics now rest.

Those who, knowing Saint Vincent, admire and love him—and they are many—gladly proclaim that he is a great saint and a great Frenchman.

Those who will give him this double title, after reading your life of Saint Vincent, will do so with far greater justification and more complete assurance.

Just as you desired that the publications which preceded this book should be complete and veracious, so did you wish that the culmination of your labour should be so too. You have realised your aim—this life is true and complete ; and there is nothing so beautiful as Truth.

It is on account of this passion for rigorous and exact truth that you were unwilling to insert in the course of your narration certain facts, words and deeds, attributed to Saint Vincent without a really solid foundation.

The *Golden Legend* is not, and never will be, brought to a conclusion.

Legends redolent of poetry and devotion are almost spontaneously associated with saints beloved by the people in order to make them still more popular and to confer on them that special beatification or canonisation that springs from the admiration, confidence and gratitude of humanity.

Saint Vincent was too popular and his features too well known by pictures, engravings, and simple, pious tales not to have acquired his own little garland of legends, and these, as a rule, were touching, occasionally impressive, always expressive of admiration, and intent on bringing into higher relief some virtue, some noble deed, some act of devotion pushed to the utmost limits of self-sacrifice and immolation.

Who knows but a reader here or there may regret the omission of the moving story of the galley-slave and his chains, or of the angry duchess who, when disappointed in her maternal ambitions, threw a footstool at the Saint's head? These, and others, are all to the honour of Saint Vincent and reveal, in their own way, the type of man he actually was. But as they are not based on absolutely trustworthy historical foundations they have not been allowed a place in the pages of your book. *Amicus Plato; magis amica veritas.*

However, these edifying legends will still continue to be told, written and published for the consolation of simple, pious souls, and Saint Vincent will not thereby lose a single prayer or invocation.

Am I to say that your life of Saint Vincent, the apex of your splendid monument, will cast into oblivion the numerous lives that have already appeared? No, for each of them is valuable in its own way and thereby pleases a certain category, occasionally a large one, of readers.

Other lives will follow yours, because Saint Vincent will always remain one of the most attractive figures and one of the most lovable of Saints. These new lives will find their own readers, who will be interested and charmed by the name, the style, the genius of authors still unborn.

But your life of Saint Vincent will always remain a model and an authority on all that concerns our saint.

This life, then, whilst completing, is in harmony with the previous publication of letters, conferences and documents, and thus seems to be the summit and essential crown of the monument you have erected to Saint Vincent. You will permit me to say: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius regalique situ pyramidum altius!*

Saint Vincent, the object of your work and labours, will doubtless manifest his fatherly gratitude to you by copious blessings.

As for myself, in virtue of my title and office, I now thank you on behalf of the family of which Saint Vincent was the Founder and remains the Father. Whilst blessing the author and his work, I ardently desire the well deserved dissemination of the latter, not only in Saint Vincent's family, but also amongst his innumerable friends and admirers, amongst those who are attracted by a noble mind, a great soul, a loving heart ; amongst those who, though little interested in divine things, bow down in reverence before that reflection from on High which we call sanctity.

Those who will read you, that is to say, those who will read Saint Vincent living and speaking in the three volumes of your life, will find therein pleasure, profit, edification, and an incentive to unceasing progress in good.

Such a result would be delightful, and it is assured.

F. VERDIER,
Sup. Gen.

PARIS,
July 19th, 1931.
The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH
(1581–1605)

THE Council of Trent brought its sessions to a close in the year 1563. It had re-stated the teachings of the Catholic Church on those points of doctrine which had been called into question by the various Protestant sects, and taken measures for the restoration and maintenance of discipline within the Church. Whilst thus engaged in circumscribing the progress of the Reformation, Frenchmen were shedding their blood in profusion, engaged as they were in the most bitter and implacable civil and religious wars. Catholics and Huguenots were cutting each other's throats with hatred in their hearts under the eye of a weak and indecisive King who, falling under the influence now of one faction and now of another, could not make up his mind which to embrace.

In the ancient province of Béarn, Jeanne d'Albret the mother of Henry of Navarre (the future Henry IV), had far more character and will-power than Henry III ; she unceasingly exerted all her efforts for the triumph of Protestantism, which extended its ravages throughout the whole diocese of Dax, of which the city of Orthez then formed a part. Armed bands, in the pay of the heretics, advanced even as far as the gates of Dax, spreading ruin on their way ; churches were burnt down, monasteries pillaged, and the clergy put to death.[1]

[1] *Revue Catholique d'Aire et de Dax*, 1874, p. 104 ; *Histoire des troubles survenus en Béarn dans le XVI^e^ et la moitié du XVII^e^ siècles*, par Poeydavant, Pau, 1819–1821, 3 vols., I, p. 381.

These dreadful scenes were still present to men's minds when God, taking pity on the Church of France, sent it a man who, by his holiness and genius for organisation, was to contribute more than any individual, in the whole course of the seventeenth century, to the re-establishment of divine worship and the restoration of discipline.

Vincent de Paul first saw the light in the same year as Duvergier de Hauranne, the Abbé de Saint-Cyran, on April 24, 1581, in a little village near Dax which now bears his name, but which was then called Pouy.[2] If we were to accept the age assigned him,[3] shortly after his death, in the *Gazette de France*, by the poetaster Loret,[4] and the inscription engraved, by order of René Alméras, the second Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, on the stone slab placed at the entrance of the crypt of the Church of Saint-Lazare, he should have been born in 1576, and this date has in fact been adopted by all those who have written his life, following the example of Abelly, his first biographer. In face of such a weight of authorities and in the absence of a baptismal certificate (the custom of keeping church registers being then unknown in Pouy), nothing less than the clear, repeated, unconflicting affirmations of the servant of God himself, from between 1628–1660, combined with the testimonies of his contemporaries, could justify us in selecting another date.

It would be hard to say what precisely were the reasons that influenced those who added on five years to his age, after he was dead : their good faith may have been imposed on, or they may have concealed the truth to avoid giving scandal to those who might take the trouble to reckon up the number of years that had elapsed between his birth and his reception of holy orders.[5]

Up till 1887 all historians were agreed as to where he was born. In that year, Feliù y Perez, a Spaniard, maintained

[2] *Saint Vincent de Paul.* (Landes.)
[3] October 2, 1660.
[4] *La Muse Historique*, October 2, 1660.
[5] *La vraie date de la naissance de Saint Vincent de Paul*, par M. Coste. *Bulletin de la Société de Borda*, 1922.

with an assurance worthy of a better cause that Vincent de Paul was a countryman of Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and other illustrious saints.[6] His arguments were weak, but aided by national sentiment, they gained him adherents amongst his fellow-countrymen.

They did not deserve even such success, because we have proofs in abundance to manifest their falsity. Vincent de Paul called himself a Frenchman,[7] a Gascon,[8] a diocesan of the Bishop of Dax,[9] a native of Pouy ;[10] now, who knew better than himself the place of his birth ? We find the same thing in all official documents : in letters of ordination,[11] in Royal patents,[12] in Papal Bulls,[13] in episcopal registers and other such documents.[14] At the Process of Beatification there is no sign of disagreement amongst all the witnesses.[15] For three centuries the most complete unanimity on this point reigned amongst all historians, French or Spanish. It was not until 1887 that the discovery was made that Vincent de Paul was born, not in Pouy, in France, but in Tamarite de Litera, in Aragon. The proofs rested on the validity of two letters written by individuals of whom nothing is known ; one in 1830, and the other in 1831 ; they are full of obvious falsehoods and gratuitous assertions. The other arguments are equally futile, such as that his baptismal certificate cannot be found in Pouy, that the names of his father and mother are Spanish and that if he had been a Frenchman he would not have gone to Saragossa to study.

The little hamlet of Pouy has always claimed that Vincent de Paul was born there, and the validity of its claim is

[6] *San Vincente de Paul y su mission social*, par Arturo Loth. Obra traducida y anotada por B. Feliù y Perez, Barcelona, 1887. (The thesis forms an appendix.)

[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul, Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents.* Paris. 1920–1925. 14 vols. t. II. p. 235.

[8] *Ibid.*, II, p. 68.

[9] *Ibid.*, XI, p. 329 ; XIII, p. 43.

[10] *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 62.

[11] *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 1–7.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 215.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 258.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 208, 272.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 20, 66, 213, 222, 225.

indisputable. The house at Ranquine, in which he was born, was preserved in pious veneration for many years. When, in 1682, the farm-house collapsed from old age, a cross was planted on its ruins. Only the room in which he had been born remained standing, and this was due to the fact that it had been carefully strengthened. It too collapsed however, before 1700. An oratory was built over where its site stood, the walls of which abutted on the new house built by the de Pauls who had occupied the old one. When Vincent was canonised, a larger chapel was erected, at a few yards distance, to show the devotion of his countrymen. This, too, disappeared after more than a century and on its site stands the chapel where pilgrims now come to pray.[16] This chapel forms the centre of a little town, as it were, which is called the Birthplace of Saint Vincent de Paul and which is inhabited by orphan girls and boys, old men and women, a group of apprentices, a seminary for children and young folk who wish to become missionaries, all placed under the care and guidance of the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The large buildings on both sides and at the back of the chapel have been built for this colony. On the open space in front stand an aged oak-tree, said to be a thousand years old, in whose shade young Vincent often reposed, and also the house which, during the second half of the nineteenth century, had been regarded as the actual birthplace of our hero. At the present day, after the discovery of the depositions made in Pouy, during the process of Beatification, no further illusion is possible.[17]

When the house was first built, it stood by the roadside, and faced it. In 1864, it was brought somewhat closer to the chapel, but not very much, because the two buildings have, in part, the same foundations. The house now faces the north, for the sake of architectural symmetry. Although it is, perhaps, at a slight distance from where the Saint's birthplace once stood, nevertheless, it may be safely asserted that the distance is at most four or five yards.

[16] *Le Berceau de saint Vincent de Paiul*, par S. Serpette, p. 12, etc ; *Histoire de la maison de Ranquine avant le XIX*e *siècle*, par P. Coste (*Bulletin de la Société de Borda*, 1906, p. 334, etc.).

[17] They were published by Serpette, *op. cit.*, p. 13, etc.

The de Pauls lived there right up to the eve of the French Revolution. They had, perhaps, lived there many years before the birth of Saint Vincent, because the name was and is common in the district ; there were several de Pauls in Pouy in 1509.[18]

The origin of family names is a subject deserving careful study. At first, many family names were simply names of places. The name of a saint such as John, Peter or Francis, was bestowed on a child at Baptism, and as the Christian name was common to several individuals it was followed, for purposes of identification, with the name of the house they inhabited, or the land they cultivated, and also by the insertion of the particle, *de*, *du*, *de la*. In the course of time, the names added on in this fashion became surnames ; they became attached to the individual and followed him wheresoever he went. In the Catholic registers of Pouy, all the inhabitants, even the humblest, had, in the seventeenth century a *de* or a *du* before their name. It may be presumed that such was the origin of the name *de Paul* ; all the more so because, in former times, there was a house called *Paul* in the Buglose district, and, half-way on the road between the modern Birthplace and Buglose, a stream called the *Paul*. Saint Vincent's remote forebears had perhaps inhabited this house or lived on the banks of the stream and hence came the name which they handed down to their descendants.

The French Revolution was fatal to all titles of nobility and hence particles had to disappear or were added to the surname. As a general rule, monosyllabic names simply added the particle. The name *de Paul* had not waited for the end of the eighteenth century to become one word *Depaul*. That is how Saint Vincent wrote his name, and in doing so, conformed to a family tradition that has persisted even to the present day. Nevertheless, it is curious to note that all those around him, his confrères, friends, correspondents, did not imitate this practice, and that he himself, in the Latin translation of his name,[19] separated the two syllables. Abelly adopted the current usage and all subse-

[18] See Serpette, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[19] *Saint Vincent de Paul.* Vol. IV, pp. 67, 98, 457, 511, etc.

quent historians have followed the example.[20] Abelly states that, at a later period, Vincent de Paul had himself called simply *Monsieur Vincent* so that there should be no mistake about his peasant origin. Such a precaution would have been quite unnecessary at Pouy.

His father, John de Paul,[21] and his mother, Bertrande de Moras,[22] were not, as some have believed, noble folk who had fallen on evil days, but hard-working and honourable tillers of the soil, who owned a good dwelling-house and some acres of land. Later on a poor old woman asked the Saint to give her an alms because she had been a servant of 'Madame your mother.' 'You are making a mistake, my good woman,' he replied, 'my mother never had a servant, she did all the work herself because she was the wife, just as I am the son, of a poor peasant.'[23]

The couple had six children: John, Bernard, Vincent, Gayon, Mary, who, after her marriage, went to live near the church in a house called Paillole, and Mary Claudine, who married a young man named Gregory. Vincent was the third child and in 1626 all were alive, except John.[24]

Vincent de Paul was baptised in the village church which was about a mile and a half distant from Ranquine, between the River Adour and the high road. He was called Vincent, perhaps because his godfather or godmother bore the name

[20] *La Vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, Paris, 1664. 3 vols., Vol. III, Ch. XIII, p. 199. My readers may be surprised at my quoting from the first edition, now very rare, and not the last (Paris, Gaume, 1891, 3 vols.) which is widely circulated. The reason is that the 1891 edition is not in complete conformity with that of 1664. It is much better that the reader should have the primitive text before him and not one that has been re-touched.

[21] Abelly (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. II, p. 7) calls him John; Collet (*La Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Nancy, 1748, 2 vols.) calls him William (Vol. I, p. 5). The name of John, as a matter of fact, is very common in Pouy whilst Williams were rare, if there were any at all.

[22] Oscar de Poli, *Recherches sur la famille de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Paris.

[23] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XIII, Sect. 1, p. 204.

[24] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 62.

or, perhaps, out of devotion to Saint Vincent de Xaintes, martyr, Bishop of Dax, and chief patron of the diocese. This saint was highly honoured all through that country-side, especially on the first of September, when the feast was celebrated with great solemnity in all the parishes, but nowhere with so much pomp as at Saint Vincent de Xaintes, near Dax, where the people of the district and the surrounding country-side marched in dignified procession. The Roman Martyrology states, contrary to the tradition at Dax, that Saint Vincent de Xaintes died in Spain ; and this, no doubt, was the reason that Vincent de Paul wrote, later on in life, to Spain, to have enquiries made as to his patron saint. Abelly is the authority for this statement and he may, perhaps, have been misled.[25]

Saint Vincent de Paul had, moreover, a special devotion to Saint Vincent Ferrier, to whom he frequently referred in his conferences, and whose name he loved to invoke.[26]

He never ceased to celebrate the anniversary of his Baptism with prayer and thanksgiving.[27] Each year, Abelly relates, as the day came round, he was accustomed to kneel down in the presence of his community and beg his confrères to forgive him for the scandals he alleged he had given them and also to help him to obtain God's forgiveness for the sins of his whole life.

It is believed that the church to which little Vincent was carried after his birth was none other than the old parish church which was demolished in 1913. When the faithful, on entering, saw on their left, above the old wrought-iron font, an inscription which the parish priest had engraved on a marble tablet stating that Saint Vincent de Paul had been baptised there, they never dreamed for a moment that this was untrue, and they were pleased to think that a saint had prayed, learned the rudiments of Christian doctrine, and made his first communion in their church.

In accordance with the custom of the time, the cemetery adjoined the church ; it lay as it does to-day, along the side-wall on the Epistle side. Vincent de Paul's father and

[25] *Op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. III, Sect. III, p. 23.
[26] *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, Ch. IX, p. 94.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Ch. XIII, Sect. I, p. 296.

mother, sisters and brothers, were buried there and, later on, when he had occasion to return to his native village he went there himself to pray. From the cemetery one sees the wide valley of the Adour, with its flocks and herds, woods, streams and marshes.

On Sundays, the whole Ranquine household went to Mass and Vespers because their faith was living and the practices of religion highly honoured. On weekdays, they all went to work : some with their relations in the fields, whilst others tended the flocks.

The meals were frugal. ' In the place where I come from,' Saint Vincent remarked one day,[28] ' the people live on a little grain called millet, which is cooked in a pot ; when meal-time comes round, the food is poured into a dish and each one comes along, has his meal and then goes off to work.' The usual beverages were wine and cider.[29]

The family no doubt possessed, like every other yeoman household in the country, a farm-yard well stocked with cows and sheep and other domestic animals. Many a time in after life did the Saint tell those who showed him marks of esteem that he had tended cattle in his youth, or even, quite bluntly, that he had been a common ' swineherd.'

In accordance with the custom of little shepherd boys in those days, he used to go barefoot along the dusty roads with his eyes fixed on the flock confided to his care, carrying a little bag of provisions for his meals. Did he always return home at nightfall ? It does not seem so, for one day when conversing with Persin de Montgaillard, the future Bishop of Saint Pons, the latter spoke of his family seat, the Castle of Montgaillard, the Saint, thinking he was referring to the village of that name, which is close to Saint-Sever, and about thirty-four or thirty-five miles from Pouy, said : ' I know it quite well ; I looked after cattle when I was a lad and used to bring them along there.'[30] As there was very little good

[28] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 84.

[29] *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 481.

[30] Personal testimony of the Bishop of Saint-Pons in his postulatory letter dated January 10, 1705. Cf. Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 195.

pasturage to be found in the sandy and marshy district around Dax, it was necessary to seek for it in the more fertile soil of Chalosse.

In the comings and goings entailed by the child's duty as shepherd, he often, no doubt, passed by Buglose, which is part of the commune of Pouy and about two miles or so from the house at Ranquine. At the present day, a magnificent church stands there, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and frequented by many pilgrims. In those days, Buglose, as all admit, was a desert or quasi-desert locality, covered with marshes which made it unhealthy to dwell there, and without priest, chapel or pilgrimage.

The first historian of Our Lady of Buglose, Raymond Mauriol, Priest of the Mission and guardian of the shrine, states,[31] in 1726, that long ago there had been on this spot 'a sort of oratory,' very much frequented by the faithful, in which there was a statue of the Virgin, venerated even to this day, and which even then had deserved the reputation of being miraculous on account of the wonders it worked. When Jeanne d'Albert's bands of fanatics, under the command of Montmorency, approached Dax, about 1570, the faithful concealed the statue in a marsh. Their anticipation proved to be correct, because the Huguenots came to Buglose and wrecked the Oratory. Time went on ; those who knew the secret of the hiding-place died off and a providential occurrence, or rather a miracle, was needed to recover the precious treasure. In 1620, a herdsman, surprised to see one of his oxen constantly withdrawing to a secret part of the marsh and stopping at the same spot, had the curiosity to follow the beast. What was his surprise to find it in front of a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin, absolutely cleansed by the ox's tongue from the mud with which it had been covered. He informed the neighbours of his discovery and people came from all parts ; the sick were restored to health ; the news was spread abroad ; popular devotion supplied the place with a name Buglose (ox's tongue) ; the Bishop of Dax

[31] *Histoire de la Sainte Chapelle et des miracles de N. D. de Buglose*, Bordeaux, 1726, p. 1, etc.

and some of his canons held an enquiry into the miracles that had been worked ; he gave orders that the statue should be taken on a cart to the parish church of Pouy ; but, to the amazement of all, the oxen, after advancing a few paces, on reaching the site of the former oratory, refused to move forward ; the statue was taken down and a chapel built on the spot, which was solemnly blessed by the Bishop himself in 1622.

Mauriol's account was reproduced in a book that had a wide circulation and was frequently republished. It was scattered in profusion amongst the pilgrims and is now the accepted version. The pious pilgrims who read the book or hear of it are unaware that it was published long after the events and that other and far more ancient writers have another tale to tell. The ease with which Mauriol disseminated marvels in all directions in order to render the shrine of which he was the custodian more venerable is no inducement for us to form a high opinion of his value as a historian.

One would seek in vain for any ancient document dealing with Our Lady of Buglose ; it is not mentioned in any writing before 1630. Pilgrims' itineraries mention the Priory of Poymartet, at no great distance ; the account books of John Bauffès, Bishop of Dax, dealing with the issue of permission to beg alms, mention every place of pilgrimage in the district ; a list of titles in 1509, and of the taxes levied on the diocese of Dax in 1576 and 1588 mention all the churches, even the smallest ;[32] Our Lady of Buglose is absent from them all. The Abbé Gabarra, who made a special study of this question, writing in 1874, said : ' We have had the patience to search through all the wills, in the huge Doat collection in the National Library, of the nobility of this region in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ; those, namely, of the Viscounts of Tartas, the Lords of Albret, a few priests, and some devout noble ladies who have given expression to their last wishes. Of the parishes around Buglose not one is forgotten : Dax, Tartas, Pontonx, Lier, Laluque, and above all, Our Lady of Dubiela received legacies. Does anyone imagine that

[32] The original is in the Archives of the Mission.

Our Lady of Berglosse or Burglosse[33] alone was left in such complete and contemptuous neglect ? '

The conclusion that follows from all this is that if one is anxious to arrive at the truth about Our Lady of Buglose, one should be modest. Archæologists state that the statue dates from the first part of the sixteenth century, or even the final years of the fifteenth, but not in its entirety because the head possesses some of the characteristics of seventeenth century art. Is the origin of the pilgrimage to Buglose, in 1620, to be explained by the providential discovery of this statue in a marsh ? Contemporary evidence goes to prove it. But the story of the ox and other details of the current account are certainly to be regarded as legendary. The story related by Mauriol, in almost exactly the same form, may be found in the origin of fifty other places of pilgrimage in France.

Our Lady of Buglose is in no need of such remote antiquity and such a halo of legend to deserve the loving affection of her clients. Is not the most remarkable sanctuary in France one of the most recent ? The origin of a place of pilgrimage is concerned with history and not with devotion.

If Pouy had its pilgrimage before the end of the seventeenth century, no doubt young Vincent often went to kneel before the Madonna of Buglose. The great devotion he displayed to the Blessed Virgin later on in life gives us reason to suppose so.

To a tender piety the child united a great charity. His little heart even then was filled with pity at the wretchedness of others : he deprived himself of food to appease their hunger, gave them something out of the sack of flour he brought home from the mill, and put into their hands the

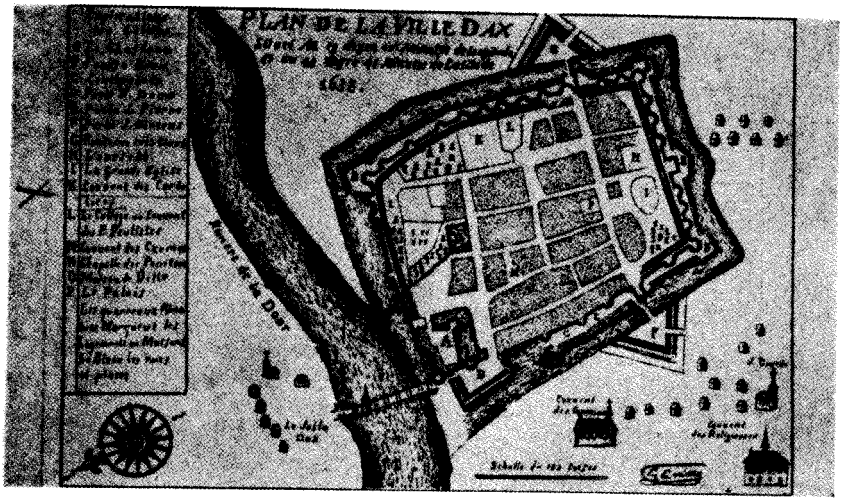
[33] *Pontonx et le prieuré de St. Caprais*, in the *Revue Catholique d'Aire et de Dax*, 1874, p. 76. On this question of Buglose, it is worth while consulting the *Bulletin de la Société de Borda*, 1895, p. LXXVI ; and 1896, p. XXXIII and XLII ; *Histoire des évêques de Dax*, by the Abbé Degert, Paris, pp. 313–317 ; and various articles in the *Revue de Gascogne* : *Historiens et Origine de Buglose*, 1882, pp. 371–382 ; *Origine de Buglose*, 1892, p. 289, etc. ; *Un ancien pèlerinage* : *Buglose* by M. Degert, 1892, pp. 23–33, 123–142, 174–181 ; 1923, pp. 27–37, 117–128.

few coppers he had slowly put by. His charity increased with his means of doing good. When he was twelve or thirteen years old he had saved as much as thirty pence, and had never been as rich in all his life. Thirty pence in those days was a small fortune in the eyes of a shepherd-boy. A beggarman came by ; Vincent did not hesitate ; the thirty pence flowed out of his purse into the poor man's palm.[34]

If he had a kind heart, he had also an open and lively mind, and hence his father made up his mind to have the boy taught Latin. A relation of his, Stephen de Paul, was in charge of the Hospital-Priory of Poymartet which was about a league distant from Pouy and served as a guest-home for pilgrims on their way to Saint James of Compostella. He lived quite comfortably on the proceeds of his benefice,[35] and, if he is the Prior referred to by Collet in his *Life of Saint Vincent de Paul*,[36] he was also well able to assist his relations. If young Vincent became a priest, he too would be able to look after his family, and so the money spent on his education would be well repaid. Such, perhaps, were the ideas and calculations that kept passing through the mind of John de Paul. He made a great mistake, because Vincent always showed the most admirable disinterestedness in regard to his own relations. Later on, it made him happy to think that they all had to earn their livings and, if he did render them some assistance during the Fronde, when the misfortunes of the time had reduced them to want, he did so, not out of his own money, but out of that supplied him by a friend for the purpose. He refused to intervene, on their behalf, in a civil action, in order to protect them from defamation, or to avert a sentence that might bring them disgrace ; and he also declined the repeated requests made to him to encourage a nephew to study for the priesthood.[37]

There was a convent of Friars Minors in Dax standing on the exact site of the present Hôtel des Postes. The Friars

[34] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. II, p. 9.
[35] S. Serpette, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[36] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 7.
[37] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, Ch. XIX, p. 291, etc.



DAX IN THE XVIIth CENTURY

kept a boarding-house and, for sixty livres a year,[38] lodged and fed the children of the surrounding district whose parents were anxious to have them educated. A door opened out from their dwelling-house into the College, which had been barely struggling along for over thirty years beneath a load of constantly recurring difficulties.[39] It is not quite certain whether the College was under the direction of the Friars Minor or merely the adjoining house. The Abbé Lahargou, its historian, favours the second solution. 'The College,' he writes,[40] 'was not in a stable condition, and the rules were badly observed. It had become the plaything of fortune, because it was not in the hands of a corporation which has, in comparison with individuals guided by the best intentions, the enormous advantage of being less affected by public calamities and, as it has a corporate existence, escapes the assaults of Death. Masters came and went, for often it was just a wandering life of adventure that had brought them there at all. They remained on the staff as birds of passage, and little was known or cared about their qualifications; for example, Denis Rousset, who was haled before the Council Chamber of Dax to be solemnly cautioned and exhorted to do his duty better in the future than he had done in the past. Laymen and ecclesiastics were taken as they turned up, for there was no freedom of choice.'

There is only one incident known of Vincent's college days and it was related by himself one day to Madame de

[38] A few words on the value of money in the seventeenth century may be useful. A. de Forille in his book *La Monnaie* (Paris, Lecoffre, 1907) points out that the value of money was declining all during the seventeenth century. He states that the money value of the livre in 1600 was equivalent in purchasing power to 7½ francs (1907). The crown (*écu*) was equal to 2 livres, and the *teston* 10 *sols* (Tours). About 1660 when Saint Vincent died the value of the livre had fallen from 7.50 to about 4.89 francs (1907). (Translator's note.)

[39] See three articles by Vicomte G. d'Avenal in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (August 15, 1929, April 1, 1930, April 15, 1930). *Le Goût de l'instruction et son prix depuis trois siècles.* The second article contains many interesting details on College life in France in the seventeenth century. (Translator's note.)

[40] *Le College de Dax*, par M. Lahargou, Paris, 1909, p. 5.

Lamoignon.[41] 'I remember,' he told her, 'that on one occasion in the College where I studied, somebody came to tell me that my father, who was a poor peasant, was asking for me. I refused to go and speak to him and thereby committed a great sin.' He gave further details to his missionaries, on another occasion: 'When I was a small boy and my father was taking me with him into the town, I was ashamed to walk with him and have people know that he was my father, because he was badly dressed and a little lame.'[42] No doubt, he was to be blamed for this, but we are very lucky to have the fact made known for it helps us to realise the struggles he had to go through in combating such feelings before attaining the amazing humility of which he gave such striking examples in the course of his life.

Vincent was a remarkably intelligent man with a mind at once penetrating and subtle. As a boy he made rapid progress in his studies, so rapid indeed that M. de Comet, a lawyer living in Dax who was also the district Justice of Pouy, took him into his own home, on the advice of the Father Guardian of the Friars Minors, and entrusted him with the education of his sons, whilst leaving him time to go on with his own studies. As this was an opportunity of educating himself without being a burthen to his father he gladly accepted it.

It is very difficult to establish the chronology of the early years of Vincent de Paul. According to Abelly, he was about twelve years old when he entered College; he remained four years with the Friars Minor and five with M. de Comet. Saint Vincent, on the other hand, says that he lived in the country until he was fifteen, or rather, interpreting his language in accordance with his method of speaking, until his fifteenth year.[43] He should then have left Pouy in 1595, and as on the other hand we have evidence that his theological studies began in Toulouse in 1597,[44]

[41] *Processus ne pereant probations*, f° 916, V° and 917.

[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 432.

[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 81.

[44] He became bachelor of theology in 1604 after seven years of theological studies in the University, attested by official documents.

he could not have remained more than two years in Dax.

Although it is not pleasant to have to say that Vincent's first biographer was ill-informed, nevertheless it is better to say that he rather than the Saint was mistaken. As a rule, the childhood of a great man is the least known part of his life, and the one into which legend most easily finds entrance; his deeds have not yet attracted the attention of his contemporaries who have no idea of what his future will be; and when, later on, his life comes to be written, the facts lie far back in the distant past. If any companions of his childhood remain, they are old men and women when questions are put to them, and both these circumstances tend to diminish the value of their evidence, especially when it is a question of trifling incidents or definite facts, such as dates, that concern a third person. Witnesses who say they know the facts from hearsay are to be handled even still more carefully. If there is any one fact in the early life of Saint Vincent that should have remained deeply engraved in men's memories, it was his captivity in Barbary, and yet it had become so completely forgotten in Pouy and Dax that when M. de Saint-Martin discovered the letter relating it in his family papers, it came as a revelation.

Canon de Saint-Martin carried out an enquiry into the early life of Saint Vincent and forwarded the result of his researches to Abelly, who made use of them when he was writing the first chapters of his biography; but we have no means of discovering with what degree of care and determination to arrive at the truth the Canon carried out his investigations. Furthermore, we can detect a large number of misstatements in the information he supplied,[45] and it would be imprudent to accept what he says as true when we have no means of controlling it; and much more so when Saint Vincent makes a statement to the contrary.

Vincent, therefore, studied in the College at Dax for only two years; he passed through the fifth form and the fourth,

[45] Especially in regard to Our Lady of Buglose, the dates assigned for ordinations and the vacancy of the diocese of Dax in 1600.

and one can now more easily understand why he used to refer to himself, afterwards, out of humility as 'a fourth-form scholar,' an assertion which would be unintelligible if he had spent nine years there.[46] In the course of these two years, M. de Comet had noticed with pleasure how well the youth was also progressing in piety. He believed that God had called him to the ecclesiastical state and encouraged him to embrace it. Vincent, for his part, was convinced that he had a vocation. With the permission of the Chapter of Dax (the see was vacant), he went to Bidache, near Bayonne, and received tonsure and minor orders in the collegiate church, on December 20, 1596,[47] at the hands of Salvat Diharse, Bishop of Tarbes.

Vincent, like many other young men of his time, might have carried on his theological studies without leaving his own native place, but he was ambitious to acquire knowledge and realised that, under the guidance of the learned and experienced masters of some famous University, his progress would be more rapid ; he also knew that University degrees would give him a right to apply for certain ecclesiastical dignities, and furthermore, by making the acquisition of a benefice more easy, put him more quickly in a position in which he need not worry about the future. The nearest Universities were those of Bordeaux and Toulouse, but only the latter had a Faculty of Theology, and Vincent accordingly proceeded there, his only resources being a sum of money his father had obtained by selling a yoke of oxen.

The University of Toulouse was frequented by thousands of students, from all parts of France and even other countries. The Professorships were open to competition. There were seven chairs in the Faculty of Theology : three of royal foundation, and the other four held by Carmelite, Dominican, Augustinian and Bernardine Fathers. Some of the courses were followed by hundreds of students. Toulouse, like other University towns, had its colleges, in which the students lived together, subject to a more or less severe dis-

[46] Littré explains *Quatrième* as the fourth form or class beginning with Rhetoric, second, third, fourth, fifth. (Translator's note.)

[47] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 1, 2.

cipline. The Colleges of Narbonne, Saint-Martial, Périgord, Maguelone, Pampeluna, Saint-Raymond, Mirepoix, Foix and Secondat had been founded by Churchmen. The celebrated Cardinal Peter de Foix had liberally endowed the College that bore his name and surpassed all the others ' by its noble buildings, the observance of its rule, the richness of its endowments, and the variety of classes and conditions of its students.'[48] Of the twenty-five burses at its disposal, one was allotted by statute to a student of the diocese of Dax. Vincent de Paul had not the good luck to win a bursary, as the financial difficulties he had to contend with during his whole sojourn in Toulouse clearly show. If he were, from his arrival in that city, an inmate of the College of Foix, which is not impossible, he must have paid a pension.

The University students were grouped according to their native provinces, each of which formed a society with a President and Vice-President at its head, or, to use the language of the time, a Prior and a Sub-Prior. These groups were opposed to each other, and frequently indulged in fights which often turned into armed battles. Accordingly, the University authorities proceeded against them with the utmost severity. A mere list of the documents dealing with the University, published by René Gadave,[49] shows how easily the rebellious scholars fell into the same sins. The years spent by Vincent de Paul in Toulouse were fully as disturbed, as anyone may judge from the following : ' December 23, 1599. Decree of the Parlement[50] banishing the Priors of the Nations of Burgundy and Languedoc from the city of Toulouse for five years ; condemning a student to pay a fine of 50 crowns for carrying arms ; ordering an enquiry to be made about several others ; commanding the Capitulars[51] to arrest all who contravene the regulations by

[48] *Le VII^e centenaire de l'Université de Toulouse*, par Paul Dudon, *Études*, June 20, 1929, Vol. 199, p. 732.

[49] *Les documents sur l'histoire de l'Université de Toulouse et specialement de sa faculté de droit civil et canonique.* (1229–1789.) Toulouse, 1910.

[50] p. 202, etc.

[51] *Capitouls* (Capitulars), Municipal Officers of the City of Toulouse (Littré). (Translator's note.)

day or by night.'—' June 21, 1602. Decree of the Parlement forbidding scholars to carry arms under penalty of being hanged or strangled. Accordingly a gallows shall be erected in the Rue de la Pomme.'—' March 20, 1603. The students' conduct is becoming worse and worse ; they are forcing even strangers who are not scholars to pay their footing. Some German gentlemen visiting the city, went to the Law School and were held up by the scholars of Burgundy and Languedoc, who forced them to pay their footing. A Capitular with the police went to the schools and found the Rector of Maran there with two or three hundred armed scholars. The Parlement gave orders that the heads of the Nations should be arrested and information obtained of the robbery committed on the Germans ; but the Capitulars, having raided the lodging-houses, could not lay hands on a single Burgundian, and got hold of only two Lorrainers whom they had to set free because they could not obtain evidence.'—' November 1603. A fresh instance of the scholars' insolence in the matter of paying one's footing. Whilst the Seneschal of Puy was at Vespers in the Church of Saint-Severin, the scholars of France and Burgundy demanded his footing from him ; the Canon hurried to put a stop to such a scandal ; the Capitulars were notified and came, but the scholars ran away and not one of them could be captured.'—' December 5, 1603. A Decree of the Parlement forbidding the scholars to carry arms : a fine of 1500 *livres* to be imposed on lodging-house keepers who receive armed scholars and do not denounce them ; a prohibition issued to students forbidding them to go to lodging-houses at which strangers are staying and force them to pay their footing.'—' April 20, 1604. A Council of Capitulars decrees that in view of the insolent conduct of the students, their lodgings and colleges should be rigorously examined ; that lodging-house keepers should be ordered to seize their arms, declare their names and denounce those who are Priors, Sub-Priors or Treasurers of a Nation.'

On May 10 an order was issued to arrest the Priors.

The decrees of the Parlement and the severity of the Capitulars did not lessen the insolence of the students. Notwithstanding the proclamation of police regulations, the

imprisonment of ringleaders, and fresh prohibitions to hold meetings or carry arms, the turbulent young men persisted in their rowdyism. They even went so far as to stain their hands in the blood of one of the city officials. A Capitular, M. Céléry, appeared on St. Stephen's Place to put a stop to a riot and was slain by two young scholars from Champagne—Firmin and Claude de Rousselet. They were condemned to death for the crime by the Capitulars. The Parlement took pity on their youth and commuted the sentence to five years' banishment and a fine of two hundred *livres*. Before leaving the city they had to make a public apology on their knees, clad in shirts, with bare heads and ropes about their necks, in presence of the Capitulars in their Council Chamber.

Such were the surroundings in which Vincent de Paul lived his life as a student. He kept apart, no doubt, from all such scenes of disorder. He had come to work and not to amuse himself with a gay life. Moreover, the rowdiest students were to be found in the Faculty of Law and not in that of Theology to which he belonged.

In the course of his first year at Toulouse he suffered a severe loss in the death of his father, who loved him most tenderly and begged in his will, dated February 7, 1598, that the family should spare no sacrifice in order to help him to go on with his studies. It was the wish of his whole family and especially of his mother, but Vincent, with his scrupulous sense of honour, would not consent. It was entirely foreign to his character to live in comfort at the expense of others, and he had no intention that his family, afflicted as they were by the disappearance of their chief support, should make any further sacrifices on his behalf. When he had exhausted his means of support he would find some means or other to earn his living.[52]

It is hard to understand why the young man, in the straitened circumstances in which he now found himself, should have left the University of Toulouse for that of Saragossa, and shortly after his arrival there, should have

[52] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 12; Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 13.

returned to Toulouse.[53] Before one accepts the fact of this journey, to which the notes sent from Dax to the first biographer refer, one would like to know on what foundation the statement rests.[54] Vincent, so Collet supposes, found the University of Saragossa raging with such theological disputes on *scientia media* and predetermination that he made up his mind to get away from it and return to France. It is an unlikely hypothesis fabricated to explain a still more unlikely fact.

When the young student had come to the end of his resources, he accepted the offer of a small academy for boys at Buzet, a village about fifteen miles from Toulouse on the borders of Tarn and Upper Garonne.[55] He received them into his school as boarders and taught them himself. He proved such an excellent teacher that the fame of his ability spread, and pupils were sent to him even from Toulouse as well as from the local gentry. Collet states that amongst his pupils were two grand-nephews of John de la Valette, Grand Master of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.[56] The school proved to be such a success that he was able to put some money by, and after some time, found himself able to transfer the Academy from Buzet to Toulouse, to which he was anxious to return so that he might be able to take out his lectures in Theology.

[53] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 10.

[54] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 9.

[55] It was Buzet-sur-Tarn and not Buzet in Lot-et-Garonne, which is mentioned expressly by Abelly (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 12) and by Collet (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 9, 14) so that it is hard to understand how any controversy could arise on this point. (Cf. *Où Saint Vincent de Paul dit-il sa première messe ?* by Tamizey de Larroque, *Revue de Gascogne*, 1890, pp. 197–199 ; *Ordination et première messe de Saint Vincent de Paul*, by P. Coste in the same review, November, 1908, pp. 513–518 ; *Pèlerinage à Notre-Dame de Grâce en l'honneur de Saint Vincent de Paul*, by Abbé Maffre, 1856, p. 77, etc. ; *Histoire de Notre Dame d'Ambrus*, by Abbé Jean Dubois, Agen 1898, pp. 58–63.) The idea that the children of Hérard de Grossolles, Lord of Buzet in Condomois were pupils of Saint Vincent, arose from a mistake ; it was first put forward by Abbé Maffre who thus supplied a weapon to his adversaries, for the Abbé himself was in favour of Buzet-sur-Tarn.

[56] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 10. Collet depends on Canon de Saint-Martin's *memoires* which are of no weight.

Vincent de Paul had something else in view besides his studies. It was God's will he should be a priest, and step by step the young cleric drew nigh to the priesthood. Salvat Diharse, Bishop of Tarbes, ordained him sub-deacon in his Cathedral on September 19, 1598, and deacon three months later, on December 17, in virtue of dimissorial letters dated September 10 and December 11. On September 13, 1599 he procured dimissorial letters for the priesthood from the Bishop of Dax with the obvious intention of receiving this Holy Order at the next Quarter Tense ordination. Why did he wait another year and apply to the old Bishop of Périgueux, Francis de Bourdelle, rather than to the bishop of a diocese nearer Toulouse or to his own bishop ? There is not the slightest ground for even a conjecture. He was raised to the priesthood on September 23, 1600, at Château-l'Évêque, near Périgueux, in the oratory of the bishop's country-house.[57]

The young priest was only twenty years of age. Such non-observance of the canonical prescriptions so recently reinforced by the Council of Trent and recommended by many provincial Councils, is a matter for surprise for all who observe, in our own days, with what scrupulous fidelity the rules of the Church are observed, and especially so in such a matter as ordination. Times change ; what is customary in the twentieth century was not so in the sixteenth and if we are to understand such events, we should consider them in the light of their age and not in that of ours.

The decrees of the Council of Trent had not, as by the wave of a magic wand, renewed the life of the Church of France in a brief period. The decrees long remained a dead letter and it was chiefly in the seventeenth century, thanks to the great reformers who founded the Oratory, Saint-Nicholas du Chardonnet, Saint-Sulpice, and Saint-Lazare, that the transformation was effected. Amongst the documents that throw a vivid light on the state of France at the end of the sixteenth century, few are as interesting as the letter written to Pope Clement VIII, on September 8, 1597, by Cardinal de Medicis, the legate *a latere* in France. He writes : ' Over one hundred and forty bishoprics and forty-

[57] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 7.

three sees are vacant. Several prelates formerly inclined to schism have now returned. Not many of them are intelligent ; the greater number never shave ; they are negligent as far as conferring Holy Orders is concerned, and hence the number of ignorant, mendicant priests, with no ecclesiastical title, and the number of persons who have taken orders before attaining the prescribed age and without any preparation, especially in the case of religious ; for no one pays any further attention to them once they have their superiors' permission. As they are priests, they hear confessions without any further approbation from the Ordinary. Some of the bishops have been accused of simony, and I think there may be some foundation for this, but one cannot very quickly obtain information on that point.'[58]

It took a long time to cure the evil. On July 21, 1609, the Cardinal Secretary of State,[59] in a letter to the Nuncio in France, expressed his surprise at the large number of French priests who having been ordained before the canonical age, by means of forged dimissorial letters, had written to Rome to be absolved from the censures involved. The Nuncio, in his reply, admitted the existence of the abuse and suggested remedies. ' From the very first days of my Nunciature,'[60] he wrote on August 28, ' I could see, from the petitions addressed to me by those who believed I had power to absolve them, how widespread this evil is in France, and also that an infinite number of clerics had incurred the censure.' Sebastian Zamet, appointed Bishop of Langres in 1615, found in his diocese, ' up to two hundred clerics who had received Holy Orders before the legitimate age and who had exercised the functions of these orders.'[61] In how many other dioceses had not ecclesiastical discipline experienced a similar relaxation and abuses become so common that men did not even think they were contrary

[58] *Vatican Archives.* Lettere di Francia, V. XLV, quoted by Henri de l'Épinois. *Les derniers jours de la Ligue* in *Revue des Questions historiques*, 1883, Vol. XXXIV, p. 111.

[59] Vat. Arch., Bibliot. Pia 301, Reg. de Lettere de Segra di Stato al nunzio di Francia, 1607–1609.

[60] Vat. Arch., Vol. LIII, p. 255. The text is in Italian.

[61] *Sebastien Zamet*, by Louis Prunel, 1912, p. 96.

to the laws of the Church![62] It is a great pity that this question of premature ordinations in France before the reform of the clergy had been effected, has not yet been dealt with; such a piece of research would show by definite details how easily this abuse was tolerated, even in the best and most religious parts of the country.

If Vincent de Paul had not observed the Council of Trent's regulations, and its disciplinary canons were not, as a matter of fact, adopted in France until 1615, he was in no way deficient in the knowledge, virtue and maturity of judgement prescribed. He spent the days following his ordination preparing for the celebration of his first Mass. He trembled at the thought of his own unworthiness. He selected a secluded chapel and chose only one priest to assist, and a cleric to serve Mass, in order that he might secure greater tranquillity. Abelly is ignorant of both the day and the place in which this first Mass was celebrated. According to an ancient tradition, mentioned by Collet,[63] or rather by his confrère Vieillecases,[64] to whom he refers, Vincent said this Mass at Buzet, on the other side of Tarn, in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, on a mountain and in the depths of a wood.[65]

[62] The dimissorial letters of September 15, 1599, we may note in passing, employ the usual formula . . . *tanquam idoneo, sufficienti, legitimae aetatis et bene intitulato reperto*, although, even if the date stated by Abelly (April 24, 1576) were correct, Saint Vincent would not yet have completed his twenty-fourth year. The usual formula was not altered in the case of those who had not complied with the regulations on this point.

[63] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 11.

[64] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 14.

[65] Collet's description is applicable to two chapels; one, Our Lady of Grace, in the parish of Buzet; the other, Our Lady of Remoulle, in the parish of Mezens. An extract from the document, preserved in the Castle of Mezens, shows us that the tradition to which M. Vieillecases refers is rather to the chapel at Remoulle. A marginal note, signed by the parish priest of Mezens in 1746 and 1748, refers to Our Lady of Remoulle as the place: 'where it is believed the new saint named Vincent de Paul said his first Mass.' We may add that Our Lady of Remoulle no longer exists and that the altar was removed to Our Lady of Grace immediately after the French Revolution.

At the suggestion of M. de Comet, the Bishop of Dax appointed the new priest to the parish of Tilh, one of the best in the diocese. Scarcely had this appointment been made than it was appealed against in the Court of Rome by an ecclesiastic named Saint-Soubè. Rather than engage in a lawsuit which might go against him, Vincent preferred to abandon his claim. It was, perhaps, on this occasion that he paid his first visit to the Capital of the Christian world, to which, as he tells us himself, he went during the pontificate of Clement VIII, who died in 1605.[66] His heart was filled with deep emotion during his sojourn in the Eternal City. 'O Sir,' he wrote later on to one of his confrères,[67] who had just reached Rome, 'how happy you are to walk upon the ground on which so many great and holy personages have trod! This idea touched me so deeply when I was in Rome thirty years ago, that, although I was laden with sins, it never ceased, I think, to move me, even to tears.'

On his return from Rome, where he remained a very short time, possibly during the long vacation, he resumed his studies, whilst continuing to carry on his little Academy. On October 12, 1604, after seven years' study of theology, the diplomas were signed which stated that he was a bachelor of theology, and which gave him a right to expound the Master of the Sentences.[68] He subsequently became a Licentiate in Canon Law in the University of Paris. These are the only two degrees ever taken by Vincent de Paul;[69] he never admitted he had any others and Brother Chollier, the archivist of Saint-Lazare produced only these two diplomas for the process of Beatification. Abelly therefore, made a mistake[70] in declaring that he was a licentiate, and

[66] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, pp. 316, 418; X, pp. 365, 593; XII, p. 347.

[67] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 114.

[68] The University of Toulouse presented Vincent de Paul with three letters, all bearing the same date, October 12, 1604; the first attests that he had spent seven years in the study of Theology; the second confers the title of bachelor; the third gives him leave to comment on the Master of the Sentences. They were found in his room after his death.

[69] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 60.

[70] *Summarium*, p. 5.

the *Gallia Christiana*[71] when it stated that he was a Doctor in Theology.[72] The glory of a saint does not lie in his university degrees, but in the nobility of his character and the splendour of his virtues.

We do not know whether Vincent de Paul, now that he was a bachelor, expounded, as he was entitled, the second book of the Sentences, which deals with the angels, creation, grace, sin, free-will, those interesting and complex questions which roused the passions of seventeenth-century theologians so strongly, or devoted all his time to the management of his school. Bachelors of theology who wished to go through the prescribed two-year course began their lectures about All Souls' Day. It is possible the new graduate did so but, if such be the case, he was obliged to abandon them before the end of the term.

An extraordinary set of events soon taught him that man is not the master of his future and that a higher Will rules his own. After Vincent de Paul had raised himself, by his own exertions, from a humble position to an enviable rank, he was now about to fall into the saddest of plights. God thus permitted him to taste the depths of human misery to the solace of which his future life was to be dedicated.

[71] *Op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XIII, p. 199.
[72] Paris, 1720, Vol. II, Col. 1403.

CHAPTER II

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL AT TUNIS, AVIGNON, ROME (1605–1608)

WHEN the year 1605 dawned, the young professor of Toulouse could have faced the future with confidence. His Academy was flourishing ; and the debts contracted whilst reaching the excellent position at which he had arrived, were decreasing. Everything was going well when he was summoned to Bordeaux on a matter of urgent importance. It is said he was offered a bishopric by the Duc d'Épernon, uncle of two of his pupils, and that this explains his journey to that city.[1] What we know for certain —on Vincent de Paul's own admission—is that the business promised to be of the greatest advantage to him, that it would involve considerable expenditure,[2] and that he subsequently considered it would be ' rash ' even to mention its nature.[3]

When he returned from Bordeaux, he learned that an old lady in Toulouse had left him all her property. This was the starting-point of a series of adventures which was to end with his captivity in Tunis. Nothing can equal his own picturesque account of the affair.

On July 24, 1607, he wrote to M. de Comet : ' You may have heard, Sir, since you were only too well informed of the state of my affairs,[4] how I discovered on my return

[1] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 14. The Duke of Épernon did not become Governor of Guienne until 1622 ; but it is quite possible that he was making a prolonged stay, as he frequently did, in his magnificent castle at Cadillac, near Bordeaux.

[2] Saint Vincent's debts had multiplied. The hundred or hundred and twenty crowns which he received after his captivity could have covered only part of them, and a small part at that. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 12.)

[3] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 2–3.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

from Bordeaux, that a good old lady in Toulouse had made her will in my favour. The property consisted of some movable goods and lands which the bi-cameral Court of Castres[5] had adjudged her in payment of a debt of three or four hundred crowns owed her by a worthless scoundrel. In order to save some of the property I set out for the place intending to sell it, acting on the advice of my best friends and the urgent need I had of money to pay the debts I had incurred and the heavy expenditure I should be forced to make whilst carrying out a matter which I do not even dare to mention.'

There is certainly very little resemblance between this Vincent de Paul and the Saint we all know. He was preparing to go home when a gentleman who was lodging in the same inn suggested to him that they should both go by sea to Narbonne. It was the end of July : the weather was gloriously fine : the journey would not be so hot and dusty ; it would also be shorter and cheaper, so why not go by sea ?

It is true there were some counterbalancing disadvantages. The greatest of all was the possibility of falling in with a Turkish ship and the risk of a sea-fight, with the danger of losing one's life or liberty. Every harbour in the Barbary States was, in those days, a nest of fierce pirates who were as a rule well able to bring home all they had stolen and pillaged. The corsairs on their light, swift, well-armed ships sailed up and down the Mediterranean and even ventured out into the Atlantic as far as the coasts of Brittany.[6] They preferred to hang around harbours, or cruise along the routes followed by trading-vessels and they waited for days at a time to fall on their coveted prey. Their audacity went even still farther. They landed, pillaged and carried off into captivity the peaceful inhabitants of towns they had taken by surprise. The inhabitants of Provence, in self-protection, had established watch-towers at intervals along the coast from which sentinels examined the horizon night and day

[5] A Court comprised of an equal number of Catholics and Protestants.

[6] The town of Baltimore in County Cork was sacked by Algerine pirates as late as 1631. (J. L.)

and announced the approach of the corsairs by ringing an alarm bell or discharging rockets. France had frequently made representations to the Sultan, to whom an ambassador was accredited, but always in vain ; the Turks in Barbary turned a deaf ear to orders issued from Constantinople even if transmitted through a special delegate. The reason of this immunity was, of course, the fact that such raids and acts of piracy were most profitable for all concerned. When a pirate captain returned in triumph to his home port with banners flying it was the signal for a public holiday ; his guns fired a salute, those of the port responded and the people came flocking to the quayside to welcome the conquering hero.[7]

At the moment when Vincent de Paul was preparing to leave Marseilles, the danger was greater than usual, because the great Fair of Beaucaire began on July 22, and to this town, which provided a central market for all the Levantine ports, an innumerable fleet of ships from all over the Mediterranean was flocking daily. It was a splendid opportunity for the Barbary pirates, and well they knew it. They lay concealed as best they could all along the coast, not far from the mouth of the Rhone, and swooped down on any imprudent ship that ventured out without an escort. The captain of the vessel in which Vincent de Paul was travelling, relying no doubt on his power of putting up a good fight, did so venture and paid dearly for his rashness. Let us listen to his young passenger :

' The wind, moreover, was so much in our favour that we could have made Narbonne that day—and it is fifty leagues off—were it not that God permitted three Turkish brigantines[8] which were cruising along the gulf of Lyons, lying in wait for ships coming from Beaucaire (where a fair was being held that is regarded as one of the finest in Christendom), to fall on us and attack us so vigorously that two or three of our men were killed and all the rest wounded ; even myself, who received an arrow-wound that will serve me as a time-piece for the rest of my life. We were forced then

[7] Cf. Abel Boutin, *Anciennes Relations commerciales et diplomatiques de la France avec la Barbarie.* Paris, 1902.

[8] A small, very swift type of galley carrying only one sail.

TUNIS IN THE XVIIth CENTURY
(From Dan's, *Historie van Barbaryen*, Amsterdam, 1684).

to surrender to these criminals who are worse than tigers, and in the first outburst of their rage they cut our captain into a hundred thousand bits because they had lost one of their best men, besides four or five convicts whom our men had killed. When this was over, they put us in irons, having roughly dressed our wounds, and went their way, committing a thousand robberies, but at the same time setting those free who had not put up a fight, after stripping them of all they possessed. And so at last, laden with booty, at the end of seven or eight days, they made for Barbary, a lair and den of robbers unacknowledged by the Great Turk. When we arrived there we were exposed for sale, with a declaration stating that we had been captured on a Spanish ship, because without this lie we should have been set free by the Consul whom the King keeps there so that trade may be carried on freely with the French.

'This was their procedure in regard to our sale. After stripping us quite naked, they handed out to each a pair of breeches, a linen vest and a small cap and then marched us up and down the streets of Tunis to which they had come expressly to sell us. When they had taken us around the town five or six times, with a chain about our necks, they brought us back to the ship, so that the merchants might come and see who were able to eat well and who were not, and also to show that our wounds were not mortal. When, this was over, they brought us back to the market-place, where the merchants came to see us, for all the world just like people come to the sale of a horse or an ox, making us open our mouths to see our teeth, feeling our sides, examining our wounds, making us walk, trot and run, making us carry weights and fight so as to gauge the strength of each of us, as well as a thousand other forms of brutality.'

This shameful scene must have been of common occurrence, because at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the territory of Tunis alone contained seven thousand Christian slaves.[9]

Vincent de Paul was bought by a fisherman, but as he

[9] *Histoire de Barbarie et de ses corsaires*, par Pierre Dan, Paris, 1649.

could not stand the sea, he was sold again after two months, in September, ' to an old man, an alchemist,[10] a sovereign extractor of quintessences and a most humane, pleasant and kindly old man.' This old scholar, his slave goes on to relate, ' had laboured for fifty years seeking for the philosopher's stone ; but all in vain, as far as the stone was concerned, but most successfully in another manner of transmuting metals. For instance, I myself often saw him melt down equal quantities of gold and silver, arrange the metals in small plates, place over them a layer of certain powders, then another layer of the metals and then another of the powders in a crucible or goldsmiths' melting-pot, place this in a furnace for twenty-four hours, then open it and find that the silver had become gold ; and still more often did I see him freeze or fix quicksilver into fine silver, which he sold and gave the proceeds to the poor. My occupation was to look after the fires of ten or twelve furnaces ; in which, thanks be to God, I had as much pleasure as pain.'

Evidently the old alchemist had not yet discovered the art of transmuting metals. The state of science was not sufficiently advanced to permit of such a discovery. It would be hard to decide whether he had recourse to some form of trickery or whether he was really a dupe of appearances.

The old man cultivated medicine as well as alchemy. He had discovered a sovereignly efficacious remedy for gravel. Vincent de Paul called to mind that his patron, M. de Comet, had died of this disease and was anxious to know how his master proceeded ; he questioned him and succeeded in being allowed to prepare and administer the ingredients. After he had recovered his liberty, instead of keeping the secret to himself, which would have made him an important personage and proved a source of pecuniary profit, he hastened to reveal the secret, in the interest of the sick, and the first person to whom it was divulged was M. de Comet the younger.[11] The receipt was not lost, if we may trust a manuscript preserved in the Hospital at Marans

[10] A *médicin spagirique* in the seventeenth century was one who practised the art of alchemy. (J. L.).

[11] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 7 ; Vol. VI, p. 601.

(Charente-Inférieure) in which we find : ' Saint Vincent de Paul's remedy for gravel. Take two ounces of Venetian turpentine, two ounces of white turpeth, a half an ounce each of mastic, galangale, gilliflower, and cubed cinnamon bark. Mix all together along with half a pound of white honey and a pint of the strongest spirits. Let the whole mixture stand for some time and then distil. The fourth part of a spoonful should be taken fasting every morning, along with three parts of borage or bugloss water ; it may be taken as often as one likes, because it will do no harm ; on the contrary, it is very good for the health and especially so in case of urinary troubles. Hence no special régime is required except that one should not eat for an hour after drinking ; and one can go about one's ordinary business. This will be seen from experience. This great servant of God learned the remedy in Barbary when he was a captive there.'

The slave went into ecstasies at the prodigious learning of his master and set himself out to be his pupil. He learned, he tells us ' a thousand . . . beautiful geometrical matters,' a mere list of which would now be of the greatest interest. Vincent de Paul, in his letters, refers vaguely only to two ; a mirror and a sort of talking-machine, or, to give the exact words of his account, ' the first stage, but not the total perfection, of the mirror of Archimedes,' and ' an artificial spring by which a skull may be made to speak.' This amazing old physicist, who was also a devout Mahometan, placed his weird instrument in a skull, ' to deceive the people . . . saying that his god Mahomet taught him what the god's will was by means of this voice.' Such trickeries revolted Vincent de Paul, and after he had won his freedom, his pen allowed one word to escape which revealed his true mind. He speaks of the alchemist as ' This wretch.'[12] What annoyed him even still more were the old man's attempts to induce him to abandon his faith. ' He loved me deeply,' he relates,[13] ' and took great delight in discoursing with me about alchemy and even greater about his Law to which he did everything in his power to win me, promising to give me enormous wealth and to impart all his knowledge.'

[12] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 15. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Vincent, however, preferred his liberty to the gold which he thought he had seen, and to the science which the old man taught him. 'God,' he goes on, 'always gave me a firm conviction that I should escape by the unceasing prayers I offered up to Him and the Virgin Mary, through whose sole intercession I firmly believe I was set free.' But whilst waiting patiently for the happy day on which he would once more see his native land, he bore his slavery patiently.

The fame of the marvellous old alchemist even reached the ears of the Great Sultan Achmet the First, who was curious to see him and anxious to take him into his service. The old man had to obey, but he fell ill of melancholy and regret and died on the journey.

His nephew, 'a convinced anthropomorphite,' received Vincent de Paul as part of his inheritance, but sold him shortly afterwards as he was afraid he might lose him without any recompense. In point of fact, rumours had begun to spread that in consequence of a treaty entered into on May 21, 1604, between Henry IV and Achmet I, Francis Savary de Brèves, the French Ambassador at Constantinople, was on his way to Tunis to demand the liberation of all Christian slaves, the restitution of all that had been captured by pirates, and the abolition of the right of visitation.

The news was quite true. The Ambassador landed in Tunis on June 17, 1606, and began a series of negotiations that lasted until the month of August. His efforts resulted only in the emancipation of seventy-two slaves who departed with him on the twenty-fourth of the same month.[14]

Vincent de Paul remained behind. His new master was from Nice, a priest and Friar Minor, named William Gautier,[15] who had denied his faith to gain his liberty.

[14] *Relation des voyages de Monsieur de Brèves tant en Grèce, Terre Sainte et Egypte qu'aux royaumes de Tunis et d'Alger, ensemble un traité fait l'an* 1604, par Jacques du Castel, son sécrétaire, Paris, 1628.

[15] The *Journal historique et recherches pour servir à l'histoire d'Avignon* (a manuscript work by Joseph Laurent Drapier, Musée Calvert d'Avignon, MS. 2562, f° 344) states : 'Monsieur Vincent de Paul, missionary apostolic, placed the adjuration of a minister

Apostasy had set him free. He was now living amongst the mountains with his three wives, apparently happy enough, but haunted, perhaps, by the remembrance of his fall. The country-side was a desert, and the heat appalling. The slave spent the whole day tilling the soil beneath a burning sun, and at nightfall, returned home in a state of exhaustion. But if bodily strength often failed him, he never lost his courage.

This courage was based on his reliance on the Blessed Virgin. He had learned from his earliest years that Mary never deserts those of her children who turn to her in their misfortunes. And so he prayed every day, and every day he seemed to hear in his heart the voice of his heavenly mother, answering his groans with the words : ' Courage ! the hour of deliverance is at hand.'

Vincent de Paul was twenty-six. The charms of youth and intelligence were united in his person. Two of his master's wives felt themselves invincibly drawn towards him. The first woman was a schismatic Greek and a ' highly intelligent ' person, who found the conversation of the slave so attractive that she wished to enjoy it as often as she could. The second wife was a Mahometan and equally alive to the charm of the young man.

' As she was curious to hear about our way of living,' writes Vincent de Paul, ' she used to come and see me every day in the fields where I was digging, and when I had finished, she commanded me to sing the praises of my God. The remembrance of *Quomodo cantabimus in terra aliena* of the children of Israel when they were captives in Babylon induced me to begin, with tears in my eyes, the psalm *Super flumina Babylonis*, then the *Salve Regina*, and several others. She took such great delight in them that I was most

named William Gautier, who had been a priest and a Friar Minor, into the hands of Mgr Peter Montorio, Vice-Legate of Avignon, in the Church of Saint Peter. M. Vincent de Paul was afterwards canonised.'

It is likely enough that Drapier makes this statement from knowledge acquired from minutes of the meetings of the Chapter of Saint Peter's, or at any rate, from a very ancient text. Observe the word ' ministre ' which he seems to have added himself. As most recantations were those of Protestants he probably believed that this one was similar.

surprised. She did not fail to tell her husband in the evening, that he had done wrong to abandon his religion, that it was an extremely good one, as she knew from what I had told her about it and some praises I had sung in her presence ; in which, she said, she took such a divine pleasure that she did not believe the paradise of her fathers, which she hoped for, was so glorious or accompanied with so much joy as the pleasure she had taken whilst I was praising my God, and she concluded by saying that it was marvellous.' The reproaches of the woman awakened that remorse in the renegade's soul which he had, perhaps, succeeded in stifling up till then. He saw the shame and horror of his apostasy more clearly than ever. But to throw aside his turban meant certain death. What was he to do? He made up his mind to escape, and on the following day, mentioned his idea to the slave. Both of them now settled down patiently to wait for a good opportunity.

They had to wait ten months. When they had made all their preparations in the greatest secrecy, they got on board a ' little skiff,' crossed the Mediterranean and landed at Aiguesmortes on June 28, 1607. We may imagine Vincent de Paul's delight when, at last free from all danger, he trod once more the soil of France which he had quitted two years previously. On the next day, Avignon was to celebrate with great solemnity the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, and the Vice-Legate, Peter Montorio, might possibly receive the renegade's act of abjuration. This idea decided the two travellers to leave Aiguesmortes immediately. Their hope was not deceived and on June 29, in the church of Saint Peter, the prelate publicly absolved the apostate from his crime.[16] When all was over, Vincent de Paul remembered that for two years his mother had been weeping over his disappearance and that she would be deeply consoled to hear how God's Providence had watched so solicitously over her son.

[16] The minute-book of the proceedings of the Chapter of Saint Peter's, in the seventeenth century, no longer exists ; the eighteenth-century minute-book mentions incidentally, in an entry dated June 29, 1775, the recantation made on June 29, 1607.

He also recalled to mind M. de Comet, the younger, to whom he was bound by many ties of friendship and gratitude.

He sat down to write. We have not the first of these letters; the second, dated July 24, ends up thus: 'His Lordship the Vice-Legate has kept us both here in order to take us to Rome with him, where he is going immediately after his successor in the trienniate[17] (which terminated on the feast of Saint John) shall arrive. He has promised the penitent to secure his admission into the rigorous monastery of the *Fate bene fratelli* which he has made a vow to enter, and to have me provided with a good benefice. He does me the honour of loving me very much and of treating me with the utmost kindness on account of a few alchemical secrets I taught him and, as he says himself, he takes more account of them than if *Io gli avessi dato un monte di oro*, because he has been working at alchemy all his life and nothing gives him such pleasure. As My Lord knows I am an ecclesiastic he told me to send for my letters of ordination and assures me that he will do his best and his very best to provide me with a benefice.'

Vincent de Paul and the Vice-Legate of Avignon were, as may be seen, far more broad-minded and enlightened than most of their contemporaries who regarded alchemy as one of the black arts. Even sixty years later, Abelly, the Saint's first biographer, did not dare to quote the passages relating to alchemy in the long extracts he gave from this letter to M. de Comet. In the course of the process of Beatification, the advocate of the Cause had to show, in answer to the objections brought against him, that there is such a thing as scientific alchemy with which the devil has nothing whatever to do.

Vincent de Paul resided with the Vice-Legate during his stay in the city of Avignon. His expenses were slight, because he 'enjoyed the friendship and shared the table' of His Excellency, and with the hundred or hundred and twenty crowns which the converted renegade gave him he was well able to manage. He was also able to make a few

[17] The Vice-Legates were appointed for three years; hence the word *triennate*.

presents because he had brought some rare and curious objects from Barbary. Of two 'Turkish stones' which formed part of his collection, both of which were, as he says, chiselled by Nature 'like the facets of a diamond,' he set one aside to be forwarded to M. de Comet. If he had sufficient money, he had even more creditors and his first idea was to strip himself of all he possessed so as to pay them without further delay ; but yielding to the advice and insistence of his friends,[18] he deferred the payment of his debts.

The letters of ordination which he had asked M. de Comet to procure, arrived, but devoid of the official seal of the Bishop of Dax,[19] and this oversight obviously rendered them useless. He wrote to his benefactor again and asked for another copy fully complying with the regulations.

This second letter is dated February 28, 1608, and was sent from Rome in which he probably arrived sometime in the course of the preceeding year. 'My state,' he says, 'is . . . this . . . I am here in this city of Rome in which I pursue my studies and am maintained by His Lordship who was Vice-Legate at Avignon. He does me the honour of loving me and desires my advancement, because I taught him a great number of beautiful and curious things I had learned, during my slavery, from that old Turk to whom, as I wrote to you, I was sold. Of these curious matters one is the preliminary stages but not the total perfection of the mirror of Archimedes ; another is an artificial spring employed to make a skull speak, which this wretch made use of to seduce the people, telling them that his god Mahomet made known to him his will by means of this skull, and a thousand other geometrical things I had learned from him ; and His Lordship is so jealous of these matters that he does not like me to meet anybody because he is afraid I might teach them and he desires that he and he alone, should have the reputation of knowing them and he takes pleasure in showing them to His Holiness and the Cardinals from time to time.

[18] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 12.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

'Now this kindness and affection of his is a guarantee, and he has in fact also promised to provide me with the means of making an honourable retirement, by procuring for me, to that end, an excellent benefice in France; and for this it is of the utmost necessity that I should have a copy of my ordination letters, signed and sealed by Mgr d'Ax,[20] together with a testimonial letter of His Lordship, which he could obtain by making a summary enquiry from some of our friends, as I have been always regarded as a good-living man; and all the other little solemnities requisite to the purpose. Every day His Lordship here exhorts me to procure them.'

Such is Vincent de Paul's correspondence with M. de Comet. There is a story attaching to this letter and the preceding one which is worth recording. Both letters passed from the hands of the recipient, together with other family papers, into the possession of Catherine de Comet, wife of John de Saint-Martin; they were left undisturbed in some drawer or other until one day, fifty years after, in 1658, when M. de Saint-Martin to his great delight discovered them. The letters were not found together: one was discovered some days after the other. Saint Vincent's captivity was so completely forgotten that no one seemed to have been aware of it, or, at any rate, to have had any clear and definite knowledge of this adventure of his youth. Immediately the first letter was discovered, it was shown to his friends and relations. Canon de Saint-Martin, uncle of Saint Martin d'Agès, thought that Vincent would be delighted to read again these pages of his young manhood; he had a copy made and sent it to the Saint.

Vincent de Paul was as much pained as surprised when the copy arrived; his humility was hurt by the possible revelation of facts to which he never referred. Hence he hastened to write to Canon Saint-Martin and asked the latter to let him have the original. His secretary, Brother Ducournau, fearing lest the precious documents would be destroyed if they once fell into the hands of Saint Vincent, took the liberty of inserting a note in the letter despatched to Dax.

[20] The ancient form of the word Dax.

On his advice, the letter, or rather the letters, for the second had been discovered in the meantime, were forwarded to Fr. John Watebled, Superior of the Collège des Bons-Enfants, who passed them on to the Saint's assistants. Brother Ducournau read them and wrote back at once to thank the Canon.[21] 'Sir,' he wrote sometime in August, 'I have been requested to write to you on the part of Fathers Portail, Dehorgny, and Almèras, whom you know, until they are able to do so themselves, to thank you very humbly for the letters you have communicated to them. They would not for anything in the world have missed them because they contain matters which will one day add additional lustre to the saintly life of the person who wrote them. Not one of us had ever heard with any degree of certainty that he had been in Barbary and still less that he had converted his master. As for myself, Sir, I am filled with admiration at the conversion of the apostate, the humility of his slave, the conviction he felt in his soul that he would regain his liberty and the charm of manner that caused him to be loved even by the Turks, who are an inhuman race, and especially by the physician who taught him so many wonderful secrets. But I must confess I wonder even still more at the strength of mind he has displayed by never saying a single word on these matters to one of the Company, although he had hundreds and hundreds of occasions to mention them when speaking in conference on helping the slaves, a work he has undertaken for the past twelve or fifteen years. He has told us often enough, indeed, that he was the son of a peasant, that he had tended his father's swine and performed many other humiliating actions; but he has always remained silent in our presence about those that would tend to his honour, such as having been a slave, lest he might have to speak of the happy results that ensued therefrom.'[22]

[21] A manuscript note of Brother Ducournau's (Archives of the Mission). Hence it was not in 1660, as Collet alleges (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 23) that M. de Saint-Martin sent the original to Paris.

[22] Saint Vincent's silence is also attested by Brother Robineau (MS. already referred to) and by Abelly (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. IV, p. 19; Bk. III, Ch. XIX, p. 296). Hence one should not take Raymond des Mortier's statement too seriously. He declared

After thus expressing his delight at the discovery of M. de Comet's two letters, Brother Ducournau goes on to say that he is not yet satisfied. His curiosity had been aroused and what he had just heard only made him all the more anxious to learn more. There was so much obscurity regarding the childhood and youth of Vincent de Paul ! He had hopes that fresh researches might enable them to see behind the veil that concealed them and he went on to say in his letter to the Canon : ' You have discovered a hidden treasure for us by sending us those letters, and you will give those gentlemen much consolation if you can send them some others, even though they may not contain anything remarkable. They would very much like to know how he parted company with the legate of Avignon who brought him to Rome, what he did at the Court there, where he went when he left Italy, when and why he came to Paris, in what year and in what place he was ordained priest. And if you know, Sir, any other particulars regarding his youth, you would oblige us by letting us hear of them. He never speaks to us about himself except to humble himself and never to show forth the graces God has bestowed on him, nor those which His divine goodness has granted others through his means. If those two letters had fallen into his own hands, no one would ever have seen them. And these gentlemen have decided that it was right to keep them and not to speak about them to him and they have even suppressed your own letter in order that he may not know we have them, as they believe you will not be displeased thereby, as they humbly beg you not to be. But in case he should ask you again for his letters, you might then write to him and say that you had sent them on and were very sorry that he had not received them. We ourselves are

in 1705, during the process of Beatification, that he had an account of Vincent's captivity from the Saint himself. As Raymond was admitted to Saint-Lazare in 1655, when he was just 21, he must have been quite a young priest, or even a simple cleric, when Saint Vincent died. It can scarcely be supposed that the saint revealed a secret to him of which he never said a word even to his secretaries. It is much more natural to suppose that information acquired forty-five years previously had become confused in an old man's memory.

very grieved to deprive him of the pleasure of reading the story of his own adventures and seeing himself as a young man in his old age ; but it was absolutely essential to make up our minds either to do so or to lose the originals ; which would have been still more annoying.'

Vincent de Paul kept on waiting. At length, on March 18, 1660,[23] almost on the eve of his death, which he felt approaching, he renewed his petitions. ' Sir,' he wrote to his friend, ' I conjure you, by all the graces God has been pleased to grant you, to do me the favour of sending me that wretched letter in which Turkey is mentioned. I refer to the one which M. d'Agès found amongst his father's papers. I beg you over again, by the bowels of Jesus Christ Our Lord to do me the favour I ask you[24] as soon as possible.'

[23] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 271.

[24] Saint Vincent's captivity has recently been impugned by M. Grandchamp. His two pamphlets on this subject (La prétendue captivité de Saint Vincent de Paul à Tunis) do not question the authenticity of the two letters which form the source of the narrative, but the veracity of the Saint. He points out a dozen points in them which seem contrary to the customary conduct of pirates or slaves, or which even border on the impossible.

What strikes him most, however, is Saint Vincent's complete silence on his captivity for the remainder of his life. This silence, as we have already observed, was noted by his own contemporaries. Saint Vincent had hundreds of occasions, either when sending his missionaries to Barbary, or when visited by liberated slaves, or again, when in the course of his conversations he roused the sympathy of his hearers for the wretched condition of the Christian slaves, to make some reference to his two years' sojourn in Barbary. He might have remarked, without saying anything of those circumstances which were to his credit, ' I myself was in the direst straits ; I too was a slave.' Such a remark would have been, for him, an occasion of humbling and debasing himself. And yet he remained silent. Such silence, on the part of a man who delighted in recalling all that was humiliating in his past life, is astonishing.

And not only did he remain silent, but, when M. de Saint-Martin discovered the first letter, he denounced it, described it as a wretched letter and asked to have it destroyed. Why then was he so insistent that no trace of his captivity should remain ?

There could not be a more piteous request and the venerable old man had not the slightest suspicion that the two letters were in Saint-Lazare. They remained there until July 13, 1789, the day on which the house was pillaged by a Parisian mob. Shortly afterwards, the first letter fell into the hands of Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau and subsequently into those of his colleague, Carnot. It then passed into M. de la Bouisse-Rochefort's collection. M. Laverdet, the Parisian autograph dealer, offered it in one of his catalogues, in 1854, for 500 francs; he did not sell it, but took in exchange some of Montesquieu's manuscripts. Madame Joseph Fillon, of Fontenay-le-Comte, then acquired it and bequeathed it to Benjamin Fillon, who gave it to the

Furthermore, the discoveries of his master the alchemist are most disconcerting. The state of physical and chemical science was not sufficiently advanced to procure such results. Putting aside the transmutation of metals which was, perhaps, merely apparent or a piece of trickery, what is to be said of the skull that spoke by means of a spring?

These objections are not regarded by M. Grandchamp as 'absolute proofs.' They leave, in his opinion, room for doubt, however little that doubt may be.

M. Grandchamp is discreet. The thesis opposed to his can only rest on the authenticity of the letters themselves, but that proof is remarkably strong. What could Saint Vincent's motives have been to lie in such a barefaced fashion to his benefactor and his own family? We are bound to remember that he wrote to his mother when he was writing to M. de Comet; if he wished to deceive one, he should necessarily have deceived the other. Now, there is nothing whatever to authorise us to cast any doubts on his honour and straightforwardness.

His romantic tale, for such M. Grandchamp regards it, was meant, 'to conceal some fault or other committed by a young man without means, who was restless and excited like so many other young priests of that turbulent age.' But this is not so, because as we know from the Calvet MS. he was, at that period, a priest in search of souls to bring them back to God; he had just converted a Huguenot minister and assisted at the recantation in Saint Peter's on June 29, 1607. If he had need to conceal something in his past, why erect such an elaborate scaffolding of falsehoods and lie so copiously and so brazenly to those whom he loved most?

(Was the 'talking-skull' a feat of ventriloquism combined with the mechanical articulation of the jaw?)

Daughters of Charity in the local hospital where it now lies. The second letter was offered for sale by Laverdet in 1860. It was bought by F. Bodin, Priest of the Mission, in charge of the parish of Loos (Nord) about 1895, in Lille, and presented by him to the Mother House of his Congregation, in whose possession it now remains.

It is time to return to the author of the letters. Whilst Vincent was waiting in Rome, as a guest of Peter Montorio, for his letters of ordination, he perfected himself in his knowledge of the Italian language as well as in Theology. He also gave free vent to his religious emotions and, as during his first stay there, he no doubt was often melted to tears by the remembrance of those moving scenes of Christian antiquity which were recalled to him by those sacred sites. The wheel of Fortune had turned once more and he was now well provided for. His second letter to M. de Comet gives us ground for supposing that he was only waiting to return to France to pay his debts.[25] We know nothing about what acquaintances and friends he made, but we may be sure he did make friends, and very good ones, because he had a genius for friendship and the Vice-Legate's house was a centre of social intercourse. And so the year 1608 rolled by.

It had not reached its term before Vincent de Paul left Rome for Paris. Abelly tells us that he was entrusted with a diplomatic mission from Cardinal d'Ossat, the French Ambassador to the Sovereign Pontiff, to deal with Henry IV on a secret affair which it would have been rash to commit to writing.[26] This statement contains at least one mistake, because Cardinal d'Ossat died on March 13, 1604. The whole account may be, perhaps, quite erroneous. All the researches that have been carried out in Paris to throw light on this historical riddle have had no result ; not one single document contains a reference to the alleged mission of the young priest.. To cast doubt on a fact of such a nature does not, indeed, detract in the slightest from a life so replete in great deeds as was that of Saint Vincent de Paul.

[25] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 15.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 20.

CHAPTER III

SAINT VINCENT'S EARLY YEARS IN PARIS (1609–1613)

As soon as Vincent de Paul had arrived in Paris he rented a modest apartment near Saint Germain-des-Prés and, for the sake of economy, shared it with a compatriot, the district Judge of Sore.[1]

At this time there was a young ecclesiastic in Paris who was so richly endowed both by nature and grace that he was admired by all. At his word, Protestants bearing famous names had abjured their errors, and devout and noble women had left the world to take the veil in the Carmelite monasteries which he had just introduced into France. His name was Peter de Bérulle and it was of him that Cardinal du Perron had said : 'If there is question of refuting heretics, bring them to me ; of converting them, bring them to the Bishop of Geneva ; but if you wish to convince and convert at the same time, send them to M. de Bérulle.' Vincent de Paul made his acquaintance, submitted to his influence and chose him as a spiritual guide.

Just at this moment when a fresh trial was about to befall him, and one more terrible, perhaps, than slavery, he was in need of a wise adviser. One day, in the year 1609, he was confined to bed by a slight attack of illness, and he sent for some medicine which the chemist sent back by a messenger-boy. The latter, whilst searching for a glass in a cupboard, saw a purse containing four hundred crowns. The patient was not looking ; the Judge had gone out quite early that morning ; the temptation was strong and the youth succumbed. When the Judge returned home he was amazed to find his money gone : he questioned Vincent

[1] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 21. Sore is a small hamlet in the Landes.

de Paul who declared he had not taken it himself or seen anyone else take it. This reply angered the Judge who fell into a violent rage, forced the young priest to leave the lodging, telling him never to return there, injured his reputation with all who knew him and had a summons issued. Time did nothing to calm the Judge's anger. A little later, whilst Vincent was conversing with M. de Bérulle, who was the Superior of the Oratory, and some other devout persons, the Judge came up and called him a thief and a hypocrite. To this the accused replied quite calmly : ' God knows the truth.' Six years went by ;[2] the thief was arrested in Bordeaux for other misdemeanours. He was overcome with remorse and sent for the Judge to whom he confessed the theft and promised to make restitution. The Judge's hatred now turned to admiration and he wrote a touching letter to his old friend expressing his deep regret and saying that, if it were necessary, he would go to Paris and there, on his knees, ask absolution for his fault.

This fact, of itself, shows what a high standard of virtue Vincent de Paul had now reached but he had still far to go before reaching the summits he subsequently attained. He was still haunted by the idea of making his fortune, of obtaining a good benefice and thereby a comfortable income so that he might go back to his native place and be near his own relations and friends. It is obvious that such was his limited ideal from a letter he wrote to his mother on February 17, 1610 :[3] ' The assurance which M. de Saint-Martin has given me that you are quite well,' he says, ' has given me as much joy as the sojourn which I must still make in this city if I am to discover an opportunity of advancement (which my disasters have ruined) has caused me annoyance, since I cannot go and render you all the services I owe you. However, I put great hope in God's grace, that He will bless my efforts, and soon give me the means of making an honourable retirement so that I may spend the rest of

[2] Abelly's latest editor makes Saint Vincent say (Vol. I, p. 2) ' at the end of six months.' This is an obvious mistake because the first edition states quite clearly, ' at the end of six years.'

[3] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 18.

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, QUEEN OF FRANCE

my days beside you. I informed M. de Saint-Martin of the state of my affairs, and he told me he wished to be M. de Comet's successor in kindness and affection for us all. I begged him to tell you all about the whole state of affairs. I should very much like to know what conditions are like at home, and if all my brothers and sisters, and all our relations and friends are well, and especially if my brother Gayon has got married and to whom ; likewise, how is my sister Mary, of Paillole, doing, and does she live with and keep house for her brother-in-law Betrand. As for my other sister, I am sure she will be quite well off as long as God may be pleased to keep her husband and herself alive. I should also like my brother to send one of my nephews to college ; my misfortunes and the little assistance I have so far been able to render the family may possibly make him unwilling to do so ; but let him not forget that present ill-luck is indicative of future prosperity.'

At this date, February 17, 1610, Vincent de Paul's prospects certainly did not look very brilliant. He was living in poverty in Paris ; he was grieved at the recent death of his friend, M. de Comet the younger, but the thought that his relations had found another good friend in the person of M. de Saint-Martin, the husband of Catherine de Comet, afforded him some consolation.[4] In spite of everything he had not lost hope and that was his real strength.

A few days after he had written this letter, Queen Marguérite de Valois, daughter of Henry II and former wife of Henry IV, inscribed the name of Vincent de Paul on her list of councillors and chaplains.[5] Ever since 1606 she had lived in the magnificent palace which she had recently built for herself on the ground that now lies within an area bounded by the Rue Visconti, the Rue de Seine, the Quai Malaquais, the Rue des Saints Pères and that part of the Rue Jacob

[4] Information supplied by Abbé Foix, parish priest of Laurède (Landes).

[5] His name appears for the first time, together with his qualifications, in a list dated May 17, 1610. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 8.)

which adjoins the Charity Hospital. Three groups of buildings were scattered over this vast expanse and the chief entrance was in the Rue de Seine. Spacious, beautifully laid-out gardens stretched down right to the river.

Queen Marguérite was a lively-minded and witty woman, of a light and intriguing disposition, just at this time as fond of piety as she was of literature and art ; and so she divided her time between acts of charity and social functions. Her palace was a meeting-place for scholars, artists and men of letters, with all of whom she delighted to converse. Porchères and Vauquelin des Yveteaux met Garnier and Pithard the moralist there. All her household officers were men of note ; Pibrac was her chancellor ; the poet Francis de Maynard and de Fresne-Forget, her secretaries ; Scipion Dupleix and Anthony le Clere de la Forêt, her Masters of Requests ; Savaron, her counsellor ; Baudoin, her reader ; Charron et Coëffeteau, her preachers, and Philip Cospéan, Bishop of Aire, her principal chaplain. As she was very fond of music, she frequently had concerts held at which violin and lute-players performed.

She was as pious as she was worldly. She went to Communion thrice a week, heard one High and two Low Masses every day, and on every Saturday went to pray in Our Lady's crypt in the Church of Saint Victor. In March 1608, in fulfilment of a vow, she built, close to her own palace and on ground taken from the Brothers of Charity, whom she compensated, a circular chapel surmounted by a dome which was called the Chapel of Praises. As the example of Jacob had suggested the idea of making a vow[6] she wished that the consecration of the altar should recall the memory of the Hebrew patriarch. The chapel was entrusted to the care of Discalced Augustinians on whom she imposed an obligation to chant in pairs, both day and night without a break, hymns and canticles composed by herself or written to her orders. She erected a huge monastery which was known as the monastery of the Trinity along the Cheminaux-Clercs (now the Rue Jacob) and between the Chemin de la Noue (the Rue Bonaparte) and the Rue Saint-Pierre (the Rue des Saints-Pères). The monks soon lost her favour and

[6] Genesis, XVIII, 20–22.

she dismissed them in 1613 on the pretext that they neither sang well enough or long enough ; and she substituted in their stead the reformed Augustinians of the province of Bourges.

She was undoubtedly kind and generous to all in need. She provided for the support of a hundred poor people and for forty English priests. On her birthday and on the four great Church Festivals she distributed a hundred golden *sous* to the poor and needy. When Holy Week came round, she visited the hospitals, provided free meals for three or four thousand persons, and often gave large sums as dowries for poor girls.[7]

Such was the Royal Princess who entrusted Vincent de Paul with the distribution of her alms, for such indeed was a chaplain's chief duty. He too lived in the Rue de Seine, in close proximity to the Royal palace and in a house that bore the sign of Saint Nicholas.[8] The chief officers of Marguérite de Valois' Court lived all around him and he had made their acquaintance. It was, in all probability, by their efforts and, in particular, by those of his friend, Charles de Fresne, the Queen's secretary, that he became a member of the Royal household, of which already Philip Cospéan, the Bishop of Aire, and the Queen's principal chaplain as well as five or six other ecclesiastics, were members.

His desires were only partly realised, but they were fulfilled on the day he acquired the long wished for benefice. Very shortly afterwards, on May 17, 1610, Hurault de l'Hôpital, Archbishop of Aix, granted him the Abbey of Saint Leonard de Chaumes, a Cistercian Abbey in the diocese of Saintes with an annual revenue of 1200 *livres*.[9]

[7] *Histoire de Marguérite de Valois*, by Leo de Saint Poncy, Paris, 1887, 2 vols. See also Arch. Nat. KK. 180, f° III V° on her almsgiving.

[8] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 13, 14, 19. In 1622, the house had a tennis-court attached to it. It was purchased, on February 22, 1663, by the executors of Cardinal Mazarin and part of the site is now occupied by the new entrance to the Rue Mazarine. (*Topographie historique du vieux Paris, Région du faubourg Saint-Germain*, by A. Berty and Tisserand, Paris, 1876, p. 248.)

[9] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 8 and 37.

The sum looks very large on paper ; in point of fact, it amounted to very little because the chief thing which the prelate handed over to the new abbé, without the latter, perhaps, suspecting the fact, was a set of contested rights and a series of impending lawsuits. Vincent de Paul, once in possession of his benefice, thought no more of returning to his native place where his mother awaited him. His post of chaplain to Queen Marguérite kept him in Paris, and perhaps his director may have led him to understand that it would be his duty to labour for the salvation of souls for the rest of his life, instead of seeking for an easy, or at any rate, not too strenuous post amongst his relations. His ideal was destined to rise higher and higher the farther he progressed in virtue, and this progress was still further hastened by a series of spiritual trials.

Amongst the ecclesiastics who were then members of the Queen's household was a famous doctor of theology, remarkable for his learning and piety, a skilful controversialist and a redoubtable antagonist of Protestants. He had been the Canon Theologian of his diocese, and Marguérite de Valois had taken him away from it in order to have him beside her. His function left him with much spare time on his hands, and this state of idleness proved most dangerous. He began to be assailed by doubts against the faith ; the most horrible blasphemies against Jesus Christ rose up before his mind and he was perpetually haunted with the idea of throwing himself out of a high window. The very moment he pronounced the first word of *Our Father* terrifying spectres gathered before his eyes. By dint of the multiplication of acts disavowing the temptation, he had reached a state in which he could no longer produce an act at all. He consulted Vincent de Paul who forbade him to say any prayers, not even the Divine Office, or to celebrate holy Mass. He also suggested to the unfortunate doctor that he should, in order to affirm his faith, content himself with pointing his hand or finger towards Rome or a neighbouring church. The poor man was unable to resist the violence he was doing himself and fell ill ; bodily exhaustion weakened the energy of his will and left him less fitted than ever to resist the shock of temptation. Vincent de Paul, not content with praying

for the man, offered himself as a victim in his stead. God did not delay to hear his prayer. The sick man felt all his doubts vanish away ; spiritual darkness suddenly gave place to dazzling light and he died with a heart overflowing in gratitude to God for such a signal favour.

Vincent de Paul, on the contrary, felt his faith trembling ; the more he prayed and mortified himself, the greater he felt the darkness invading and suffusing his soul. Worn out by the combat, he wrote out the articles of the *Creed* and placed the sheet of paper next his heart ; he then covenanted with God that as often as he should place his hand on his heart, this gesture was to be taken as an act of faith. Furthermore, he took a resolution to serve Our Lord in His poor and forthwith began to visit the sick in the Charity Hospital close to which he resided. It was all in vain. After three or four years of unspeakable mental anguish, he made a promise to God to consecrate the rest of his life to the service of the poor. The taking of this resolution immediately banished the temptation, and banished it for life ; never afterwards was he troubled in regard to Faith, the truths of which were, to his mind, as indisputable as the most evident facts, since they were based on the very word of God Himself.[10]

The hospital which Vincent now began to visit regularly was of quite recent origin. Marie de Médicis, the wife of Henry IV, had, in 1601, invited four brothers of St. John of God from Florence to open the institution which was called St. John Baptist of Charity, or, simply ' The Charity.' At first she rented a house for them in the Chemin de la Noue (now the Rue Bonaparte) and subsequently purchased it on February 4, 1605. Important changes and alterations had been effected there when Marguérite de Valois asked them to let her have the house ; she gave in exchange the Hotel de Sansac, which opened out on the Rue Saint Pierre, now the Rue des Saints Pères. The street took its name from a chapel dedicated to Saint Peter which was adjacent to the hotel and which Queen Marguérite presented to the Brothers on August 27, 1611. With even greater generosity, she caused the chapel, which was already very old and quite small, to be knocked down, and in 1613 she laid the founda-

[10] Abelly, *op cit.*, Vol. III, Ch. XI, Sect. I, p. 116.

tions of a larger edifice which was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and opened in the month of July, 1631.[11]

When Vincent de Paul began to visit the sick in the Charity Hospital, it was still in a very primitive state and much remained to be done. The Brothers of Saint John of God appealed to the charity of the faithful and gladly received assistance from anyone. Queen Marguérite's chaplain was not very rich, but he too made his contribution. One day—it was October 19, 1611—fortune smiled on him ; John Latanne, Master of the Paris Mint, made Vincent de Paul a personal gift of 15,000 *livres*. On the following day he got rid of it by handing it over to the Charity Hospital, ' out of affection and devotion ' so as to enable the brothers ' to tend and nurse the sick poor ' and also to help them to pay for the buildings already in existence and such as were still to be erected.[12]

Vincent de Paul was not, as we may see, the same sort of man in 1611 as he is revealed to us by the letter to his mother written in the preceding year. His virtue had reached a higher level and the ascent was to be continuous. The credit for this is in great part due to Father de Bérulle.

We have reason for believing that Saint Vincent, whilst retaining his domicile in the Rue de Seine, adjoining Queen Marguérite's palace,[13] spent some time in the house of his spiritual guide, close to the convent of Carmelite nuns, and that he had the good fortune to meet there a young cleric of outstanding virtue who was afterwards to rival de Bérulle and Vincent in the reformation of the clergy. This was Adrian Bourdoise, the founder of the community of priests of Saint Nicholas.[14] A seventeenth-century biographer of

[11] *L'hôpital de la Charité*, by Fernand Gillet, Montévrain, 1900.

[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 14.

[13] Three deeds dated May 17, 1610, October 20, 1611, and December 7, 1612 (Saint Vincent de Paul, Vol. XIII, pp. 13, 14, 19). assign the same domicile to Saint Vincent.

[14] *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de l'Oratoire*, by F. Louis Batterel (Arch. Nat. M. 220) ; *La vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu Messire Adrien Bourdoise* by Courtin, MS. 1698, p. 99 (Bibliot. Maz.) ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 24. Batterel asserts

this great servant of God relates in this connection an interesting story, the authenticity of which, however, is not quite free from objection.[15] Many months before the foundation of the Oratory, he says, de Bérulle, Vincent de Paul, and Bourdoise, who was then only a cleric, were exchanging views one day as to the best means of restoring the Church of France to her former splendour. After some remarks, they all three agreed to pray to the Father of Light for knowledge by means of a ten-day retreat, accompanied by fasts and special acts of penance. When the retreat was over, they exchanged the ideas that had occurred to them in that period of solitude and recollection.

M. de Bérulle spoke first.

'If the earth is flooded with evils,' he said, 'and if the devil exercises his power over it, this is due to the fact that God is not known as He should be. Let us dissipate this darkness and drive away this ignorance. With that end in view, I think it would be well to establish a Congregation of learned and virtuous priests who, in imitation of the

that Bérulle lived with Vincent de Paul and some other ecclesiastics 'in a sort of community, in the precincts of the Carmelite nunnery.'

Abelly, after stating that Saint Vincent 'went to live with the Reverend Fathers of the Oratory who received him into their house, not indeed as a member of their holy Company, but that he might withdraw a little from his engagements in the world and discover the designs of God on his behalf,' goes on to say, that Vincent remained 'two years in this retreat' and that 'during this time the Rev. Father Bourgoing, then parish priest of Clichy, having resolved on leaving this office to enter the Congregation of the Oratory . . . the Rev. Father de Bérulle induced M. Vincent to accept the resignation of this cure.' When Abelly wrote this he did not notice that the foundation of the Oratory had not preceded but followed Bourgoing's resignation and Saint Vincent's acceptance of the parish of Clichy; he forgot that between the foundation (November 11, 1611) and the taking possession of the parish (May 2, 1612) there is only an interval of six months, and he allowed the reader to believe that the saint had left his own house to reside with M. de Bérulle, which is not the case.

[15] Courtin relies, for this story of the retreat, on the word of M. Barat, a member of the Community of Saint Nicholas, who may have heard the tale from Bourdoise himself. (*Ibid.*, p. 100.)

apostles, would travel about everywhere announcing the truths of our holy religion.'

'That is indeed the real remedy,' Vincent de Paul then said, 'and I should say the evil is greatest in country districts where souls are utterly neglected. The peasantry are not instructed in their religious duties; many spend their lives in the practice of vices which they dare not mention in confession, either out of shame or fear or culpable carelessness; hence millions are falling into hell. The establishment of a Congregation composed of men who would be specially set aside to cultivate this neglected vineyard of the Householder by means of missions, in accordance with the wishes of the bishops, would be a very meritorious work, productive of great good, most pleasing to God and beneficial to His Church.'

'The evil referred to,' Bérulle replied, 'is only too real. I have a presentiment that God will choose you yourself to establish this Congregation of Missionaries.[16] And now, M. Bourdoise, what have you got to say on the subject of our discussion; what do you think would be the best means of making religion flourish again in France?'

'Gentlemen,' replied Bourdoise, 'I have heard you and been much edified. The remedies you suggest are excellent but, it seems to me, it would be well to complete them. I have been strengthened in a resolution that has occupied my mind since childhood. I would like to be able to induce the parish clergy to live together in the same house, in obedience to a rule conformable to their state. They would edify the public by their good example, they would assist the parish priests, they would instruct children by means of elementary schools, and the faithful by their homely lectures and by teaching the catechism; and finally, they would administer the sacraments with devotion and reverence. Such communities as these would supply favourable surroundings for the professional instruction and the formation of candidates for the priesthood until we shall have seminaries such as are

[16] Abelly also gives this prediction (Bk. I., Ch. VI, p. 24), yet the reader should note that when proceedings were being taken in Rome, for the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission, de Bérulle was one of its chief opponents.

prescribed by the Council of Trent. They would furnish the parish priest with all the help he needs for the spiritual service of his parish, for the education of children, and the maintenance of his church. All such priests, by their precepts and example, would be pillars of faith and morals. Without them, missions would be of no avail, because they could have no lasting success : in vain is the vine planted if it be not tended, or a field sown if the ground has not previously been ploughed and harrowed. . . . They would be useless, because even should they bring forth fruit, it would soon be contaminated.'

'M. de Bérulle and Vincent de Paul listened in admiration and amazement whilst such words of ripe wisdom flowed from the lips of a simple cleric. They besought him to join with them in laying the foundations of the reform which was so dear to the hearts of all three.'[17]

There is no doubt, Courtin goes on, that they believed just then that they could reconcile their several standpoints, but after they had worked together for some months, and as divergences began to grow, de Bérulle, who was eager for action, began to prepare for the establishment of the Oratory. He rented a house, made ready a domestic chapel, and appealed to such of his friends as were prepared to follow him. Bourdoise determined to remain with the pastoral clergy ; Vincent de Paul felt called to labour for the salvation of poor country folk and was inclined to think he would not find much readiness for such work in a group of scholarly priests. Bourdoise retired. Did Saint Vincent follow his example or did he continue as before to live under the same roof as de Bérulle ? Courtin says nothing on the matter, as it had nothing to do with his own story, but Abelly tells us that for some time Vincent lived the community life of the first members of the Oratory, but only as a guest and not as a confrère.

[17] If the narrator had been quite ignorant of the lives of de Bérulle, Bourdoise and Saint Vincent after 1611, it is likely his characters would have spoken differently. The account of this conversation is obviously somewhat influenced by overlapping memories.

On November 11, 1611, de Bérulle assembled in his new home, the Petit Bourbon, where Val-de-Grâce stands at the present day, his first five disciples : John Bèce and James Gastaud, doctors of the Sorbonne ; Paul Métezeau ; Francis Bourgoing, parish priest of Clichy ; and Peter Caron, parish priest of Beaumont.[18]

Bourgoing, before leaving his parish, acting on the advice of de Bérulle had resigned it in favour of Vincent de Paul.[19] The deed is dated October 13, 1611 and when Rome gave its approval, on November 12, Bourgoing was already living with de Bérulle. It would seem as if the new parish priest was bound to take up his post without delay. And yet circumstances, no doubt, did not allow him to do so, for he did not actually take possession until six months later.

On May 2, 1612, in the afternoon, he presented himself at the door of the church, produced for Thomas Gallot, the Bishop's notary, the authentic deed of his appointment,[20] approved by Rome, and, in accordance with custom, demanded free access to the building. When he was led in, he took a holy-water sprinkler, sprinkled holy water, knelt before the crucifix and then before the high altar which he kissed and touched ; he likewise kissed and touched a Missal placed on the altar, touched the tabernacle and the baptismal font, and afterwards sat in the choir in the seat reserved for the parish priest. He rang the bells, and finally went to the presbytery which he entered, and then left. All the prescribed formalities had been carried out. Thomas Gallot published and notified this act of taking possession, and as no one protested, he handed over a declaration to that effect to the new parish priest who asked for it.

Clichy in 1612 occupied a far larger stretch of territory than does the Clichy of the twentieth century. On the North,

[18] *Le Père de Bérulle et l'Oratoire*, by the Abbé Houssaye, Paris, 1874.

[19] Collet, *op cit.*, Vol. II, p. 36. Note.

[20] The official document is on parchment and is now in the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission. *Le Messager de Saint Vincent de Paul*, the parish magazine of Clichy, has given a photographic reproduction of it together with a brief commentary. (April, 1911.)

the parish extended to that of Saint Ouen ; on the South, to that of Villiers ; on the East, the parishes of the Madeline, Ville l'Evesque, Saint Roch and Saint Peter of Montmartre ; on the West, it stretched away to the banks of the Seine. It embraced nine-tenths of what is to-day the seventeenth arrondissement, one-tenth of the eighteenth, half of the eighth and a small portion of the ninth. In the direction of Paris, its limits would be determined by a line drawn from the Porte des Ternes, along the Rue des Ternes, the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, the Rue de la Boétie, the Rue de la Pépinière, the Rue Saint Lazare, the Rue Blanche, the Rue Macardet, the Avenue Saint Ouen and the Boulevard Bessière. The priest who served the chapel of Monceaux was subject to the parish priest of Clichy. Diminished in 1699 by the erection of the parish of Roule, in 1790 by the extension of Paris, in 1830 and in 1867 by the erection of Batignole-Monceaux and Levallois-Perret into urban districts, it was finally confined within its present limits.

The population of Clichy was made up in great part of poor, devout peasants who lived in the simplest manner ; they were all Catholics and the total number was round about six hundred. Vincent de Paul was a model pastor. He taught the children catechism, succoured the needy, consoled the sick, reconciled those who were at variance, and in short, made himself all things to all men to gain all to Christ. His love for his neighbour was enkindled and fed in the Heart of Jesus Christ, and hence he placed the worship of the Divine Master before all things else. From the very first days of his sojourn in Clichy, the decrepit state of the church, its poverty and also, perhaps, its lack of accommodation, moved him ; and so he conceived the idea of rebuilding it. The generosity of some wealthy Parisians provided him with means to realise his project. The baptismal font which is still in use in Clichy bears the date, 1612. The building operations were prolonged and were terminated only in Holy Week, 1630.[21] The stained-glass windows were remarkably fine ; they were smashed by huge hail-stones on July 11, 1823.[22] The church still remains standing. It is

[21] *Histoire de Clichy-la-Garenne*, by Lecanu, Paris, 1848, p. 211.
[22] Lecanu, *op. cit.*, p. 212. Note I.

believed the actual pulpit is the one from which Vincent used to preach, and in a side chapel a crucifix is shown before which he often knelt in prayer.

The worship of Jesus Christ is closely connected with that of His Mother. Vincent de Paul, like all the saints, loved the Queen of Heaven and was gladdened by the sight of a similar affection in those around him. He established in his parish the Rosary Confraternity, which was widely spread. Each of its meetings gave him an opportunity of singing the praises of Mary of which he gladly availed himself. He also established a school for clerics. Twelve young persons were instructed in the sacred sciences and in the practice of virtue. One of the students was a youth aged twenty with whom the parish priest of Clichy had already come into contact, and who lodged in the presbytery. His name was Anthony Portail. One day he was attacked by strangers to the locality ; the inhabitants of Clichy rushed to the rescue and seized one of the assailants who was haled off to prison. The charitable parish priest interceded for the prisoner, who was released. In all probability he did not allow him to depart (for this was his usual method of acting), without first having heard the man's confession and obtained his promise to live for the future like an honest man and a Christian.[23]

The words, example and labours of the holy parish priest produced their effect. A learned member of a religious order who was a doctor of the Sorbonne, said on one occasion : ' I preached to the good people of Clichy where he was parish priest ; but I confess I found those good folk living like angels and, to tell the truth, I was bringing light to the sun.'[24]

Hence when Vincent de Paul was an old man he often referred to his happy days in Clichy with emotion. ' I was a country parish priest,' he said at a conference, ' my people were good folk and so obedient in doing whatever I asked of them that when I told them they should go to confession on the first Sunday of the month, they never failed to do so.

[23] Manuscript note-book of Brother Robineau (Arch. Cong. Miss.).

[24] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 26.

They came to Church and went to Confession, and they saw from day to day the great good it did their souls. This gave me such consolation and made me so happy that I used to say to myself: "*Mon Dieu! How happy you are to have such good people! I think the Pope himself is not so happy as a parish priest in the midst of such kind-hearted people.*" One day His Eminence, Cardinal de Retz asked me: "Well, Sir, how are you?" I replied: "My Lord, I am so happy that I cannot express it—Why?—Because I have such good people, so obedient to all I tell them that I think within myself that neither the Pope, nor you, My Lord, is as happy as I." '[25]

But the parish priest of Clichy never experienced as much pleasure as when he heard his flock on Sundays in church, singing the liturgical services with vigour and delight. 'I listened,' he said later on, 'with admiration to those peasants singing the psalms and never missing a single note.'[26]

It was not without a heartfelt pang that Vincent de Paul, after a year's residence in Clichy, was advised by M. de Bérulle to place his parish in the hands of an administrator and go to Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, the General of the Galleys, to take up the duty of tutor to his sons. He obeyed with the docility of a child. The parish priest, though absent, still continued to look after Clichy and returned there as often as his new occupation permitted. Provided with the permission of the Archbishop of Paris, on September 22, 1623, he established, a few days later, a branch of the Confraternity of Charity in his own church and united it with that of the Rosary. On October 9 following, he baptised Claude Gilbert,[27] whom God subsequently called to the priesthood.[28] In the year following, to the very day, he received in his church, with the customary ceremonial, accompanied by Gregory le Coust, his curate and Peter Pasquier, chaplain of Monceaux, John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris,

[25] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 646.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 339.
[27] *Histoire de la ville et de tout le diocèse de Paris*, new edition by Hippolyte Cocheris, Paris, 1870, Vol. IV, p. 118; Lecanu, *op. cit.*, p. 211.
[28] Catholic Registers in Clichy Town Hall.

who had come to make a pastoral visitation. The prelate visited the church and sacristy and found everything clean and neat and in good order. 'The divine service is conducted here in a worthy manner,' the official report goes on,[29] 'Catechism is taught, the registers are kept up to date, the people have made no complaint either about the parish priest or the other priests; and the parish priest has no fault to find with his people.'

From time to time a considerable interval elapsed between Vincent de Paul's visits to Clichy because the duties of his office kept him for months at a time in Paris. On one of these occasions, his curate wrote to say that 'all the neighbouring parish priests very much desired his return, and all the citizens and inhabitants of the place were no less eager for it. So come then, Sir,' he added, 'and keep your flock in the good way wherein you have set them because they greatly desire your presence.'[30]

Vincent de Paul did not definitely abandon his post in Clichy until 1626, when his ever-increasing occupations rendered it impossible for him to look after the parish,[31]

[29] Arch. Nat., Z 10, 241.

[30] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. VI, p. 26. The Council of Trent, whilst imposing the duty of residence on pastors, admitted the case of legitimate absence. (*Sessio VI de Reformatione, Cap. II*) Article 27 of the spiritual regulations composed by the ecclesiastical Chamber of the States General of 1614 (Memoire du clergé, Paris, 1763, Vol. III, p. 334) thus interprets the mind of the Council. 'Parish priests shall be obliged to reside in the parishes in accordance with the law, but if anyone, for any just cause, is legitimately dispensed from residence, he shall be bound to supply a competent administrator who shall be fittingly remunerated, with the consent and express approbation of the Ordinary.'

[31] It was long believed, on the word of Abelly (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. VI, p. 27) that Saint Vincent retained the spiritual charge of Clichy only up to the time of his entrance into the household of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, that is to say about a year. It has now been shown that he remained parish priest until 1625 or 1626 and the latter date is even more likely. (Cf. *Fin d'une erreur historique. Saint Vincent de Paul treize ans curé de Clichy, de 1612 à 1625*, by M. Bretaudeau, Clichy; *Saint Vincent de Paul, curé de Clichy*, by P. Coste, in the *Revue de Gascogne*, June, 1912, pp. 241–256.)

He then resigned it in favour of John Souilland for the modest sum of four hundred livres, payable in four years at the rate of one hundred livres a year.[32]

The new scene of life to which de Bérulle summoned him, about 1613, made very little appeal to his temperament but, ever an obedient servant, he submitted to his spiritual guide who represented, in his eyes, the will of God.[33]

[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 85.

[33] The Abbé Lecanu (*op. cit.*, p. 184) says that Saint Vincent, some days after he had left his parish, wrote to a friend to say how much he had felt leaving and also how grieved his flock had been. Maynard (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Paris, 1886, 4 vols., Bk. I, Ch. IV, p. 83) also refers to this letter. Until the contrary has been proved, we believe the statement to be apocryphal. Maynard, no doubt, borrowed from Lecanu and the latter probably had simply made use of a literary artifice to tell us how deeply Saint Vincent had been regretted by his parishioners.

CHAPTER IV

SAINT VINCENT'S FIRST PERIOD OF RESIDENCE WITH THE DE GONDIS (1613–1617)

IN the beginning of the sixteenth century, Anthony de Gondi, a member of one of the chief Florentine families, set up as a banker in Lyons, where he married Mary Catherine de Pierre Vive, of Piedmontese descent. Queen Catherine de Médicis, herself a Florentine, made him Lord Steward of the Dauphin's household—the future Henry II —and selected Mary Catherine as governess of the royal family. The eldest son, Albert de Gondi, Marquis of Belle-Isle, was General of the Galleys, Duke and Peer, Governor of Provence, Nantes, Metz and its territory, Marshal of France and Commander-in-Chief of the King's armies. His marriage to Catherine de Clermont, daughter of Baron de Retz,[1] brought into the family the de Retz estate, which was subsequently made a duchy. He favoured the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, yet this did not prevent him later on from being one of the warmest partisans of Henry IV, even before the latter's accession to the throne of France.

Peter de Gondi, Albert's brother, became a Churchman and was laden with ecclesiastical dignities. He governed the dioceses of Langres (1565–1568) and Paris (1568–1616), was Charles IX's confessor, Elisabeth of Austria's almoner, Chairman of the Council, Commander of the Order of the Holy Ghost and died a Cardinal. When age and infirmity had rendered the weight of diocesan administration too heavy, he transferred it to his nephew, Henry de Gondi, Albert's son, who was appointed coadjutor in 1598.

On the death of his uncle, the coadjutor became Bishop

[1] Retz, in pre-revolutionary France, was a district embracing part of Paimbœuf and Nantes.

CARDINAL HENRI DE GONDI, BISHOP OF PARIS

of Paris ; in 1618, he received the Cardinal's hat and took the name of Cardinal de Retz.

Notwithstanding its importance, the capital of France was only a simple bishopric of the ecclesiastical province of Sens. Paris was erected into an archbishopric in 1622 when John Francis de Gondi succeeded his brother Henry, of whom he had been the coadjutor. Like his two predecessors, he too wanted a member of his family as coadjutor. His choice fell on his nephew, John Francis Paul de Gondi who is only too well known as ' Cardinal de Retz.'

The latter's father was Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, Count de Joigny, Marquis of the Iles-d'Or,[2] Baron de Montmirail,[3] de Dampierre,[4] and de Villepreux,[5] General of the Galleys, and the King's Lieutenant-General in Levantine waters, second son of Marshal Albert de Gondi and brother of the first Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris. The Count de Joigny possessed in a high degree qualities appreciated in Court circles ; a fine and manly bearing, courage, a distinguished appearance and an affable character. His most intimate friends were the Duc de Guise, the Duc de Chevreuse, the Duc de Crequi and de Bassompierre.[6] ' I do not believe,' wrote the second Cardinal de Retz in his *Mémoires*, ' that there was a better hearted man in the world than my father, and I can honestly say his character was naturally virtuous.'[7]

Philip Emmanuel de Gondi loved, above all else in the world, his devout and nobly-born wife, Frances Margaret de Silly, the eldest daughter of Anthony de Silly, Count of Rochepot, Squire of Commercy, Sovereign Lord of Euville, who was married to Mary de Lannoy, Lady of the Manor of Folleville. It would have been hard to find a more virtuous woman. Her naturally quick temper inclined her to acts of impatience which she immediately regretted. Whenever

[2] Now Hyères.

[3] The market-town of this canton in the Marne.

[4] A small hamlet in Aube.

[5] A small village of Seine-et-Oise.

[6] Hachette, 1870, Vol. I, p. 89.

[7] The history of the de Gondis has been written by Corbinelli (*Histoire généalogique de la maison de Gondi*, Paris, 1705, 2 vols.) and Chantelauze (*Saint Vincent de Paul et les Gondi*, Paris, 1882).

she forgot herself, she went down on her knees, even before her domestic servants, and begged pardon.[8] Her chief fault was a tendency to scrupulosity and this weakness entailed even more suffering on her confessor than on herself.

They had three sons. Peter was born in 1602[9], and became Duc de Retz by his marriage to his first cousin, Catherine de Gondi. He succeeded his father as General of the Galleys and distinguished himself in several engagements. He conspired against Richelieu, was one of Mazarin's chief opponents and died in Brittany on April 20, 1676, aged seventy-four.

The Archiepiscopal see of Paris was reserved for the second son, Henry. He was well aware of the fact and promised himself a Cardinal's hat so as to take precedence of his elder brother. An unfortunate accident prevented the realisation of these ambitious hopes. Henry died in 1622, as the result of a kick from a horse whilst out hunting, when he was only ten or eleven years old.

This premature end had altered the fate of the third son, John Francis Paul, who was intended to be made a Knight of Malta and who, to please his parents, was obliged to enter the ecclesiastical state and prepare for Orders.

He was baptised, on September 20, 1613, in the Castle of Montmirail, in Brie, in Champagne, where his mother had been residing for some months. We do not know if Saint Vincent had already taken up residence with the de Gondis, because his first biographer simply states that this occurred 'about the year 1613.' Philip Emmanuel de Gondi resided, at this time, in the parish of Saint Eustache, in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs.[10] Although he lived in princely style, he was head over ears in debt and was forced to have recourse to his brother, the first Cardinal de Retz, to satisfy his creditors.[11] The eldest child was then eleven years old ; the second, two or three, and the third had just been born.

[8] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 576.

[9] In 1606, according to Jal (*Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire*, 2nd ed. 1872).

[10] He was certainly living there on January 5, 1615 (Arch. Nat. Y 156, f° 213 V°) and on October 29, 1616 (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 37).

[11] Arch. Nat. Y 156, f° 213 V°.

Hence, about 1613, it was only for Peter de Gondi that the General of the Galleys needed a tutor.

No better man for this task could be found than Vincent de Paul. The intellectual, moral and religious formation of the child was entrusted to his care. Their mother did not conceal from him the fact that she preferred to see her children walking in the paths of virtue than in the road of honours. The teachings and example of the holy tutor, his methodical mind and angelic patience bore fruit : Peter de Gondi advanced in wisdom and knowledge. All his life long he remained deeply religious. If he did not subsequently show himself sufficiently on his guard against a passion for political intrigue, the reason was that the wise advice of a saint was no longer there to counterbalance the inherited tendencies of his natural character.

Vincent de Paul was also placed in charge of the household staff ; he gave them religious instruction, and prepared them for the reception of the sacraments on the approach of the chief festivals of the year. He acted as arbitrator in their disputes, appeased their quarrels, and exercised a salutary influence over all which increased as their confidence in him extended.

He had, moreover, duties towards the outside world. The holy priest never forgot that he was the parish priest of Clichy or neglected the obligations imposed on him by this office. Nothing of importance there was undertaken without his consent ; the parochial accounts were submitted for his inspection ; he often went to Clichy to preach, visit the sick, administer the sacraments and lend his support to all the good work that was being done.

When the de Gondis resided in their country houses at Joigny, Montmirail, or Villepreux, he looked after the spiritual welfare of the people of these districts and carried out all his priestly duties. He felt much more at home with the poor country folk than in the splendid mansions of the great. He was accustomed to ask his penitents to review the sins of their past life, which was an excellent means both of knowing them and tranquillising their consciences ; in this way many reserved cases were revealed, and for these

he applied to the Ordinary for faculties to absolve. A letter written by him on June 20, 1616, asking for such faculties, to the Vicar-General of Sens (in which diocese Joigny is situated), is still extant.[12]

In his free time, the man of God lived alone in his room, 'as in a Charterhouse,' and there, all alone and in the presence of God, he laboured and meditated. In this splendid mansion, the centre of a brilliant and worldly society, if he had felt ambitious desires, he would have had plenty of opportunities for forming valuable acquaintances and securing powerful protectors. But the time was now far distant when he had dreamed of his own 'advancement': the sole thought that now occupied his mind was the promotion of the glory of God. He preferred solitude and silence to the society of the great and the idle conversations of a fashionable salon. Isolation, in matter of fact, was far more in harmony with his naturally 'sombre and melancholy' temperament. Whilst both M. and Madame de Gondi approved his discretion and reserve, they nevertheless experienced uneasiness from time to time, because they were afraid lest this behaviour sprang from boredom.[13]

No person in that house showed them more attachment, respect and docility. The saintly tutor had accustomed himself to see in the General of the Galleys the person of Our Lord, and in his spouse Our Lady; but this did not prevent him, in case of necessity, from giving them a charitable word of rebuke.[14]

Like so many of the nobility of his day, Philip Emmanuel de Gondi put 'the point of honour' before obedience to the laws of the Church. On one occasion, before going out to fight a duel with one of the courtiers, who had challenged and killed a near relation, he went to assist at Mass in the chapel in order to recommend himself to God. When Mass was over, Vincent de Paul, finding himself alone with the General who still knelt in prayer, threw himself at his feet. 'Sir,' he said, 'pray allow me to say a word to you in all

[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 20.
[13] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XII, p. 177.
[14] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 8; Vol. X, p. 387.

humility. I know from a good source that you intend to go and fight a duel ; but I say to you, on the part of my Saviour, whom I have just held up before your eyes, and whom you have just adored, that if you do not abandon this wicked design, He will exercise His justice on you and on all your posterity.'

Hereupon, he withdrew. His words had the desired effect. Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, moved by grace, abandoned his design. At the suggestion of his friends, he withdrew, for some time, with his family, to his estate in Picardy to forget his acute disappointment. The man whom he wished to kill was exiled from France.[15]

Vincent de Paul behaved in such a dignified manner in all circumstances as to win the respect of both husband and wife. De Gondi said, after Vincent's death : ' What I chiefly admired amongst the virtues of our dead friend were his humility, charity and great prudence in all things. I never remarked, or heard anybody else say that he had committed a fault against those virtues, although he lived with me for ten or twelve years. I have never known him to have the slightest failing and that is why I always regarded him as a saint.'[16]

Madame de Gondi asked him, about 1614 or 1615, to act as her spiritual guide, and as the holy priest hesitated or even declined, she asked de Bérulle to intervene, and thus gained her point. If the confessor was deeply edified by the delicacy of conscience of this chosen soul (for she abhorred even the shadow of sin), he had, on the other hand, much to endure from her tendency to scrupulosity. She wished to have him beside her both in the house and on her travels. When he was absent, she feared lest an accident or an illness had deprived her of him, and kept urging him to return. To combat this excessive attachment, Vincent de Paul introduced her to an excellent spiritual guide, a priest of the Order of Recollets, whom she consulted when her usual confessor was not at hand.[17] He considered that the best

[15] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XIV, p. 30 ; *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XI, p. 28 ; *Bibliothèque Oratorienne*, Vol. I, p. 428.
[16] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 88.
[17] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. IX, p. 36.

remedy was to divert this devout woman's attention from thinking too much about herself, to doing good to others. She began to visit and nurse the sick on her estates ; and the habit rapidly became a pleasure. Her frail and delicate health could not stand the strain she imposed on it. A state of extreme lassitude supervened and she soon learned that zeal should go hand in hand with discretion. Vincent de Paul himself was attacked, about 1615, by a grave illness which resulted in a disease of the legs, from which he suffered for the rest of his life.[18]

It was, perhaps, the state of his health that led him, when he was appointed treasurer and canon of the Chapter of Ecouis, in the diocese of Rouen, now the diocese of Evreux, thanks to M. de Gondi who had the right of appointment to this benefice, to delegate a procurator to take possession of it in his stead, on May 27, 1615. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the canons sent an official report to de Gondi : ' My Lord, we have received your letter and carried out its prescriptions. We are sending to M. Vincent, your sons' tutor, a copy from the registers of the Chapter, which will serve as an official act of taking possession of the Treasureship and Canonry to which you have been pleased to appoint him. May God grant him the grace of accomplishing all that you expect from him for the welfare and honour of your church ! ' And the good canons added with a spice of genuine Norman mischief : ' The presence of beneficed clergy themselves results in divine worship being carried out with greater splendour in your church, in which we will continue to beseech the divine goodness to aid you with its grace, as also Madame and your children, and we remain, My Lord, Your very humble orators and servants ! '

Vincent de Paul, as soon as ever he was able, went to Ecouis. ' On September 16, 1615,' says the register of the old collegiate church, ' Master Vincent de Paul, priest, bachelor in theology, presented himself in person to take the oath of fidelity and to receive the *osculum pacis* ; which is essential before a canon, who has taken possession by a procurator, can put on his choir dress. Consequently, Vincent took the oath, and signed the undertaking to fulfil

[18] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 46.

his duties ; but, as he is obliged to dwell in Paris, he asked for, and obtained, a substitute ; after which he received the kiss of peace and invited the Company to dinner on the following day, the feast of the dedication of Ecouis, *pro suo jucundo adventu*, according to the custom of the Chapter.'

The Treasurer returned to the capital and never went back to Ecouis. When the canons authorised him to appoint a substitute, they did not reckon on the zeal of Peter de Rocherolles, Baron of Pont-Saint-Pierre-Marigny, and co-patron of the Collegiate Church. This nobleman called a meeting of the Chapter for April 20, 1616, and there pointed out that ' the foundation of the said church and college was being violated in such a manner as to threaten its entire destruction, namely, the actual residence of all the Canons in general ; and Messieurs Desmay, the Dean ; Paoul, the Treasurer ; and Blondel, a Canon, were contravening their rule ' ; hence he summoned them, ' in the name of God, to proceed in this matter on the same lines as himself.' The Chapter could do nothing but submit and summoned the delinquents to appear and give an account of their conduct at the next General Chapter on Whit-Monday. On the day appointed, Desmay and Blondel attended ; only the Treasurer failed to appear ; but a letter from the General of the Galleys explained the reason for his absence. It would be interesting to know how the matter ended ; unfortunately, there are no further documents extant.[19]

It is probable Vincent de Paul did not long remain a Canon of Ecouis. On October 29, 1616, he even resigned the Abbey of Saint Léonard-de-Chaumes,[20] which he had held for five years. The benefices he had so eagerly sought for a few years previously, weighed more and more heavily on him now that he better understood the importance of the duties of beneficed clergy, and the necessity of residence if they were to be properly carried out. If he still retained the spiritual charge of Clichy, it was because he was sufficiently close to it to look after his flock.

There was no man less fitted for the sedentary life of a

[19] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 19 ff.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

canon than Vincent de Paul ; for him, the active life of a missionary was essential. Whenever the de Gondis visited their country mansions, his greatest delight was to get into touch with the villagers and look after their spiritual welfare. At Gannes, a tiny hamlet on the de Gondi estate, about two leagues from their castle at Folleville,[21] in January 1617, a peasant lay dying : he was sixty years old and was tortured by the wretched state of his conscience, although by all around him he was looked on as a good-living man. He wanted to see Saint Vincent, who had accompanied Madame de Gondi to Folleville. The Saint hastened to his bedside and recommended him to make a general confession. The sick man, once delivered from his sins, could no longer contain his joy. ' Ah ! Madame,' he said to Madame de Gondi, three days before he died, ' I should have been damned if I had not made a general confession, on account of the many great sins I never dared to confess.' Madame de Gondi could not contain herself either. ' Oh ! Sir,' said she, turning towards the Saint, ' Listen to that ! Just think of what we have heard. The same is true, no doubt, of most of these poor people. Oh ! if this man, who passed as a good-living person, was in a state of damnation, what is the case of others who are living an evil life ? Oh ! Monsieur Vincent, how many souls are perishing ! What is the remedy for such a state of affairs ? '

God Himself suggested the remedy. Let us listen to Vincent de Paul : ' On the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, which is the 25th, this lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church at Folleville and to exhort the inhabitants to make a general confession. I pointed out to them its importance and usefulness, and then I instructed them how to make a good one ; and God had so much for the regard of this lady (for the great number and enormity of my sins would have prevented this action bearing any fruit) that He gave His blessing to my discourse ; and all these good folks were so touched by God that they all came to make their general confessions. I continued to instruct them to prepare for the Sacraments, and began to hear their confessions, but the crowd was so great that even

[21] In the department of the Somme, a few miles from Amiens.

with the help of another priest we could no longer suffice, and so Madame sent to the Reverend Jesuit Fathers in Amiens to come to our assistance. She wrote to the Reverend Father Rector, who came himself, but as he could only remain for a very short time, he sent Father Fourché, of the same Society, to take his place. The latter helped us to hear confessions, to preach and catechise, and, by the mercy of God, found plenty to do. We then went on to the other villages belonging to Madame in those places and did the same as in the first. And that was the first sermon of the Mission, and the success God gave it on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul ; and it was not without some design that God did this on such a feast of the Church.'[22]

When Vincent de Paul spoke these words to his Missionaries, he was not able to reveal the whole truth. Madame de Gondi had another motive for urging the practice of general confessions. He let them know it later during a conference held on January 25, 1655. 'There were two reasons that induced Madame, the General's wife, to have opportunities supplied to those poor people for making general confessions and, if I mention one of them to the Company, I may cast a slur upon a certain family. O my God ! shall I mention it ?' And after a short pause, he went on : 'All things considered, yes, it should be mentioned because there is certainly not a single member of that family alive ; they are all dead, and so too is the parish priest of whom I am about to speak. I have also heard that one of the relations, a really good man who came to see me some time ago, died recently, and he was the last of the family. Now, the fact of the matter is that one day when the late Madame (de Gondi) was making her confession to her parish priest, she noticed that he did not give her absolution. He muttered something between his teeth, and did the same on some other occasions when she went to confession to him : now this caused her some anxiety, so one day she asked a religious, who had called on her, to give her the form of absolution in writing, which he did. And when this good lady went again to confession, she asked his Reverence the parish priest to pronounce over her the words of absolution contained in

[22] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 4.

this paper, and he did so. She continued to do the same every time she went to confession to him subsequently, handing him the paper, because he did not know the words he was bound to pronounce, so ignorant was he. She told me all about it and I bore it in mind and paid more particular attention to those to whom I went to confession, and I found, as a matter of fact, that this was true and that some of them did not know the words of absolution.'[23]

General confessions made after the spiritual exercises of a mission were a remedy for such a sad state of affairs. In view of the wonderful results obtained after a few days, Madame de Gondi conceived a project of putting aside 16,000 livres for a community that would undertake to give missions on all her estates every five years. Vincent de Paul mentioned the matter to Fr. Charlet, the Jesuit provincial, but he declined the offer, acting on the orders of his Superior General, who did not think such a work came within the scope of the Institute. He then turned to Bourdoise and de Bérulle, but both of them thought it their duty not to accept. Faced with these refusals, Madame de Gondi made a clause in her will by which she left the sum assigned for the foundation to Vincent himself, leaving him the choice of where the missions should be given, and the means whereby they could be preached. We shall see later on how he responded to the intentions of the pious foundress. The establishment of the Congregation of the Mission is the result of the sermon at Folleville ; it sprang from it as the tree does from the seed. Hence the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul was always, for Saint Vincent and his disciples, a day of thanksgiving to Almighty God.

The mission at Folleville clearly revealed to Vincent de Paul what God expected from him. When so many souls in these country villages were endangering their eternal salvation, was it fitting that he should spend the greater part of his time within the narrow circle of a single family, giving lessons to two or three children ? After a long and terrible struggle, God had set him free from temptations against the Faith after he had made a resolution to devote the rest of his days to the service of the poor : were his

[23] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XI, p. 169.

duties as a tutor compatible with this engagement and was there not reason to fear lest the temptation would return if he did not fly from the de Gondis? His departure would entail other advantages : it would protect him from temptations to vanity to which the tokens of the General's esteem and respect were exposing him ; it would cut short the attachment that Madame de Gondi felt for him and give the children a chance of having a tutor endowed with the qualities requisite for this function, qualities which he did not believe he possessed.

Moved by these considerations, Vincent de Paul went to Father de Bérulle, pointed out his motives for going away to work, far from Paris, for the salvation of the poor country people, and with his usual docility, waited for a decision. The General of the Oratory could not but see the hand of Providence in such a step, for, as a matter of fact, he was looking for a zealous priest who would go to a tiny parish in Bresse, Châtillon-les-Dombes. God had now sent him such a priest, and he fell in with Saint Vincent's proposal.

CHAPTER V

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, PARISH PRIEST OF CHÂTILLON-LES-DOMBES

THE little town of Châtillon, which is known to-day as Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne, from the river that flows through it, is beautifully situated in a smiling, fertile valley, diversified by woods, meadows and vine-clad hill-sides. It rests at the foot of a rising ground on which stand the half-ruined towers of an old fortified castle, formerly known as *Castellum Dumbarum*, the castle of the Dombes.

In those days it contained a working population of about two thousand souls, who left much to be desired both from the point of view of morals and religion. After the treaty of Lyons (1601), which took Bresse away from the House of Savoy, and especially after the purchase by Marshal Lesdiguières, of the seigniory of Pont-de-Veyle, where the Huguenots had a conventicle (1613), Protestantism attracted some followers, especially from the better classes.

The clergy of Châtillon consisted of six elderly ecclesiastics, who acted as chaplains but did nothing to prevent the spread of heresy; on the contrary, they favoured it by their mode of life which was anything but sacerdotal. The presence of young women under their roof afforded plenty of subject for gossip to scandalous tongues. Contemporaries tell us that they spent their days in the taverns, took part in all public sports, demanded payment for the most trifling spiritual services, and compelled children to confess in public in the presence of their companions. They even lowered themselves,[1] says

[1] After Saint Vincent's death, two official enquiries were held in Châtillon, the first in 1664, the second in 1665, with the object of obtaining information on his period of residence in the town. Old inhabitants were questioned, and memoranda dealing with the information acquired were drawn up in the presence of public notaries. One of these memoirs is given in *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 45.

CARDINAL PIERRE DE BÉRULLE

Collet,[2] to certain practices, traditional, no doubt, but so ridiculous that any serious historian would be ashamed to give an account of them.[3]

The temporal lords of Châtillon were the Canon-Counts of Lyons. They were only to be seen when the parish priest fulfilled his obligation of paying them an annual tribute of five hundred livres.

The official report of the visitation of 1614 remarks that the Church of Saint Andrew was in good repair, but that the pavement was broken. It was a huge church seeing that besides the high altar, there were four side altars and fifteen chapels. The farriers had a chapel of their own, dedicated to Saint Éloi, the patron of their confraternity ; the cordwainers met in Saint Crispin's chapel. An altar in the tribune, dedicated to Christ crucified, was a great centre of attraction for the faithful. All these sanctuaries had their own revenues and depended on a patron, who used to nominate the prebendary.

The chief hospital was falling into ruins ; in 1614, there were only six patients and half a dozen children living in it.

There was great excitement amongst the people when they learned that Denis de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons, was to make a visitation of the parish on May 5, 1614. He had a magnificent reception. The governor of the town, M. de la Bastie, marched before him, accompanied by three or four gentlemen and the entire population. When he had descended from his carriage, the parish priest, John Séraud, Doctor of Divinity, canon of Saint Didier and afterwards custodian of the Holy Cross of Lyons, read an

[2] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 62.

[3] This account, borrowed from the memoir dated August 7, 1665, would seem to be somewhat exaggerated when compared with the official report of Cardinal de Marquemont's visitation in 1614. (Cf. *Les visites pastorales en Dombes en* 1614 *et en* 1654, by Philip Cordenod, in the Bulletin de la Société Gorini, July, 1906, p. 296.) On Tuesday, May 6, 1614, the Archbishop of Lyons administered Holy Communion in the Church of Châtillon for an hour and a half and Confirmation for about three hours. He notes that ' the said associates and parish priests recite every day Matins, Lauds and the other Canonical hours, Vespers and Compline in a loud tone of voice in the said Church.'

address. Then beneath a canopy and preceded by the faithful, he walked in procession to the Church of Saint Andrew, over streets strewn with palm branches.

It was, perhaps, this episcopal visitation that led to the desire of providing the parish with an exceptionally zealous pastor who would be prepared to fight against the prevailing abuses. What would seem to indicate this is that two Oratorian Fathers, Bourgoing and Métezeau, had accompanied the Archbishop, and that the request, presented to de Bérulle, to select and send to Châtillon a priest really worthy of the name, emanated from the superior of the Oratory at Lyons, Father John de Bence.

However this may be, the proposal was made to Vincent de Paul and was accepted. The parish was at length to have a parish priest capable of repairing the ruins that had accumulated for half a century.

Vincent left the de Gondis in the month of July, 1617,[4] on the pretext of making a little journey and without troubling to think what people might say about it, but heart-broken at the thought of the sorrow he was about to inflict on the General and his wife. On his way through Lyons, he called on Father Bence to ask for advice and information as to the actual state of affairs in Châtillon.[5] He learned that the presbytery there was being repaired and that whilst waiting to move in, he would receive a hearty welcome from a wealthy Calvinist in the town, one John Beynier,[6] to whom Father Bence gave him a note of introduction.

[4] This is the date suggested by Abelly (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. IX, p. 37). It should be noted, however, that Charles Demia, in his account of Saint Vincent's stay in Châtillon, says that he arrived 'about Lent of the year 1617.' (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 47.) Abelly's opinion seems much more probable.

[5] Collet writes (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 54) that 'the parochial house was almost a ruin.' On the other hand, we know from the official report of the 1614 Visitation that the presbytery was 'in a fairly good condition.'

[6] The same John Beynier was one of the three witnesses who assisted the new parish priest of Châtillon to take possession of his cure. It is not without a certain amo unt of surprise that we note at the present day such friendly relations then between a heretic and a Catholic priest.

Scarcely had the new pastor established contact with his parish than he was horror-stricken at the ravages that heresy and immorality had inflicted on his flock. He thought there was work for at least two priests and went back to Lyons to look for help. Providence guided him to a Doctor of Divinity and a native of Bresse, Louis Girard, a priest of proved virtue, who became his curate.

Vincent de Paul was installed, on August 1, with the usual formalities, first in the church of Saint Martin of Buénans and next in that of Saint Andrew of Châtillon Although the latter was only an annexe of Buénans, he took up his residence there and made it the principal church. As in Clichy, he followed an order of day and invited his curate to do likewise : they were to rise at five o'clock and, after tidying their rooms, they were to devote themselves to mental prayer for half an hour ; the Divine Office and Mass were to be said at fixed times. ' They had no woman or girl to act as servants,' writes Collet,[7] ' Vincent would not permit it, and his guest's sister-in-law was the first to conform generously to this decision so that good order might be observed.' Collet also adds, on the word of Baron de Chastenai : ' He dressed very simply and always wore a long garment and had his hair cut very short ; he would have absolutely nothing to do with those profane usages to which worthless ecclesiastics apply the term " fashions," and the holy canons, " worldly vanities." '

The most urgent reform was that of the chaplains. Vincent de Paul applied himself to this so successfully that these ecclesiastics formed themselves into a community and acquired habits of work and prayer. He divided his time into two parts : one for visiting, especially the sick ; and the other for study and his parish church to which God and the love of souls attracted him. His confessional was so besieged that they often had to come and forcibly remove him from it at meal-times. He learned the language of the country so that he might be more useful, and his excellent memory soon rendered him able to teach the children catechism.

[7] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 62.

Every Sunday and holiday he preached, and his sermons, which could be understood by the youngest, had that unction which penetrates and wins men's minds and hearts. His constant preoccupation was the maintenance of order and cleanliness in the church and the due observance of the ceremonies. To honour the two saints whom he regarded as his patrons, Saint Vincent and Saint Paul, he established two Masses in perpetuity to be celebrated on their feasts. The people observed with astonishment that he was always satisfied with whatever sums they offered him as honoraria.

He delighted in the society of children. 'The holy parish priest,' said one of them later, 'scarcely passed a day without speaking to me of alms-giving.' This virtue inspired such veneration that the power of obtaining miracles was attributed to him. A pregnant woman, who had fallen ill and was given up by the doctors, felt her pains relieved every time he paid her a visit. She recovered her health, thanks, as she believed, to the prayers of Saint Vincent.

Châtillon was transformed in less than four months.[8] Public rejoicings on holidays, in Châtillon as elsewhere, consisted in dances and other amusements dangerous to youth. At his word, these abuses vanished.

Of all the conversions he effected, the one that caused most talk was that of the Count de Rougemont. This nobleman was a Savoyard who had retired to the Castle of Chandée[9], in 1601, when Bresse was reunited to France. Like most noblemen of the Court, where he had spent most of his life, he was passionately devoted to duelling. There was no one brave enough to measure himself against the Count, who was an expert swordsman. Attracted by the reputation of the new pastor, he wished to make his acquaintance and, after the first interview, left his presence completely won

[8] There were 900 communicants in Châtillon in 1614 (official report of the Visitation in 1614, p. 264), 1500 in 1656 (official report of the 1656 Visitation, p. 286). The number of Protestant families had fallen to 12 in 1684 (cf. Cordenod, *op. cit.*, p. 29, from a MS. register preserved in Pont-de-Veyle).

[9] Situated in Bugey, in the parish of Arenc.

over and ready to accept him as a spiritual guide. In a short time the Count was completely transformed. His greatest difficulty was to give up duelling but he succeeded in doing so by an act of heroic virtue that Saint Vincent never ceased to admire. Let us hear the story from the lips of the Saint :

' I knew a gentleman in Bresse whose name was M. de Rougemont ; he had been an avowed duellist.[10] He was a tall, well-made man who had frequently taken part in duels, sometimes challenged by other gentlemen, or himself calling out those who differed from him. He told me himself, and it can hardly be believed, how many he had fought with, wounded, and even slain. At length God so efficaciously moved him that he entered into himself, and recognising his wretched state, he made up his mind to change his mode of life, which, indeed, he did. After this change, and when he had passed some time as a beginner, and then as a proficient, he made such progress that he requested the Archbishop of Lyons for permission to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved in his chapel that he might worship Our Lord there and better sustain his devotion, which was remarkable and well known to all. This gave me a desire one day to go and see him in his own house, and he there recounted to me all his devotional practices, and amongst others, that of detachment from creatures. " I feel quite sure," said he to me, " that if I only cling to that, I will go straight to God, and that is all I aspire to ; with that in mind, I think of the friendship of such and such a nobleman, such and such a relation, such and such a neighbour, as a hindrance ; whether if it is self-love that prevents me from soaring ; if my worldly wealth or my vanity are attachments ; or if it is my business or my pleasure that keep me back ; when I see anything that turns me away from my sovereign good, I pray, I lop, I cut off, I get rid of the bond, and these are my exercises of piety."

' He mentioned this fact in particular, and I have always

[10] *Éclaircilleur*, a duellist. The word *éclaircir* was used in the sense of *to polish up*. ' Commenceront à fourbir leurs bachines et à esclairchir leurs espées (Froissarts Chronicles, VIII, 183. Kerv.).

remembered it, that one day when he was on a journey and thinking about God as usual, he examined himself as to whether, since the time he had renounced all, there had remained with him, or supervened, any attachments. He went over in his mind all his affairs, his property, his reputation, the love of glory and honour, and the trifles that captivate the human heart. He looked around and his eye fell on his sword. "Why are you wearing that?" he thought to himself. "How could I bear to be deprived of it? What! abandon this beloved sword which has served me so well on so many occasions and which, after God, has rescued me from a thousand perils! If I were attacked again, I should be lost without it; but on the other hand, a quarrel may be fastened on me in which I should not have the strength, if I still carried a sword, not to make use of it; and then I should offend God. O my God, what shall I do?" said he to himself. "Is such an instrument of my sin and shame still capable of swaying my heart? I find it is this sword alone that encumbers me. Oh! I will not be such a wretched coward as to bear it any longer!"

'Then, finding himself facing a large rock, he got down from his horse, took his sword, struck it against the stone, smashed it at length, broke it into bits and rode away.

'He told me that this act of detachment, this breaking of the iron chain that held him captive, rendered him so free that, even though it went against his heart, for he dearly loved this sword, he never again felt any affection for a perishable thing; he was attached now to God alone.'[11]

The Count sold his Rougemont estate, and with the 30,000 crowns he obtained for it, established several monasteries and gave abundant alms to the poor. If he had had his own way, he would have got rid of his Castle at Chandée.[12] 'This good nobleman,' wrote Father Desmoulins, 'was, as it were, annoyed by the possession of this property, although actually he only seemed to be its steward and utilised it for the welfare of the poor. As he said to me one day, with tears in his eyes: "Oh! Father, why am I not

[11] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 231.
[12] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XII, p. 51.

allowed to do what I want, and why must I be always treated as a nobleman and possess so much property and wealth ? " M. Vincent, who was then his spiritual guide, forced him, so he told me, to act thus. " I assure you, Father," he said to me, " if he only relaxed his grasp, the Count de Rougemont would not own even an inch of soil before a month was up." He was astonished that a Christian could keep anything, when he saw the poverty of the Son of God when He was on earth.'

Vincent de Paul was quite right not to give his penitent permission to sell the Chandée Castle, for there was no one who could make a better use of it. The castle became, in fact, the monastery of a religious order, a hospice and a hospital. The Count filled it with the poor and sick, and moreover, supplied ecclesiastics to instruct them.

He was accustomed to visit and wait on those who were ill on his domains, and when unable to do so, sent a domestic. He spent three or four hours in prayer every day, bare-headed and kneeling bolt upright, without any support, in his private chapel in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. He preferred to meditate on the Passion of Our Saviour, than on any other subject, and sent the Fathers of the Oratory as many crowns as Our Lord had received lashes during the Scourging at the Pillar.

A prolonged, excruciating illness enabled him to practise another virtue, patience. When at the point of death, he asked to be clad in the habit of a Capuchin in which he died.

The parish priest of Châtillon also succeeded in detaching two fashionable young women from earthly things in order the better to unite them to God. They were very wealthy, very worldly, and thought of nothing but dances, amusements and feasting. Their names were Frances Baschet de Mizériac, the wife of Gomard, lord of the manor of La Chassaigne ; and Charlotte de Brie, Lady du Bioley, wife of Cajot, lord of the manor of Brunand. The first sermon of the new parish priest caused them to reflect and examine themselves, and they resolved to abandon worldly amusement and think seriously on the salvation of their souls.

They were his most loyal collaborators in all his charitable undertakings.

Even heretics allowed themselves to be won over by Saint Vincent. A conversion he had very much at heart was that of John Beynier, the wealthy young Calvinist who had given him hospitality. In this case, not only was faith wanting, but also morals. Vincent de Paul gradually won his friendship, succeeded in moderating his life of debauchery and finally opened his mind to the light of faith, notwithstanding the desperate efforts of the Calvinist ministers.

' The most remarkable feature of this conversion in faith as well as in morals,'[13] wrote Father Desmoulins, who was then the Superior of the Oratory at Mâçon, ' is, that although God had made use of M. Vincent to effect it, nevertheless the latter left all the credit of it to those who had merely assisted at the abjuration and imparted absolution ; he might have given it himself, in accordance with the orders of His Grace, the Archbishop of Lyons, M. de Marquemont, but his humility made him unwilling to accept this honour and he wished to hand it over to others.'

The new convert made a resolution to lead a life of celibacy for the remainder of his days, transferred some farms to two or three persons who had not even asked him, as compensation for the wrongs his father might have done them, expended large sums on the poor and works of piety, and left several bequests in his will for various charitable objects, amongst others a capital sum for the establishment at Châtillon of a Capuchin monastery.

John Beynier's brother-in-law was one of the officers in command of the Duke of Montpensier's men-at-arms. His name was Garron and he too belonged to the reformed religion and gloried in the fact. The conversion of Beynier had greatly annoyed him, but the whole force of his anger burst forth on the day he was told that his own children, who had also been converted, wished to embrace the Catholic faith. He threatened to disinherit them, asked his friends and the Calvinist ministers to do what they could with them, and even went so far as to have the parish priest

[13] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. XI, p. 48.

summoned before the Chamber of the Edict of Grenoble.[14]

It was all in vain. The grace of God completed the work. One of his children abjured Calvinism at Montpellier in the presence of the bishop of that town ; the others publicly renounced their errors even in Châtillon itself. The father died of grief ; the eldest son became a Capuchin ;[15] the daughter joined the Ursulines, and the children who remained in the world were models of piety and charity.

A letter written by one of them, on August 27, 1646, to Vincent de Paul is still in existence : ' Behold,' it says, ' one of your children in Jesus Christ, who has recourse to your fatherly kindness of which he formerly experienced the effects when, bringing him forth to the Church by the absolution of heresy, which your charity publicly imparted to him in the church of Châtillon-les-Dombes in the year 1617, you instructed him in the principles and beautiful maxims of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion, in which, by the mercy of God I have persevered and trust to continue for the remainder of my life. I am that little John Garron, nephew of M. Beynier of Châtillon, in whose house you lodged when you first stayed in that town. I beseech you to give me all the help I need to prevent me from doing anything contrary to the designs of God. I have an only son who, after finishing his studies, has made up his mind to be a Jesuit. He is the most prosperous from a worldly point of view, of all the young men in this province. What should I do ? My doubt proceeds from two sources . . . I am afraid I may make a mistake and I thought you would do me the favour of giving your advice on this matter to one of your children who very humbly requests you to do so. You will be pleased when I tell you that the association of Charity of the servants of the poor in Châtillon is as vigorous as ever.'

The charitable association mentioned by John Garron was the work of Vincent de Paul. He had established it

[14] These were Chambers set up by the Edict of Nantes, half of the members being Catholic and the other half Protestants.

[15] Father Scholasticus Garron.

a month after his arrival in Châtillon,[16] in the following circumstances : ' When I was living near Lyons, in a small town to which Providence had called me to act as parish priest,'[17] he said to the Sisters of Charity one day, ' on a certain Sunday, just as I was vesting to say Mass, a person [18] came to tell me that, in an isolated house a quarter of a league away, the whole family lay ill, so that not a single one of them could come to the assistance of the others, and they were in such dire straits as cannot be expressed. It moved me to the depths of my heart. I did not fail to speak feelingly about them during the sermon, and God, touching the hearts of those who were listening, caused them all to be moved to compassion for the poor afflicted people.

' After dinner, a meeting was held in the house of a good lady in the town to see what help could be given and every single one of those present was quite prepared to go and see them, to console them by talking to them and to help them to the best of their ability.

' After Vespers, I took a good, honest man, a citizen of the town, as my companion and we walked along the road together to go and pay them a visit. We passed on the road some women who had gone in front of us, and a little farther on, we met some others returning. And as it was summer and the weather was very hot, these good women were sitting down by the road to rest and refresh themselves. And in fact, my daughters, there were so many of them that you would have said it was a regular procession. When I arrived, I visited the sick and went to look for the Blessed Sacrament for those who were in the most urgent need, but not in the parish church, because it was not a parish, but depended on a Chapter of which I was the prior. So then after hearing their confessions and giving them Holy Communion, the question arose as to how we could best help them in their need. I suggested to all these dear, good people whose charity had induced them to visit the family, that they should take it in turn, day by day, to cook for them, and not only for these but also for other cases that might arise.'

[16] Very probably August 20.
[17] *Saint Vincent de Paul,* Vol. IX, p. 243.
[18] Madame de a Chassaigne.

FRANÇOISE-MARGUERITE DE SILLY,
DAME DE GONDI

may not be still some remedy for the disaster of losing him. I am extremely surprised that he never spoke to you about his resolution and that you had heard nothing from him about it. I beg you to do everything that lies in your power so that we may not lose him ; for, even if the motive he alleges were true, I should pay no attention to it whatever, as I have nothing more at heart than my salvation and that of my children. And I know that he will some day greatly assist me in that respect, as also in the resolutions which I now more than ever desire to take, and of which I have often spoken to you. So far I have made no reply, and I am waiting to hear news from you first. Do you think the intervention of my sister, Madame de Ragny, who is close to him, would do any good ? But, I think no one will be as powerful as M. de Bérulle. Tell him that even if it were true that M. Vincent could not teach youths, he could have a man under him ; but no matter what happens, I passionately desire his return to my house in which he can live just as he pleases, and I can, some day or other, lead a good life if he is near me.'

Madame de Gondi received this letter on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. She was so upset by it that she could not cease from crying and could not eat. ' I never would have believed,' she wrote to a friend, possibly M. de Bérulle, ' that M. Vincent who had shown himself so charitable to my soul, would have abandoned me like that. But God be praised ! I bring no accusation against him ; far from it. I believe he has done nothing save by God's special Providence, and moved thereto by His holy love ; yet in truth, his flight is most strange. I confess I can make nothing of it. He knows the need I have of his guidance and the matters I have to confide to him ; the bodily and mental sufferings I have endured through lack of assistance ; the good I wish to do in my villages and that it is impossible to carry out without his advice. In short, I see my soul in a most pitiable state. You see with what feelings of annoyance the General wrote to me ; my children are day by day wasting away, and the good he did in my home and to the seven or eight thousand souls on my estates is gone for ever. What ! have these souls not been redeemed by the

precious blood of Our Lord as well as those in Bresse? Are they not just as dear to Him? In truth, I know not what M. Vincent thinks of that. But it seems to me to be of such great importance that I will do everything in my power to have him back. He seeks only the greater glory of God and I do not desire anything contrary to His holy will, but I implore Him with all my heart, to give him back to me. I ask this from His divine Mother and I would ask for it even still more strongly if my own interest were not mingled with the General's, my children, my family's and my dependants.'

The poor lady moved Heaven and earth, employed every means, natural and supernatural, to bring about the return of the parish priest of Châtillon to Paris. First of all, she turned to Vincent himself: 'I was not mistaken,' she wrote, 'about losing your help, as I let you see so often, since in point of fact I have lost it. The bitterness of soul in which I now find myself would be insupportable without an extraordinary grace from God, and that I do not deserve. If it were only for a time, I should not suffer so much; but when I reflect on all the occasions in which I shall need to be assisted by guidance and advice, both in life and death, my sorrows are renewed. Consider, then, whether my mind and my body can long sustain such anguish. I am in such a state that I can neither seek for or receive any help from any other source, because you know quite well that I cannot treat of my spiritual necessities with many persons. M. de Bérulle has promised me to write to you and I call on God and the Blessed Virgin to restore you to our house for the salvation of our entire family, and many others on whose behalf you can exercise your charity. Once more I beseech you to show your charity towards us, for the love you bear Our Lord, to Whose will I deliver myself on this occasion, though greatly fearing I cannot persevere. If after all this you still refuse, I will charge you before God for all that may befall me, and for all the good I shall fail to accomplish through being left unaided. You are placing me in the risk of being very frequently deprived of the sacraments in various places, on account of the interior trials that befall me, and because there are very few indeed who are capable of assisting me. You see how the General has the same desire

as myself, which God alone in His mercy has given him. Do not go against the good you can effect by helping him in his salvation, since he will be able some day to assist in that of many. I know that, as my life only serves to offend God, it is dangerous to place it in peril ; but my soul should be assisted at the hour of death. Remember the state of apprehension in which you saw me in my last illness in a certain village. I shall probably soon be in a worse state and the mere fear of it would cause me such pain that I think it would cause my death, even without any previous great disposition.'

Madame de Gondi asked for the prayers of the principal religious communities in Paris for her intention and, early in October, despatched a messenger to Châtillon. This was an old friend of the Saint's, Charles du Fresne, formerly secretary to Queen Marguérite of Valois and now secretary to Philip de Gondi. He set out provided with a bundle of letters, from Cardinal de Retz the Bishop of Paris, from M. de Bérulle, from Madame de Gondi, her children, her nearest relations, from the chief officers of her household, from doctors of divinity, members of religious communities, and from many persons of rank and piety. Father de Bérulle did not ask Vincent de Paul to return ; he contented himself with describing Madame de Gondi's distress and asking him to reflect on what he should do.

When the parish priest of Châtillon had read the letters and listened to the arguments and supplications of Charles du Fresne, he felt very much shaken. However, as God had made use of Father Bence to lead him to Châtillon, he did not wish to come to any decision until he had first consulted the Superior of the Oratory at Lyons. Father Bence advised him to go back to Paris, see Father de Bérulle and other trustworthy friends, and then follow the line of conduct they would trace for him.

Vincent de Paul submitted. He sent word of what he proposed to do to M. de Gondi, then at Marseilles, and to his wife, who was feverishly expecting du Fresne's return.

The General of the Galleys replied to Vincent on October 13 : ' I received two days ago the letter you wrote me from Lyons, in which I see you have made up your mind to take

a little trip to Paris about the end of November. This has given me the utmost joy and I hope to see you there then and that you will grant the boon I desire of you in answer to my own prayers and the advice of all your good friends. I shall say no more about the matter now, as you have seen the letter I wrote my wife. I only beg you to consider that it would seem that God wishes, by means of you, that the father and children should be good Christian men.'

Vincent de Paul realised that once in Paris it would be very difficult to escape. Accordingly he bade good-bye to his parishioners as if he was never to see them again. His final exhortation to them was most touching ; he assured them he had come to Châtillon fully resolved to live and die amongst them, but that he felt he must allow himself to be guided by Providence ; he then recommended himself to their prayers and promised never to forget them before God. The news produced general stupefaction : sobs were the response to his words of farewell ; and only the heretics were pleased. ' You are losing the prop and the foundation-stone of your religion,' they remarked to the Catholics. The parish priest distributed his possessions, clothes and linen amongst the poor. Everybody wanted to have a souvenir and several persons might have been seen trying to obtain possession of a hat which a poor man, named John Carron, had received from the Saint.

The day he left was a day of mourning for the whole parish. The people accompanied the car that bore their pastor for many miles and it was only when it had vanished from their sight that they retraced their steps homewards.

Vincent de Paul reached the capital on December 23 and, without wasting any time, proceeded to consult Father de Bérulle and his other friends. The following day he presented himself before Madame de Gondi ' who received him as if he were an angel from Heaven.'[24] We may easily imagine what she said to him. The poor country people were in the most dire necessity ; it was his duty to help them ; he could not, without endangering his salvation, remain in cities,

[24] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. IX, p. 45.

where there were plenty of priests, whilst the country folk were shamefully neglected.

Madame de Gondi fully realised that Vincent de Paul could not be induced to alter his determination unless she too would make some concessions. She perceived that his desire to evangelise the most neglected parishes came from Heaven ; but she pointed out that he could realise it much more fully by staying on as her chaplain. Had she not large estates in Picardy and Champagne, on which there were nearly eight thousand tenants ? He would be their pastor ; he would be perfectly free to visit them, preach missions and establish Confraternities of Charity. She would co-operate with him by her influence, her fortune and her personal activity. ' Have not these souls,' she very probably added, ' been redeemed by the precious blood of Our Saviour just as much as those in Bresse ? And are they not just as dear to Him ? ' When he returned to Paris from the country, he would be near Clichy, his parish, and there would be nothing to hinder him from exercising his ministry there. She also spoke, and how touchingly about her soul, her husband's and those of her children. The latter were growing up : the eldest son was now fifteen, the second, six or seven ; the youngest, who was then four years old, already seemed to overshadow the others in liveliness and quick-wittedness. Vincent de Paul would supervise their training, but their education would be handed over to another so as to allow frequent and prolonged absences on his part.

Vanquished by the arguments, tears and entreaties of the Countess, Vincent promised never to leave her as long as she lived. He remained beside her, but no longer as tutor—he is no longer so described in official documents—but as chaplain of her house and estates.

This appointment had another result. Now that he was far away from Châtillon, Vincent de Paul felt obliged to hand over the spiritual charge of the parish to somebody else ; he sent in his resignation on January 31, 1618 and on July 10, his curate Louis Girard was appointed his successor.

Châtillon did not forget its pastor. The official enquiry of 1665 ends thus : ' The undersigned declare it would be

impossible to set down all that M. Vincent effected in so short a space of time, and that they could scarcely believe it, were it not that they had both seen and heard of it. He was held in such high esteem that the people never spoke of him save as a saint. They loudly declare that they never had and never again will have such a parish priest and that he left them far too soon for their liking. They believed that what he accomplished at Châtillon would be sufficient to have him canonised, and they have no doubt whatever that if he behaved everywhere else as he did here, he will certainly be canonised some day.'[25]

When this hope became a reality, the little city of Châtillon was the first to rejoice. Saint Vincent de Paul is now the second patron of the parish and his feast is solemnly celebrated every year. Local pilgrimages are made to the town to honour his memory. A splendid bronze statue, the work of Emilien Cabuchet, stands in one of the city squares. It was unveiled on September 29, 1856, by the Bishop of Belley, in the presence of Father Etienne, who was then Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. There is a chapel dedicated to him in the church and a series of stained-glass windows tells the story of his life.

[25] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 53.

CHAPTER VI

CONFRATERNITIES OF CHARITY AND MISSIONS (1618–1624)

SCARCELY had he returned to Paris than Vincent de Paul drew up a complete plan of campaign for the evangelisation of the de Gondi estates. Folleville had had its mission in the preceding year and the zealous missionary now proposed to visit Villepreux, Joigny, Montmirail, and the surrounding districts.

Villepreux, a little village in the department of Seine-et-Oise, formed part of the diocese of Paris in those days. Madame de Gondi's almoner went there in the beginning of the year 1618, accompanied by John Coqueret, a doctor of the Sorbonne, Berger and Gontière, councillor clerics of the Parlement of Paris,[1] and some other virtuous ecclesiastics who wished to take part in the work. Madame de Gondi was also present, and by her lavish alms, her visits to the poor and sick and her wise advice to those who she knew were engaged in lawsuits or violently at variance with their neighbours, greatly contributed to the success of the preacher.[2]

Vincent de Paul, before leaving Villepreux, established a Charity there, and made this a custom ever afterwards wherever he gave a mission. On the evening of February 23, 1618, after Vespers and before the faithful left the church, he went in a surplice to the Chapel of the Confraternity where the future 'Servants of the poor' had assembled, each bearing a lighted candle. They had prepared themselves for the ceremony by going to Confession and receiving Holy Communion. After chanting the *Veni Creator* and reciting the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, he explained

[1] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. X, p. 47.
[2] *Ibid.*, Ch. XIII, p. 53.

in a few words the object of the association. He enumerated the spiritual advantages the members and benefactors would derive from it, read the rules and the formal approbation, called up and took the names of those who had promised to become members, and then proceeded to the election of the officers. The latter were chosen by a majority of votes which were given in a low tone of voice. The singing of the *Salve Regina* brought the proceedings to an end. On the following day he called a meeting of the officers with a view to determine, in concert with them, what day should be assigned to each of the associates for the service of the sick and for the collection of alms.[3]

The regulations, which have not so far been discovered, no doubt resembled those of the associations he founded in the course of that year. The organisation of the ' Charities,' for such was Vincent de Paul's name for the Confraternities, is known to us chiefly from the general regulations, which were elaborated, somewhat later, it is true, but which reproduce practices already long in vogue, and of which the greater number go back to the very beginning of the movement.[4]

Jesus Christ Himself was the patron of the Charity ; its end was the spiritual and corporal assistance of the sick poor ; its membership confined to a limited number of women who, if married, should have the permission of their husbands, and if still dependent on their fathers or mothers, the permission of their parents. It was directed by three officers : the prioress, the treasurer and the wardrobe-keeper, elected by a majority of votes every two years, on Whit-Monday, in presence of the parish priest. A devout and charitable man of the parish, chosen in the same way, was to act as bursar or procurator. The prioress was to watch over the observance of the rules ; she admitted the

[3] There is no document extant relating to the Charity at Villepreux. The details given above as to the first meeting have been borrowed from the rules of the Confraternity of Paillart. (September, 1620), which conclude with one entitled : Ceremonies hitherto practised on the day on which a Charity has been established.

[4] The general regulations and a résumé of them will be found in *Saint Vincent de Paul,* Vol. XIII, p. 417 ff.

sick poor, with the advice of the other officers, and sent them away when they were no longer in need of the assistance of the Confraternity. She had a crown at her disposal for current expenses and it was strictly forbidden to lend money belonging to the Charity. At the end of her two years of office she presented a statement of her accounts to the Association in the presence of the parish priest and any parishioners who cared to attend.

The wardrobe-keeper, as her name implies, had charge of marking, supervising, keeping in repair and lending the movable goods of the Charity : linen, crockery, blankets, napery, coverlets, and other such objects of which the poor were in need. She gave an account of her stewardship on the day she left office. The procurator kept an account of the monies received as gifts or which accrued from collecting alms ; he paid the bills and helped the treasurer, if necessary, to keep her accounts ; he kept the registers of the Confraternity open for inspection. These contained, amongst other matters, copies of the regulations, the formal act of establishment, a list of the associates with the dates of their reception and deaths, official reports of the elections, audits of the accounts, the means of persons who had been helped, together with an indication of the day on which they had first been admitted, the day of their death or cure, and lastly, an account of the chief notable events in the history of the Confraternity.

The Association needed money to pay its expenses for it had to provide nourishment for the sick, purchase medicines and remedies, pay doctors and nurses, acquire and repair linen, furniture, etc., and allot stipends for masses. The spontaneous gifts of charitable persons would not have sufficed for all this, so the sisters, each in turn, asked for alms, both in church and from house to house, on Sundays and holidays ; the faithful were reminded not to forget the Charity in their wills, and from time to time, persons of rank and wealth were visited to stir up their lethargy ; magistrates also, in various places, handed over to the Charity the sum total of certain fines. It had an alms-box in the church and also one in various taverns and inns. Where the Confraternity owned sheep, they were sure of a supply of wool and

lambs ; where there were cows they had milk and calves ; and, in addition, they had other sources of revenue.

When her day came round, the sister brought the patient his meal, all cooked and ready : as much bread as he pleased, four ounces of veal or mutton,[5] soup, and half a pint of wine, Paris measure. On days of abstinence, meat gave place to a couple of eggs and some butter. For those who could not take flesh meat, there were soups and fresh eggs four times a week. Sisters who brought uncooked meat or were content with handing over some money to the patient to provide for himself, acted against the regulations. If a dying person needed a nurse, then the Association provided one ; when he died, they assisted in a body at his funeral and had a low mass offered for the repose of his soul. They paid the nurses and looked on them as part of the Confraternity.

It was essential that persons should be poor and sick if they were to be looked after by the Association. In the first years of its existence, those who possessed nothing, that is to say, neither movable nor immovable goods, were considered to be poor. Experience showed that the word had to be extended to cover all those who, though owners of a few scraps of land and a few necessary sticks of furniture, had nothing to subsist on once they had ceased to work.

The Confraternity refused to undertake the care of persons suffering from incurable diseases, such as paralytics, because such cases would have much too rapidly depleted the slight funds at its disposal. Contagious cases were not visited ; the members placed, at a suitable distance, in the street or garden, what had been prepared for such patients, so as not to expose themselves to the risk either of incurring contagion themselves or of infecting others.[6] In places where the Confraternity of Charity for the plague-stricken was at work, the Confraternity established by Saint Vincent or his disciples took the name of Confraternity of Mercy and did not deal with persons suffering from contagious diseases.

The Charity had its own chapel in the parish church and in

[5] This is the amount fixed by the first regulations ; later on an ounce was added ; the general regulations mention the fact.

[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 133.

this chapel, its own picture representing Our Lord, its patron, and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. A Mass was said on the first or third Sunday of every month, in presence of the members who never failed on this day, as their rule recommended them, to go to Confession and Holy Communion, if it was possible.

In the afternoon, between Vespers and Compline, there was a procession, and the Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus and of the Blessed Virgin were chanted. The same exercises were carried out on January 14, the Feast of the Holy Name and the patronal feast of the Confraternity.

The Sisters did not draw on the funds of the Confraternity[7] to decorate the chapel or purchase a picture ; they either made a collection from amongst themselves or turned to their benefactors. We have just said that the feast of the Holy Name was the patronal feast of the Association ; the reason of this is that wherever a Confraternity of Charity was established, it united itself with the Confraternity of the Holy Name of Jesus, which was then very widely spread.[8] In some places, it became amalgamated with the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament ;[9] in others with that of the Rosary.[10] The union with the Rosary Confraternity raised opposition,[11] of which Vincent de Paul, a lover of peace, had to take account.

The members of the Confraternity, who had united to practise charity, owed it to themselves to exercise this virtue in their dealings with one another. Vincent de Paul thus exhorted them to do so : ' They shall cherish one another as persons whom Our Lord has united and bound together by love ; they shall visit and console one another when ill or afflicted ; they shall assist in a body at the funerals of those who die, and shall go to Holy Communion for the repose of their souls, and shall have a High Mass sung for each member ; they shall do the same for the parish

[7] The word ' Confraternity ' employed in the Châtillon regulations is changed to the word ' Association ' in subsequent ones ; it is resumed in the general regulations.

[8] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 521.

[9] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 527.

[10] At Clichy.

[11] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 246 ; Vol. II, p. 22.

priest and the procurator on their decease.' Stipends for Masses were to be supplied by the members themselves and not from the funds of the Confraternity. The recommendation (to be found in the original set of regulations) that the sick person should have his confession heard on the day he was adopted by the Association and go to Holy Communion on the following day, was dropped from the general regulations ; Vincent de Paul very probably found that this practice was rather disadvantageous than otherwise.

He never hesitated to suppress or to modify when he saw that such a course would be useful ; hence it is only in the first sets of rules that the following prescriptions may be found : ' They shall offer up their hearts to God on awaking in the morning, invoking the Holy Name of Jesus and that of His Blessed Mother ; they shall make their prayer after rising and assist at Mass every day, if possible ; they shall always behave with humility and endeavour to perform their actions throughout the day in union with those Jesus Christ performed when He came on earth, and every evening they shall examine their consciences in private.' The first regulations do not deal with the question of what were to be the respective duties of the officers and the procurator. As this was essential, Vincent de Paul proceeded to supply the omission by adding a second set of regulations for the Confraternities that were subsequently established. This was called : ' Regulations for the officers ' and the general rule was the result of the fusion of the two.

The Charity of Villepreux comes next in order of time and after that, Joigny, a small town in the diocese of Sens.[12] It was inaugurated on September 9, 1618. On that day, in presence of the Chief Magistrates, the Fiscal Procurator and the leading citizens who had met together in the Town Hall, Madame de Gondi presented to the parish priest of Villecien a document containing the official approbation of the Archbishop of Sens and requested him to be good enough to undertake the direction of the work. The parish priest willingly agreed ; he proceeded, in accordance with the

[12] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. X, p. 47.

usual rules, to establish a Confraternity which comprised, from the beginning, forty-two women, twenty of whom were unable to sign their names. Madame de Gondi was elected prioress. It is clear from the official report of the proceedings that Vincent de Paul was not present ; he may, perhaps, have been prevented, by illness or some other cause, from being with them. But although he was absent, everything was carried out according to his instructions. The rule is still preserved in the archives of the hospital at Joigny.[13] Once the Charity had been established, two nurses were required ; two women from the district presented themselves during the week and were admitted to membership on the following Sunday.

In order to provide a revenue, it occurred to Madame de Gondi to set aside the money accruing from a tax imposed, on Sundays and Holy-days, on trading vessels and others ' that passed above the bridges of the town ' or ' its draw-bridges, cable-buoys and boats.'

The saintly Countess hoped for much good from the Confraternity, and wished to establish one on all her estates. At her request, the Bishop of Soissons on October 1, approved the regulations presented to him and authorised the establishment of a Charity at Montmirail and other places in his diocese over which the seignorial rights of the de Gondis extended. The first meeting of the Charity of Montmirail took place on November 11, under the presidency of Vincent de Paul, in the Chapel of Saint Nicholas in the Church of Saint Stephen. Everything was carried out as it had been at Joigny. Madame de Gondi gave in her name, but refused to allow it to be put forward as an officer because as she usually resided far from Montmirail, she would be unable to discharge her duties. However, on the 13th, to make matters easy for the Confraternity, she accepted the post of first assistant, after the woman who had been elected resigned, but only on condition that she should have a substitute. The Sisters at Montmirail had to undertake the care, not only of the sick poor, but also that of prisoners

[13] The set of rules for the charity at Joigny has been published in *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 439.

JOIGNY IN THE XVIIth CENTURY
(From an engraving in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.)

No—don't tell me that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit : I would not believe you.'

There was some force in this objection and Vincent de Paul was disturbed. Controlling his feelings, he said : 'You have been badly informed. Good parish priests and curates may be found in country parishes. As for ecclesiastics living in cities, they too make themselves useful in a variety of ways ; some of them instruct the poor country-folk ; others pray to God and sing His praises night and day ; there are others who write books, preach, and administer the sacraments. Out of this number it is inevitable that some should be idlers because priests, like other men, are liable to fail ; but their sins are personal and should not be imputed to the Church. When it is said that the Church is guided by the Holy Ghost we speak of the bishops assembled in council or of the faithful who allow themselves to be guided by the light of faith and the rules of Christian Justice. Those who stray away from her resist the Holy Ghost ; although still members of the Church they are to be reckoned amongst those who live according to the flesh, as Saint Paul says ; and they shall perish.'

Despite the truth and force of these remarks, the heretic refused to be converted. Facts however, were soon destined to make a greater impression on him than words. In the following year (1621), Vincent de Paul, Duchêsne, Archdeacon of Beauvais and Doctor of the Sorbonne, Féron, Archdeacon of Chartres, with the help of some other priests, both secular and regular, gave a mission at Marchais, near Montmirail, after having first evangelised the latter place and the surrounding countryside. Their zeal, patience and scrupulous care to make themselves intelligible to the simplest made an impression on him. He went to Vincent de Paul and said : 'I see now that the Holy Spirit guides the Roman Church. The Catholic religion is true ; I wish to embrace it and willingly submit to whatever formalities you may impose on me before receiving me into the Church. And he added, in reply to a question : 'I have no further difficulties ; I believe all you have told me, and if you like, I will renounce my errors in public.'

Hereupon Vincent de Paul, after a summary interrogation

by which he discovered that the man had not forgotten the principal mysteries of religion, told him he would receive his abjuration on the following Sunday in the Church at Marchais. On the morning of the day appointed, after the usual sermon, Vincent de Paul summoned the convert by name and asked him if he still persevered in his resolution to re-enter the bosom of the Church. The sight of a rather repulsive statue of the Blessed Virgin had stirred up another doubt in the mind of this very refractory neophyte : ' I do persevere,' he replied, ' but I cannot believe there is any virtue in that stone.' ' The Church does not teach,' said Vincent in reply, ' that there is any virtue in material images, except when God confers them by way of a miracle, as He did in the case of Moses' rod ; even the very children could explain that for you.' Then, turning to one of the brightest children, he asked : ' What are we to believe about images ? ' ' It is good to have them,' said the child, ' and to pay them the honour that is their due, not on account of the matter from which they have been made, but because they represent Our Lord Jesus Christ, His glorious Mother and the other saints of Paradise, who, having triumphed over the world, exhort us by these dumb representations to follow them in their faith and good works.' After complimenting the child, repeating its answer and inducing the neophyte to recognise publicly that this was an excellent solution of his difficulty, Vincent de Paul put off the abjuration for some days so as to allow the man an opportunity for strengthening himself in the faith. The convert, as a matter of fact, remained faithful to the Church and was, for the remainder of his days, a source of edification to his neighbours. These details have come down to us from an address of Saint Vincent to his missionaries. ' Oh ! what a happiness for us missionaries,' he added at the end of his remarks, ' to verify the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church by labouring, as we do, for the instruction and sanctification of the poor.'[15]

Vincent de Paul was unrivalled in this form of work. The years 1618, 1619, 1620 and 1621 were chiefly taken up

[15] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XIII, p. 57.

by missions in the diocese of Beauvais, Soissons and Sens.[16] In the month of July, 1623, he preached the good tidings in the diocese of Chartres with the help of some ecclesiastics whom as usual he inspired with his own zeal.[17]

Folleville, Paillart and Séreviller, which were on the de Gondi estates in Picardy, were provided with a Charity in 1620. On September 20 the Bishop of Amiens approved of the rules, and on October 11, the chaplain established a branch for the three places in the Chapel of Our Lady of Pity in the Church at Paillart.

The zeal of the women aroused emulation in the men and Vincent de Paul at once recognised that he had at his hand a means of utilising their goodwill. The women devoted themselves to the care of the sick poor and visited and comforted those who were in prison ; why not hand over to the men all the poor who, without being ill, were in need of assistance, such as children, the weak and feeble, and old men ?[18] He drew up a rule which was approved by the Ordinary on October 23 and so, side by side, there was an Association of men who were likewise ' servants of the poor ' at Folleville, Paillart and Séreviller.

This new Charity secured places for children who were old enough to work, fed and tended the helpless and came to the assistance of those who were not able to earn enough to provide for their wants. To meet the expense, Vincent de Paul had recourse to an ingenious idea. The Confraternity purchased some sheep, had them branded with a special mark and divided them up amongst the members, who saw that they were pastured with their own flocks. Every year, about the 24th of June, the wool was sold and the money thus acquired was added to the funds of the Confraternity. New sheep were to be provided every five years. The men's Confraternity of Charity appointed twelve assistants who selected, from their own body every two years, on Whit-Monday, a Commander, Treasurer and Visitor. The Commander presided over the meetings with the Rector and

[16] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 88, 89.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[18] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 484, etc.

both supervised the observance of the rules, as well as the carrying out of what had been decided at the meeting. The Treasurer carried out the combined functions of the Procurator and Treasurer of the women's Charities. The Visitor sought out the 'retiring poor,' made enquiries about all who presented themselves for assistance, and also those who had been adopted by the Confraternity; from the latter he demanded the practice of their religious duties and attendance at the Rector's catechism lessons every Sunday, or every second Sunday. On the first Sunday of the month, after Vespers, the officers of the Association, namely, the Rector, Commander, Treasurer and Visitor, met to deliberate. All questions were settled by a majority vote, and the rule forbade any individual who had given a vote to reply when another had expressed a contrary view. If two were in favour of, and two against, a proposal, the nine other assistants were sent for to give their views. It was very seldom that all took part in a meeting; five formed a quorum. The assistants were really the foundation-stone of the Confraternity. They were bound to give good example, and every year, on Whit-Sunday or Monday, they renewed their good resolutions in these terms: 'I . . . servant of the poor of the Association of Charity, who have been elected an assistant, resolve, in presence of the Rector of the said Association, to observe its rules and to do all in my power to preserve and increase it, with the help of God, on which I now call.'

Vincent de Paul intended that the men's Association should be closely united to the women's, because, as he said, 'both have the same Patron, the same end and the same spiritual exercises.' Every year, on November 2, the day on which the Lady Treasurer presented her accounts, the members of the men's Association were admitted to the women's meeting. If the latter had not been able to meet their expenses from the collections they had made, the men made up the deficit.

The men's Charity established at Folleville seems to have been the first institution of this kind created by Saint Vincent. They soon spread, and when the men's Confraternity of Charity was established at Joigny, on May 30,

1621, there were already several actively at work.[19] The varying conditions of the places where it was set up, and the experience Vincent de Paul had acquired, led him to modify its methods. For instance, the Visitor was placed in charge of the Confraternity Chapel; the officers appointed an associate member to summon the meetings, and he held office for two years; when he was sent into the country or employed longer than two years, he was paid by the Confraternity. The number of assistants varied according to the importance of the place; Joigny, for example, had thirty, who themselves elected a Rector for an unlimited period.[20] The women's Charity at Joigny was reorganised on the model of the men's. Both here and at Montmirail, the two Associations were united under the government of the Rector and both sets of rules amalgamated into one set of regulations.

Vincent de Paul had not so far foreseen the vexatious consequences which were to result from this fusion and which obliged him to lay aside 'mixed' Charities.[21]

As the result of regrettable abuses, Vincent judged it useful to insert the following recommendations in the rule: 'As the Charity was instituted only for the really poor and the really sick, the officers shall only bestow the alms of the Association on such persons, and on such as they shall conscientiously judge to be poor and sick; and as favouritism, which is the ruin of good works, may not glide into this one, the said officers, both men and women, when taking up duty, shall promise that they will not employ, directly or indirectly, in the administration of the alms of the said Association any of their relations, family connections,

[19] We know of its existence from the petition addressed by M. de Gondi to the Archbishop of Sens; he speaks 'of the association of men instituted in some places in this Kingdom in favour of the able-bodied poor.' (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 456.)

[20] In the Folleville and Joigny regulations, the names are not the same. Those who, in the former, are called 'servants of the poor' are denominated 'associates' in the latter; the first of these titles passes to the Assistants, and that of Assistant to the Treasurer and Visitior. The word 'Commander' is replaced by 'Prior.'

[21] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 71.

special friends or persons recommended to them, so that if any other member of the said Company spontaneously proposes any such individuals, let them withdraw their claims as being unfitted to give an opinion on a matter that concerns themselves, and leave it to the judgement of others.'

The means of procuring the indispensable resources of the Confraternity varied : alms were collected in church on Sundays and holy days ; donations were accepted ; some charitable people subscribed weekly or yearly ; foundations were established ; in the country, the Association acquired herds of cattle and, in the towns, was supported by manufactures. In Joigny, the Count de Gondi gave an annual grant of five hundred livres and a certain amount of corn, and the City Hospital made an allocation from its funds.

The Confraternities established their own manufactures in houses which they rented and in which an ecclesiastic or master workman superintended poor boys from eight to twenty years old, who were fed, lodged and provided with employment. The boys lived in community under a rather severe rule, rising at four in the morning and retiring to rest at eight in the evening. Every day they assisted at Mass and, on Saturdays and Sundays, at Vespers ; they had an examination of conscience every evening after prayers, and listened in silence to the reading that went on during their midday meal. They went to Confession and Communion on the feasts of the Church and on the first Sunday of the month ; on Tuesdays and Fridays and on festivals of the Church there was half an hour's catechism lesson in the workroom. The ecclesiastic was entrusted with their moral and religious training ; he accompanied them to church and the refectory ; he remained with them during recreation and only left them when they went to work. They had to promise on oath, and so had their parents, that they would afterwards teach their trades gratuitously to apprentices in their craft.

Towards the end of one of his sets of regulations, Vincent de Paul refers to the excellent results obtained by this means ;[22] ' Whereby,' as he says, ' the rich have acquired a

[22] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 510.

thousand blessings in this world and life eternal in the next . . . and the poor are instructed in the fear of God, taught how to earn a living and assisted in their need . . . finally, cities will be relieved of many idlers, all of whom are vicious, and benefitted by the commerce resulting from the labours of the poor.'

One of the greatest plagues of seventeenth-century France was public mendicity and this was a great, if difficult, attempt to cope with it. The authorities had long and unsuccessfully fought against it. The beggars loved their freedom and the idle and vagabond life. If they were offered employment, they refused it, and if threatened with imprisonment, they simply disappeared ; those who happened to get caught rapidly managed to escape. The suppression of begging was one way of being useful to the poor, and Vincent de Paul could not remain insensible to the solution of a problem that completely baffled the most eminent economists of that day.

In September, 1621,[23] he happened to be passing through the city of Mâcon, and the sight of the multitude of beggars, their scandalous behaviour, their ignorance of the elementary truths of the faith and their indifference to their religious obligations, deeply moved him. He broke his journey, studied the situation, made enquiries into what had been done at Trévoux and other towns in the neighbourhood to deal with a similar state of affairs, to see if they were applicable to Mâcon. He drew up a scheme and submitted it to the local authorities. The Sheriffs, King's Officers, Municipal Councillors, Magistrates and local notabilities met in the Town Hall, on September 16, to study the question. The King's advocate opened the proceedings. He first spoke of the urgent need of reform and recalled the unsuccessful attempts that had been made some years previously ; he then went on to speak sympathetically of an attempt which ' a religious priest of the household of the General of the

[23] It was certainly 1621 : (see *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 497 and p. 56). The Assembly of the Clergy in 1670, Collet (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 104), Abbé Laplatte (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 490) and nearly all the Saint's biographers wrongly assign the date 1623 to the foundation at Mâcon.

Galleys, moved by piety and devotion ' now desired to make. The Lieutenant-General found the proposal ' praiseworthy, pious, devout and commendable.' ' It would do away with importunate beggars ' and would do so without incurring any further expense, because what the inhabitants will subscribe will be less than what they give at their own doors and in the churches. It will help to raise the moral standard of the mendicants by the religious instruction they will receive and the fulfilment of the obligations they incur as Christians. The Lieutenant then asked that the executive committee should be composed of one or two members from each of the city guilds, elected for a year ; that an enquiry should be made into the actual number of able-bodied and infirm poor, and that a sum of money and a supply of food-stuffs should be collected by public subscription, and that collecting-boxes should be placed in churches, shops, inns and taverns. The King's Procurator considered the proposal was ' so pious and so devout,' that he regretted there had not been a larger assembly to welcome it. All spoke in similar terms : one man saw in the scheme ' a mark of God's special care ' for the city of Mâcon, and another, an inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

The meeting broke up after appointing officers to carry out the new work. They decided to meet every week, and resolved to begin without delay a house to house visitation of the poor and have lists drawn up. They chose the church of Saint Nicholas as a meeting-place, and appointed the days on which the poor should hear Mass and receive religious instruction.

The directors met on the following day in the Town Hall. They clearly perceived that at least two hundred crowns would be required to make a beginning and that it was important to have a table of revenues, foundations and pensions intended for the poor. Out of respect for the Bishop of Mâcon, they went in a body to his palace and begged him to authorise and bless the work, which he gladly did.[24]

Strengthened and encouraged by such support, Vincent de Paul set to work to organise a mixed Confraternity of

[24] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 497 ff.

men and women, which he placed under the protection of Saint Charles Borromeo, to draw up a list of the poor, to settle the regulations definitively and to cast about for necessary resources.[25] The enquiry showed that there were three hundred poor persons in the town. It was decided to gather them together every Sunday in the Church of Saint Nizier to assist at Mass and hear an instruction, to invite them to go to confession once a month and also to Holy Communion, if their confessor permitted. After the service was over, bread and money were distributed and, in winter, firewood, in greater or lesser quantities according to the state of wretchedness and the size of the family. Anyone who had begged during the week, missed Mass or given trouble to the Sisters of the Confraternity, received nothing. It was laid down in the rules that secrecy must be observed in the case of the 'retiring poor.' The Association should not refuse help either to those who could not earn sufficient wages by their work, or to poor persons passing through Mâcon. The first should receive what they needed in addition to their wages, and the second should be provided with a night's lodging and sent off the next day with a few coins. The members of the Confraternity agreed to meet every Wednesday at the Church of Saint Nizier, to bring the sum total of what they had collected, to settle any modifications in the list of persons in their district who were being helped, and to give in the names of such poor persons as had misbehaved. The women should visit the sick of their district twice a week, bring them food and medicine, and bury the dead.[26] The rich promised in writing to give annually corn, wine, meat, firewood and linen. Vincent de Paul undertook to provide all that was needed at first.

'M. Vincent,' wrote Father Desmoulins, Superior of Oratory of Mâcon,[27] 'knew so well how to manage both high and low that everyone willingly agreed to contribute to such a good work, some giving money, others corn or provisions, according to their ability; so that nearly three hundred poor people were lodged, fed and very reasonably

[25] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 105.
[26] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 490 ff.
[27] Quoted by Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XV, p. 62.

looked after. M. Vincent was the first to give an alms and then he withdrew.'

Let us listen to himself, giving an account of his departure from Mâcon : ' When I established the Charity in Mâcon,'[28] he wrote, on July 21, 1635, ' everybody laughed at me, and people pointed at me in the streets, but when the whole thing was over, they burst into tears of joy and the Sheriffs of the city did me so much honour on my departure that, being unable to bear it, I was forced to leave secretly to avoid this applause ; and it is one of the best established Confraternities.' He had needed only three weeks to accomplish his work.

The Charity of Mâcon was still in a very prosperous state in 1635. It subsisted not only on what the clergy and comfortable citizens subscribed every year in the way of money, corn, wine, firewood and linen, but also on certain fines handed over to it by the municipality, on the Sunday collections, and the rights of entry of all the municipal officials.

' These four sources of income,' writes Abbé Laplatte,[29] must have reached a considerable sum, for the registers state that on every Sunday after Mass had been said at Saint Nizier, 1,200 pounds of bread, 18 or 20 francs in money, 12 or 15 francs for the ladies to be given to the bashful poor, were distributed, to say nothing of linen, wood and charcoal, which made up a tidy sum ; moreover there were 100 or 120 francs allocated to apothecaries for remedies, 20 francs to a surgeon, 4 francs a month to two women who nursed the sick and 20 francs to the beadles for preventing stray beggars from remaining on in the town. These details enable us to judge how much good this Association produced in the town. But the wars that supervened twelve years later and the plague of 1629–1630 left the citizens helpless to furnish sufficient funds to carry on the good work to the same extent. Their worldly goods passed on to heirs who did not imitate the example of charity left them by their predecessors. This decline was perceptible from 1639–1640. The Sheriffs attempted to meet the deficit

[28] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 833.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 490 ff.

by petitioning Louis XIII to allow them to put a tax of five francs on every barrel of wine, for the relief of the poor who had begun to suffer severely. The reply of the Court has not come down to us, but as the history of France shows us that the poor in the provinces suffered very much from 1640 to 1659, on account of the civil wars occasioned by the minority of Louis XIV, we may presume that those in Mâcon were in the same plight.'

Vincent de Paul left Mâcon more fully determined than ever to work for the poor and to fight against mendicancy by the establishment of mixed Charities. In 1622, provided with an official authorisation from the Bishop of Soissons, dated May 31, he established a Confraternity in each of the villages dependant on the Baroness of Montmirail; amongst others, one at Courboing, where the first associates were received on June 19.[30]

The success that crowned the efforts of the Chaplain to the de Gondis is not to be explained solely by his genius for organisation; God was working with him and granted His help all the more abundantly as the humble priest, deeply convinced of his own powerlessness, expected everything from Heaven. He also relied very much on the spiritual assistance of those who were, in his eyes, far more perfect than himself. Hence he received with the utmost gratitude from the General of the Order of Minims, letters signed on February 25, 1621, by which he became an associate of the Order, and thereby participated in the prayers, acts of penance and good works of all its members.[31]

His mortification was on a level with his piety. During his stay in Mâcon, the Fathers of the Oratory, who gave him hospitality, observed that he slept on straw; this had been his habit now for some years,[32] and he persevered in it up till his death. He frequently took the discipline, wore a hair-shirt and sharp chains, and at table deprived himself of everything that might please his palate.[33]

[30] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 511 ff.
[31] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 100.
[32] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XV, p. 63.
[33] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 99.

His naturally bilious and melancholy temperament sometimes got the upper hand. Whenever Madame de Gondi noticed this, she used to get afraid lest he was unhappy in her home for some reason or other, and this thought saddened her extremely. He himself suffered keenly from this defect: 'I turned to God,' he says,[34] 'and urgently besought Him to change my cold and forbidding disposition and to make me kind and gracious; and by the grace of Our Lord, and a little attention to repressing the ebullitions of Nature, I have somewhat got rid of my black moods.'

Collet tells us[35] that it was during a retreat at Soissons, in 1621, that his attention was drawn to this failing and the dangers to which it might expose his soul. He mastered it so completely that his graciousness was often compared to that of Francis de Sales. This virtue, useful to all, was especially so to a man who had consecrated his life to the poor and was now about to enter on the service of the galley-slaves.

[34] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XII, p. 177.
[35] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 99.

CHAPTER VII

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, CHAPLAIN GENERAL OF THE GALLEYS

VINCENT DE PAUL'S charity was as extensive as human wretchedness ; it made no exceptions and covered even criminals. His position in the household of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, General of the Galleys, enabled him to visit freely the Conciergerie and other prisons in Paris in which convicts awaited the departure of the Gang for Marseilles, which was the chief naval base of the King's galleys. What he saw in these prisons struck him with horror. The miserable hovels of the poor, which had so often touched his heart, were palaces in comparison with these foul dungeons which were a source of danger to even the strongest and healthiest on account of damp, dirt, vermin, and an almost utter lack of light and air. The convicts lay in these dreadful tombs, fever-stricken, deprived of all spiritual and corporal succour, bent down beneath the weight of massive chains fastened to the wall ; and their sufferings, instead of inducing any inclination to repent, only rendered them more bitter and blasphemous.

Like all the other prisoners of Paris, the galley-slaves were under the jurisdiction of the Procurator General. Vincent de Paul implored him, with tears in his eyes, to improve their lot. Thanks to his efforts, the men were transferred shortly afterwards to a house in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré,[1] close to the Church of Saint-Roch, where they

[1] The fact is admitted by Cardinal de Retz in his pastoral of June 1, 1618 (cf. Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 95, note). This pastoral shows that the convicts had already been transferred to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré in 1618. Hence 1622, the date suggested by Abelly, must be abandoned (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XIV, p. 59).

received a more abundant and healthier diet. 'As this good work,' writes Collet,[2] 'had nothing to depend upon save Providence,' Cardinal de Retz, Bishop of Paris, enjoined his clergy, on June 1, 1618, to recommend these unfortunate creatures to the charity of the faithful. Not only did this pastoral letter elicit generous offerings, but it also induced devout and charitable persons to penetrate within the prisons in order to instruct and console the galley-slaves.

Vincent de Paul was one of the most assiduous. Undeterred by contagious diseases, he sometimes, instead of a mere visit, took up his residence with them and spent whole days in their company. When business compelled him to leave Paris, two ecclesiastics took his place; these were Anthony Portail and Belin, who was Chaplain to the de Gondis in their castle at Villepreux; they lodged in the same house and said Mass there.

The convicts, who had seemed up to this to be unable to cherish any feelings save hatred and vengeance, were at length moved by such devotedness. They might have been seen, quite repentant, begging the holy priest to hear their confessions and administer the sacrament. 'To fury,' writes Cantelauze,[3] 'succeeded patience; to despair, resignation; to oaths, prayers; and to a desire for vengeance, repentance. The man who had rescued them from their hell, seemed to them to be an angel of mercy, and those eyes that had never wept, now bedewed his hands with their tears. Such an amazing change, produced in so short a time by a humble priest, poor and resourceless, became the sole topic of conversation at Court and in the city for some weeks. The name of this lion-tamer, unknown the day before, was now on every lip, and legends began to spring up around his footsteps.'

In this same year, 1618, whilst the Procurator General was somewhat improving the lot of the Paris convicts, the General of the Galleys was beginning to erect a hospital at Marseilles for sick galley-slaves; but unfortunately, for want of money, it was not finished until twenty-five years

[2] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, 9. p. 94.

[3] *Saint Vincent de Paul et les Gondi*, Paris, 1882, p. 117.

after.[4] Both these men were acting under the inspiration of Vincent de Paul.

It seems very likely that the idea of a hospital occurred to Vincent's mind in the course of a journey he made to Marseilles about this time.[5] He was harrowed by what he saw. The warders, not content with refusing the most elementary attention to the sick, treated them so harshly as to accelerate their death. As for their souls, they were utterly and completely abandoned. Abelly[6] remarks that nothing could give a better picture of hell than the hulks at Marseilles. The unfortunate convicts cursed, blasphemed and hurled imprecations of hate and rage all around them. God, for them, was the enemy ; they hated Him at least as much as they hated society. The innumerable acts of injustice they had to bear, strengthened their rebellious feelings. Their gaolers robbed them, supplied them with revolting food, and shamefully speculated in the price of provisions and other articles of prime necessity ; their sentences were prolonged by years, so as to have plenty of oarsmen ; the length of time to be served mattered so little that the clerk in charge of the registers did not even bother to set it down.[7]

Vincent de Paul constituted himself their angel and consoler ; he often went to see them, tenderly embraced

[4] So John Baptist Gault, Bishop of Marseilles, says, in a letter dated May 5, 1643 (*Vie du Vénérable J-B Gault*, par l'Abbé Payan d'Augery, Marseilles, 1894, p. 208 ; cf. *La Vie de Monsieur le chevalier de la Coste*, par Ruffi, Aix, 1659, p. 123).

[5] The hypothesis of a journey by Saint Vincent to Marseilles in 1618 is not improbable ; on the one hand, that was the year in which the building of a hospital for sick convicts was begun ; on the other, Abelly states that Saint Vincent returned from Marseilles when the Paris convicts were transferred to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré ; now we know that this was effected in 1618. That the Saint was back again in Marseilles in 1622, as Abelly states (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XIV, p. 58) and also an old MS. in the National Archives (S6,707) is not unlikely. The hospital, perhaps, may have been the reason for this second journey.

[6] *Op. cit.*, Bk. I., Ch. XIV, p. 58.

[7] *Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*, par le Comte René de Voyer d'Argenson, ed. Beauchet-Filleau, Marseilles, 1900, p. 54.

them, and softened the rigour of their punishment as far as he was able ; and in this way, he gradually led them to repent of their crimes and to place their hopes in God.[8]

Rumours of the marvels he was accomplishing with the convicts reached the King's ears, and on February 8, 1619, at the request of the Count de Joigny, the post of Chaplain General to the Galleys was created for him, with a salary of six hundred livres a year. Louis XIII, by this appointment, handed over to him the spiritual care of the galley-slaves, placed him in charge of all other chaplains to the galleys and raised him to the rank of naval officer of the Levantine fleet.[9] On the 12th he took an oath, administered by Philip Emmanuel de Gondi,[10] to discharge his office faithfully. No oath was ever better kept. What he had hitherto done out of charity was now performed as a duty, and he was henceforward provided with authority so that he was able to show greater personal initiative. Although his functions were of the spiritual order, he never ceased from exerting all his influence to have the convicts treated with some humanity, especially those who were ill. If he did not succeed as fully as he desired, it was due to the difficulty of setting some bounds to the cupidity and brutality of the warders, and also, of course, to the fact that the efforts of charitable persons are proportioned to the resources they can command.

Philip Emmanuel de Gondi was seldom at hand to lend him his support : the King's service did not permit him to remain for long either in Paris or in Marseilles ; his proper place was a battleship, and that, truly, is where he must have wished to be. He left Marseilles, on June 28, 1620, at the head of a fleet of seven galleys to seek out and hunt down Barbary pirates. He cruised about for nearly a month until July 22, when, close to Oran, two ships of the enemy showed up on the horizon ; they were Algerian vessels, each carrying seventeen guns, manned by one hundred and fifty Turks, and a crew of forty Christian slaves. At once, he gave chase and poured in such a rigorous fire that they

[8] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XIV, p. 59.
[9] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 55.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

PHILIPPE EMMANUEL DE GONDI, GENERAL OF THE GALLEYS

were forced to surrender. The galleys then made for Algiers, and on the way captured a brigantine. After a brief rest off Cape Tenes, the Count de Joigny put to sea again. He had the good luck to sight a large vessel carrying forty guns and two hundred of a crew, commanded by one of the most famous Algerian corsairs, Soliman, a renegade Christian from La Rochelle. Night was falling, and Soliman with a favouring wind, crowded on all sail. When morning dawned, the galleys were still pursuing, so he ran his vessel ashore and blew her up. A few days later, de Gondi was making for Algiers when an enemy ship hove in sight ; he hastened in pursuit as fast as he could and caught up with her before she could be destroyed by her crew ; took off the guns and ammunition and then sank her. He would have continued chasing the pirates if bad weather had not forced him to seek shelter in the harbour of Minorca, and after that in Barcelona. The crew was handed over to the General of the Galleys, who returned to Marseilles at the end of his expedition, with four vessels, captured from the pirates, added to his fleet.[11]

Philip Emmanuel de Gondi spent the winter of 1621 at Lisbon with the ten galleys[12] he had brought there, then put to sea,[13] and some time in June reached the mouth of the Gironde, where his ships lay up for three months.[14] The King had summoned the galleys there to take part in the siege of La Rochelle by the Duc de Guise. From Bordeaux they went to Nantes early in September and remained there until everything had been made ready for the fight. The attack began on October 27 by a bombardment that lasted from ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. ' About five o'clock in the afternoon,' writes an eye-witness,[15]

[11] *Mercure français* ; Vol. VI, Année 1620, pp. 470 ff.

[12] The names of the galleys were, the *Royale*, the *Régine*, the *Patronne*, the *Guisarde*, the *Esperonne*, the *Comtesse*, the *Contine*, the *Maréchale*, and the *Vinseguerre* (*Mercure français*, Vol. VI, Année 1620, p. 651).

[13] *Mercure français, ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 453–454.

[15] William de Montolieu, Captain of the *Patronne*. The quotation is from a letter to his son, written on November 4, 1622, and given in Chantelauze (*op. cit.*, p. 142).

'firing started again in all directions; it was more violent than any so far and lasted until seven o'clock. At that time, the wind was in favour of the La Rochelle forces who sailed close up to our ships so as to set them on fire by means of their dragons.[16] M. de Gondi perceived that the poop of our *Admirante*[17] had already caught fire, and at once sent two galleys to the rescue. He himself dealt with the enemy's rearguard, which he continued to punish severely with his thundering guns in the bows; and there was also sharp musketry firing. The Duc de Guise in his galleon was to be found wherever there was need, moving with incredible rapidity, and fighting like a lion. The Rochellais fought like brave men, but were so severely mauled that if night had not favoured their retreat, not one of their ships would have escaped to tell the news. They lost six of their largest vessels which were burned or sunk, two thousand men killed, not to mention an infinite number of wounded, whilst we lost scarcely two hundred and fifty men. The field of battle was ours all that night. The General showed a truly manly courage on this occasion and appeared in the midst of his officers, full of valour and spirit. The Duc de Guise loudly praised him and his galleys, attributing the better part of the honour of this victory to them, and wrote to the King, praising them in the highest terms.'

On the following morning, the General of the Galleys renewed the attack about nine o'clock. He first showered a hail of cannon-ball on the enemy fleet, without succeeding in driving it from its place of refuge; then violently bombarded two large vessels that had kept apart from the fleet, slew the entire crew, with the exception of six sailors and reduced them to such a plight that they were forced to run aground on the sand-banks of Ré.

On the 29th, the galleys began to thunder away again for two hours. On the 30th, the enemy surrendered and asked for terms of peace. Philip Emmanuel de Gondi could rightly congratulate himself on this victory. 'The greatest

[16] These were ships filled with inflammable material which were hooked on to enemy vessels with the object of setting them on fire.

[17] The Admiral's ship.

destruction of ships and smashing of masts,' wrote the *Mercure Français*,[18] 'was effected by the galleys.' But, as the season was now advanced, the galleys, instead of returning to Marseilles, sailed to Tonnay-Charente to spend the winter. When winter was over, they went to Bordeaux, from which they finally moved on June 23, 1623.[19]

During the General's long absence, his family had suffered severe bereavements. First, there was the death, on August 13, 1621, of his brother, Henry de Gondi, Bishop of Paris and the first Cardinal de Retz, who was carried off by a violent attack of fever at Béziers, where he had followed the King.[20] In the month of September in the following year, his second son, Henry, Marquis des Isles d'Or, was kicked on the head by a horse during a hunt and succumbed to his injuries.[21] The sensitive soul of Madame de Gondi was filled with grief at this unexpected trial. God supported her through the words of Vincent de Paul, who, on such an occasion, revealed depths of faith, tenderness and sympathy.

According to the family's plan, the young Marquis was destined to succeed John Francis de Gondi who had just been appointed to the see of Paris, which was at this time made an archbishopric. This premature death caused the General to select for the post his third son, John Francis Paul, then eight years old, the future coadjutor who, under the name of Cardinal de Retz, was to occupy such a prominent position in the history of the Fronde. 'I do not believe,' he wrote in his *Memoirs*,[22] 'that there was a better heart in the whole world than my father's, and I can say he was virtuous by nature. Nevertheless, neither my duels nor my gallantries prevented him from doing all in his power to put into the Church the least ecclesiastical soul, perhaps, in the entire Universe. His predilection for the eldest son and

[18] *Mercure français*, Vol. VIII, p. 866.

[19] *Mémoires et caravanes de J-B de Luppé de Guaranné*, published for the first time by the Comte de Luppé, Paris, 1865, p. 144.

[20] Chantelauze, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[21] *Oeuvres de Cardinal de Retz*, éd. Feillet-Chantelauze, 10 vols., Paris, 1870–1896, Vol. I, p. 89.

[22] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 89.

the sight of the Archbishopric of Paris, which was in his family, produced that result. He did not believe and did not feel it that way himself. I would take an oath that he himself would have sworn in the depths of his heart that he had no other inclination in doing this than the apprehension he felt of the dangers to which the world would have exposed my soul.'

The father of the future Cardinal had been better inspired when he pointed out Vincent de Paul to the King as the man best qualified for the office of Chaplain General to the Galleys. It is true that before presenting him for election to the King, he had seen Vincent at work, and experience is the best guarantee against making mistakes.

Whilst the galley-slaves, after their sojourn at Tonnay-Charente, were waiting at Bordeaux to proceed to Marseilles, Vincent de Paul had the happy idea of giving them a mission, so that their free time might be well spent. With the help of priests from various religious communities he was able to put two missionaries on board each galley. A large number of the convicts made general confessions and one Turk was converted, receiving in baptism the name of Louis.[23]

When this mission was over, Vincent de Paul paid a visit to his native place, but it was not without some hesitation that he had made up his mind. 'Before returning to Paris,'[24] he said many years later . . . 'I consulted two friends . . . to whom I said : " Gentlemen, I am going to work near the place from which I come ; I do not know if it would be a good thing to pay my relations a little visit." Both of them gave me this advice : " Go, Sir," said they, " your presence will be a consolation for your kinsfolk ;

[23] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. XIV, p. 60 ; *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 218 ; Chantelauze (*op. cit.*, p. 140, note 1) thinks that this mission was unlikely because, as he says, 'the galleys scarcely stayed any time in Bordeaux.' He did not notice that Saint Vincent himself declared there had been a mission ; or the duration of the galleys' stay in Bordeaux, as given by the *Mercure français*, Vol. VIII, p. 651, 853. The Turk was still alive in 1664. Abelly, *ibid.*

[24] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 219.

you will speak to them of God, etc." The reason I had for being in doubt was that I had seen many good ecclesiastics who had worked wonders for a time at a distance from their homes, and I had observed that after they had visited their relations, they returned quite altered and became useless to the public ; they gave themselves up entirely to family affairs, and thought about nothing else ; whereas formerly they had devoted themselves only to work and were quite detached from flesh and blood. I too am afraid, said I, of becoming attached to my relations.'

And yet Vincent de Paul had not seen his family for many years, perhaps twenty ; it was an opportunity for him to strengthen them in Christian virtue, and to tell them how much happier they were, leading their poor and simple lives, than the rich who lived in cities. How could he take no interest in the salvation of their souls, seeing that he was labouring for the salvation of so many others ?

Furthermore, great changes had taken place in the district. At Pouy itself, in the neighbourhood of Buglose, the Queen of Heaven had manifested her power ; a chapel had been erected on the spot, and large bands of pilgrims had gone to implore the help of the Mother of Mercy ; was it not then his duty, for he was a child of Pouy, to go and kneel at the feet of the Virgin of Buglose ?

He stayed with his relative, Dominic Dusin, the parish priest. All were struck by the air of sanctity that enveloped him. They remarked that he poured a great deal of water into his wine, that he slept on straw and had absolute control over all his senses. He renewed his baptismal vows in the church where he had received this sacrament. On the day of his departure he went barefooted from the Church of Pouy to Buglose, accompanied by his relations and a large number of people, and sang High Mass in the Chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. At the meal that followed, all his friends and relatives were gathered around him at the same table. He spoke a few last words of advice, gave them his blessing and bade them good-bye.[25]

[25] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 109. He is here making use of a MS. formerly belonging to Saint Lazare, but now lost, entitled, *Genealogie*, etc.

He was heartbroken. 'Having spent eight or ten days with them,'[26] as he afterwards related, 'telling them how to save their souls and keep far from them the desire of acquiring earthly goods, even going so far as to say that they must expect nothing from me and that, even if I had chests of gold and silver, I would not give them anything, because an ecclesiastic who possesses anything owes it to God and the poor; well, the day I left them, I was so deeply grieved at bidding farewell to my poor relatives that I did nothing but cry the whole way along the road, and sobbed without ceasing. After these tears, I had the idea of helping them and of settling them in a better position; of giving such a thing to this one and such a thing to that. In this way, quite moved as I was, I divided up amongst them, in my mind, what I had, and what I had not. . . . I suffered for three months from this aching desire to advance my brothers and sisters; it was a constant weight on my poor mind. Amidst all this, when I found myself a little more free, I prayed to God that He would be pleased to deliver me from this temptation, and I besought Him so earnestly that at last He took pity on me. He took away from me these over-tender feelings for my relatives, and although they have had to receive alms, and do so still, He gave me the grace to hand them over to His Providence and to regard them as better off than if they had been much more comfortable.'

Nevertheless, Vincent de Paul did something at least for his relatives, or rather for his neighbours, because, at his request, some ecclesiastics who were friends of his, gave a a mission at Pouy and the surrounding parishes.[27]

He had another family to look after, and one more dear to his heart, because it was God Himself who had confided it to him, and that was his family of convicts. If his first biographer is correct, the holy priest had given them some years previously an admirable testimony of his heroic charity. 'Long before the establishment of his Congregagation,'[28] Abelly writes, 'and consequently long before 1625,

[26] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 219.
[27] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 111.
[28] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, Sect. I, p. 114.

whilst on a visit to the galley-slaves in Marseilles, he had been particularly struck by the account given him by one of these unfortunate men of the utter misery to which his wife and children would be reduced as a result of his imprisonment. Vincent de Paul began to think how he could help them : he could see only one way and that was, to obtain the convict's release. As this could not be effected save by an exchange, he would take the man's place and put on the irons.' Such, in brief, is Abelly's story. He adds that several persons, whose names and statements he does not give, attested the fact even during the Saint's lifetime, and that one day when Vincent was interrogated on the point, instead of replying, he changed the conversation ' with a smile.' These reasons, however, did not fully satisfy Abelly himself, for he goes on to say : ' Although this was a most admirable act of charity, we may say, nevertheless, *on still more certain evidence*, that M. Vincent, by spending himself, his time, care and possessions as he did, in the service of all the convicts, did something more advantageous to the glory of God than the pledging of his own liberty for a single individual.'[29]

Confronted with the improbabilities of Abelly's story, one may reasonably ask for more solid proofs. One of two things must have happened : Either this substitution was made without the knowledge of the authorities, and with the connivance of only the head-warder (for that was essential as he alone had the keys that would allow the chains to be removed), or the officer in charge of the galleys stepped in and approved the exchange.

The first hypothesis is scarcely one calculated to arouse our admiration of Vincent de Paul's virtue. He was not so naïve as to believe, without any preliminary enquiry, the unsupported statement of a convict who said he was innocent and wept over the fate of his unfortunate family ; or so unscrupulous as to induce a warder to neglect his duties ; or so imprudent as to expose both convict and warder to the most terrible punishments, for the former, once recaptured, would have his nose and ears cut off, and the latter would be

[29] *Étude sur la marine des galères*, par Auguste Laforet, 1861, p. 93.

hanged (such, as a matter of fact, were the prescribed penalties) ; or, finally, so little respectful of judicial sentences as to interfere with their execution.

These objections have appeared so decisive that those who defend the legend prefer, as a rule, Abelly's solution. But consider the difficulties it entails.

What officer in command would have consented to set a guilty convict free and put in his place an innocent priest of Vincent's worth and character ? Moreover, the power of setting a condemned man free was outside the jurisdiction of the local authority ; he would have had to ask for instructions from Paris.

Let us suppose, for a moment, the reality of this hypothesis. It would have been quite easy later on to prove it : the name of Vincent de Paul would be there in the registers, in the list of galley-slaves ; Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, the General of the Galleys, to whom the heroic captive was chaplain, could not fail to have been told about it. And then one can understand why Abelly had only one proof to put forward, and what a proof ! Questioned one day on the subject by one of his confrères, Vincent de Paul, he tells us, turned aside the conversation ' with a smile.' Now, that is a vague and fragile proof : vague, at least for us, because we do not know precisely what question the confrère asked ; and moreover, the Saint's attitude is vague because this charitable smile might have been the equivalent of the shrugging of another man's shoulders. Furthermore, can anyone imagine that Vincent de Paul, after his experience of the profound physical and moral wretchedness of these convicts, would of his own free will put himself into a position in which it would be impossible for him to help them, by taking on the chains of one of their number ? For the one man he would be helping, he would be abandoning hundreds. Is such conduct real, true, intelligent charity ? No one would think so.

At the process of Beatification, several witnesses[30] stated

[30] René Thieulin, Priest of the Mission ; Nicholas Chapperon, of the Order of Mercy, and formerly a Lay-brother of the Mission ; Nicholas Bouthillier ; Gérard Dedun, curate of Vendretz ; Philip Ignatius Boucher, priest of the diocese of Arras, formerly a Priest of the Mission ; Charles Doustrebau, parish

that they heard the voluntary captivity of the Servant of God mentioned; but there is not a single circumstance agreed on by those who supply details.[31]

The difficulties to which Abelly's account give rise have seemed so grave to all historians that some prefer to reject the fact whilst others modify it to their own liking so as to give it some appearance of authenticity.

It is not mentioned in the History of the Generals of the Galleys, written in 1640 by Anthony de Ruffi, the annalist of Marseilles, though this work is rich in details and mentions quite a number of unimportant facts; or in an old manuscript work in the National Library of Paris, which treats of

priest of Fresnes, in the diocese of Meaux; Sister Mary Magdalen Le Laboureur, of the Visitation. The incident commented on in the course of a conference held in the house of the Mission in Toul, in November, 1660, on the virtues of Saint Vincent de Paul.

[31] Boucher states that as Vincent de Paul was walking on the sea-shore one day, he met a woman in the greatest distress. He asked her what was the cause of it and she told him her son had been condemned to the galleys. Accordingly he took the man's place. Charles Doustrebau says that 'he remembers having heard in his youth, from some very devout persons, that Madame de Gondi, mother of His Eminence Cardinal de Retz, went on one occasion to see the King's galleys, which were lying near the shore. She saw a kindly looking priest in the chain-gang and asked him what had brought him there. He replied that it was his sins. She then made private enquiries about this priest and was told: 'Madame, there was a poor gentleman in this galley who had for long been most distressed at the way he was treated. This priest, whom I do not know, offered to take his place and I acceded to his request, and he has been serving here now for some time.' After which the said lady—the wife of the General of the Galleys—had this unknown priest removed from the chain-gang and gave him a post in her household. According to Sister Laboureur, it was said in the Visitation Convent in Paris that Vincent de Paul, Chaplain to the General of the Galleys, happening to be in Marseilles, often visited the galley-slaves to preach to them. 'One day, he remarked a man who was very ill in the chain-gang and whom the petty-officer was beating harshly: he told the petty-officer to send the poor man to the hospital and the former replied that he would do so if the chaplain liked to take his place. The servant of God accepted the stipulation, had the irons fastened on and remained there until Madame de Gondi, who was looking for him, found him in the galley.'

Vincent de Paul's charity towards galley-slaves ; or in the *Vita de Saint Vincenzo de Paoli*,[32] published in Rome in 1677, by Dominic Acami, an Oratorian ; or in the *Abrégé de la vie et des vertus du Bienheureux Vincent de Paul*, which appeared in Paris, in 1729, the year of his beatification. In the Bull of Canonisation (June 16, 1737), Clement II speaks of it as a simple hearsay and as an incident that occurred during his captivity in Barbary.[33]

The theory of voluntary captivity was upheld in Rome, in 1757, by the author of the *Memoriale*,[34] and, in 1748, by Collet who, whilst arranging Abelly's story in his own way, with the idea of suppressing improbabilities,[35] only succeeded in multiplying them. Collet saw that the incident was regarded as impossible in the best informed circles and even amongst the staunchest admirers of Vincent de Paul.[36]

The Abbé Maury cannot be numbered amongst the sceptics, for whilst preaching the Saint's panegyric, he cried out in an eloquent apostrophe : 'O honourable chains, sacred trophies of charity, why are you not suspended from the vaults of this Church as one of the fairest monuments of the glory of Christian religion ! You would be worthy ornaments of the altars of Vincent de Paul by reminding society of the citizens produced by the teachings of Jesus Christ ; and the very sight of these chains, fittingly revered as an object of public worship, would assist our ministry from century to century, in forming other citizens like him.'

In 1803, another panegyrist, Mgr de Boulogne, Bishop

[32] S. 6, 707.

[33] *Narrant cum forte unum a conservis suis sub gravi catenarum pondere misere laborantem conspexisset, nec ad sublevandas miseri illius angustias haberet quod traderet, seipsum dedisse in vincula, ut corporis sui dispendio alienam redimeret calamitatem.*

[34] *Memoriale cum restrictu probationum, actus heroicae virtutis qua Servus Dei Vincentius a Paulo motus se supposuit in locum damnati ad triremes, ut ipsum liberaret.*

[35] *La Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 101, etc. Collet states that the incident occurred in 1622 in Marseilles, and that Vincent de Paul, Chaplain to the General of the Galleys, had gone there without letting it be known who he was. The exchange was agreed to by the officer in charge of the division to which the liberated convict belonged. Chantelauze has exposed the impossibilities inherent in Collet's version. (*Op. cit.*, p. 127, etc.)

[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 102.

of Troyes, gently corrected Abbé Maury for having stated as certain something that was not really so : ' We shall not say here that Vincent bore the chains of a galley-slave whom he wished to restore to his family. Why bring forward facts that are doubtful in a discourse in which the orator succumbs beneath the weight of authentic marvels, and in which, if he desires to be eloquent, all he need do is to speak the truth ? '[37]

The word ' doubtful ' is a euphemism, because the Bishop of Troyes was fully convinced that the incident was morally impossible. One of Saint Vincent's later biographers, Canon Maynard, was not as discreet as Mgr de Boulogne. He maintained the truth of the voluntary captivity but felt the need of rejuvenating it, and by the force of his imagination, did so to such effect that neither Abelly nor Collet would recognise the story.[38] His biography reopened the controversy.[39] His thesis, attacked by Casimir Bousquet and by Chantelauze, was defended by Bayle[40] and by Simard who, dissatisfied with the too fantastic details supplied by the learned Canon,[41] substituted fresh ones more in accordance with his own liking.[42]

[37] Mgr de Boulogne added in a note to his panegyric when it was printed : ' The incident on which Abbé Maury lays such stress in his panegyric of Saint Vincent de Paul is more than improbable, it is morally impossible ; and even if we suppose that the holy priest had wished to push an exaggerated humanitarianism to this point, he would not have been able, even though he was Chaplain General to the Galleys.' When Cardinal de Maury read the sermon, he was very much annoyed, as we may see from a letter he wrote on August 13, 1803, from Montefiascone, to Francis Brunet, who was the Vicar General of the Priests of the Mission. Cardinal Pacca's *Works* (French ed. by M. Queyras, Vol. I, *Mémoires sur le pontificat de Pie*, VII, 3e partie, 1809–1813, Paris, 1848, pp. 219 ff.) contains an account of a conversation he had with J. B. Hanon, Vicar General of the Mission, on Abbé Maury's sermon.

[38] *Saint Vincent de Paul ; Sa vie, son temps, ses oeuvres, son influence*, Paris, 1860, 4 vols. Vol. I, pp. 194 ff.

[39] *D'une erreur historique à propos de Saint Vincent de Paul et de son voyage à Marseille en* 1622. June 1861. A reply to Abbé Bayle's article.

[40] *Op. cit.*, pp. 120 ff.

[41] *Saint Vincent de Paul à Marseille*, in the *Revue de Marseille et de Provence*, April, 1861, pp. 183 ff.

[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul et ses oeuvres à Marseille*, Lyons, 1894, p. 33 ff. For the sake of completion, we may also refer to a

Every attempt of this nature is of necessity bound to fail, because the impossibility of the incident does not depend upon the circumstances in which it is involved, but on the very incident itself. It is much better to admit that we are confronted with a legend. Now, no one can say with certainty how this legend originated ; but here is a hypothesis, so simple and natural, as to seem quite acceptable. Although Vincent de Paul never referred to his slavery in Barbary, there was a vague memory of it in Marseilles, from which the vessel had set out that was captured by the Turks, and where there were rumours after his escape, that he had once been loaded with chains. But where, when, why, how? Nobody knew. But everybody knew about his wonderful charity, and so the rumour started from Marseilles[43] where people came to believe that in this city he had of his own free will taken the place of a convict. They repeated it to one another. The story of this act of heroism was easily believed in circles that admired his ardent charity. And when, in 1658, the details of his captivity in Tunis came to be more fully known through his letter, the authentic fact was superimposed on the legend ; there were two captivities instead of one. This supplies a good explanation of why the story was particularly popular in Marseilles and also why the incident is related by Abelly as having happened long before 1625.[44]

What does one act of charity, more or less, matter in the life of Saint Vincent de Paul, crowded as it is with such marvellous deeds, and what does it add to his virtues and

study by Charles Lalore ; *L'opinion de M. de Boulogne, évêque de Troyes, touchant la captivité volontaire de Saint Vincent de Paul sur les galères de Marseille*, in the *Annuaire administratif et statistique du département de l'Aube*, 1875, p. 11 ; and a historical drama in three acts by M. Lemaire—*Saint Vincent de Paul, ou l'illustre galérien*, played in the Gaiety Theatre, Paris, on October 7, 1815.

[43] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, sect. I, p. 114 ; Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 103.

[44] This hypothesis is mentioned in Mgr Cottret's *Panégyrique de Saint Vincent de Paul*. As he was not able to deliver it on the day when the Saint's relics were transferred, in 1830, on account of the prolonged nature of the ceremonies, he published it with notes (see note I, p. 63).

glory? Whether or not he made a sacrifice of his own liberty to save that of a galley-slave, he will always remain more than worthy of our admiration and praise.

This man, to whom Providence had confided the souls of criminals, at the same time had to interest himself in pure and fervent souls whom the desire of perfection had separated from the world; and just as he knew how to guide convicts, so did he know how to guide the Daughters of the Visitation along the paths of virtue suitable to their lofty vocation.

CHAPTER VIII

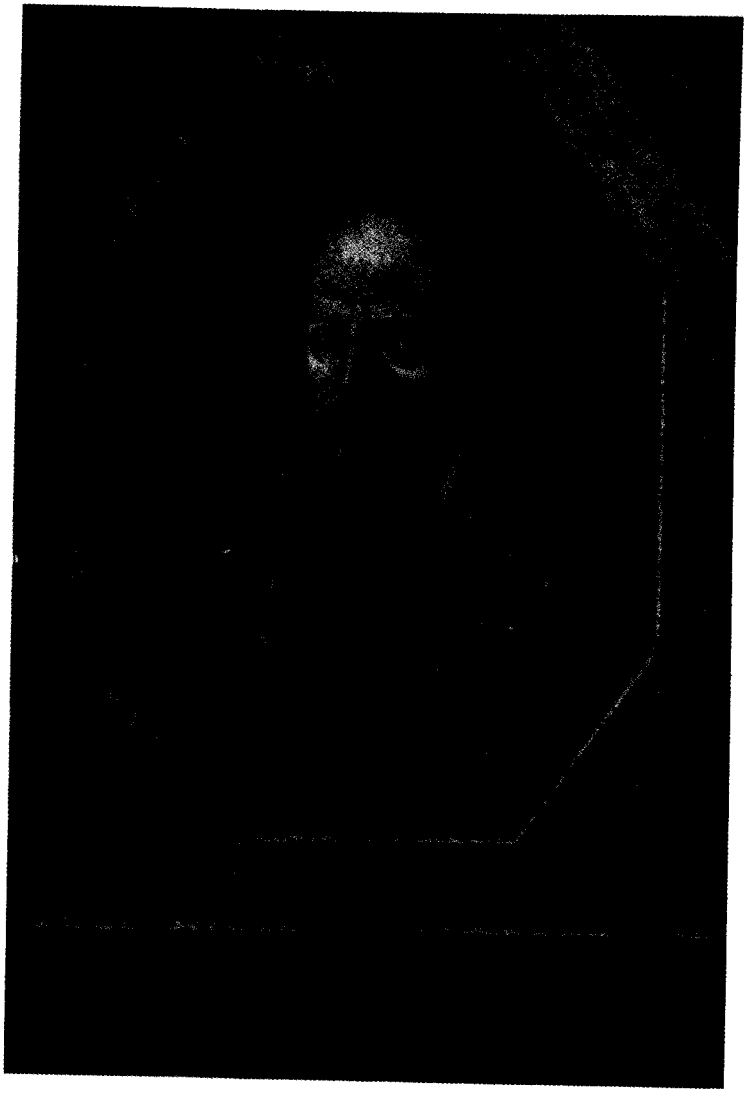
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES AND SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL

SIXTEEN years had elapsed since Saint Francis de Sales had last seen Paris when, in 1618, he arrived there with the Cardinal of Savoy who was entrusted with the negotiations for the marriage of the Prince of Piedmont and Christine of France, sister of King Louis XIII. On the day after his arrival, November 11, the Bishop of Geneva was invited to preach the panegyric of Saint Martin in the Church of the Oratorian Fathers. The news spread and, on the day appointed, the Oratory was filled with a fashionable throng amongst whom were the King, his mother the Queen, the chief personages of the Court, and several bishops and learned divines. The door of the church was besieged by such a dense crowd that the preacher himself could not gain admittance and it was only by means of a ladder placed at the foot of a window that he secured an entrance.[1]

The sight of such a congregation, which might have filled many another man with pride, only served to make the Bishop think of how he might best humble himself; laying aside the sermon he had prepared, he contented himself with a simple account of the life of Saint Martin. Some years later, he remarked :[2] 'Oh ! how I humbled our Sisters that day; they were expecting me to preach a wonderful sermon before such a grand assembly ! One of them who happened

[1] *La Vie du Vénérable serviteur de Dieu François de Sales*, par Henri de Maupas du Tour, Paris, 1657, p. 370.

[2] It is Saint Vincent himself who has supplied us with this piece of information. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 472.) The Sisters to whom Saint Francis de Sales refers were probably girls who entered the Visitation Order subsequently, for at this time there was no monastery of the Order in Paris.



SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

to be there related how a young lady, who had marriage in her eye but has since become a nun, remarked whilst I was preaching : " Just look at this booby, this mountaineer, how vilely he preaches ! Was it necessary for him to come from such a distance to tell us what he says and try the patience of so many people ! " '

Vincent de Paul was not in Paris just then ; he had gone to Montmirail with Madame de Gondi and spent the whole of November and part of December in that town. He had the happiness, on his return, of entering into close relations with the Bishop of Geneva, whom he had not so far met, at least in the capital. Francis de Sales admitted Vincent de Paul into his friendship and these two saints, so well fitted to understand and love one another, felt the mutual and profound esteem, produced by such intimate relations, gradually deepen and expand. The remembrance of those delightful conversations filled the heart of Saint Vincent with the purest joy for the remainder of his life. ' The fervour of the Servant of God,'[3] he said afterwards, ' shone in his intimate and familiar discourses. Those who heard him hung on his lips. He knew how to accommodate himself to the capacity of each of his hearers by looking on himself as the debtor of all. Whenever he was consulted on any important matter, on conscientious scruples or any other subject, he kept his visitor with him until he was fully satisfied and consoled. When I turned over in my mind the words of the Servant of God, I felt such an admiration for him that I was inclined to regard him as the one who best reproduced the Son of God in His earthly life.' It was the great kindness of Saint Francis de Sales that impressed Saint Vincent most deeply. ' His kindness and goodness were so gracious,' Saint Vincent went on to say,[4] ' that those who enjoyed the favour of his conversation felt their hearts sweetly penetrated, with the result that they experienced an intense feeling of joy. I myself shared in these delights. I remember how, when confined to bed by sickness, about six years ago, I used to repeat to myself : " My God, how good Thou art !

[3] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 72.
[4] *Op. cit.*, Vol. XIII, p. 78.

since Thy creature, His Lordship the Bishop of Geneva, is filled with so much goodness." '

It was in the course of one of these conversations that the Bishop of Geneva told Vincent de Paul, from whom we have it, the story of his sermon on Saint Martin. On another occasion, he told Saint Vincent that he could not read his own writings without tears when he thought that the pages from his pen had proceeded not from his own mind but from the God of all goodness. He also said of his sermons :[5] ' I notice how, without any personal initiative and without premeditation, I teach in the pulpit, by a divine impulse, truths of which I am in complete ignorance.' And he added that when one of his hearers was moved interiorly,[6] God manifested the fact to him. As we may see, the Bishop of Geneva revealed the most hidden secrets of his heart to Vincent de Paul whom he appreciated so highly as to regard him as one of the wisest and most virtuous of his contemporaries.[7] Saint Vincent, for his part, devoutly treasured up all the Bishop's words.

The chaplain to the de Gondis soon had to return thanks to God for another favour. On April 16, 1619, Mother Jane Frances Frémiot, widow of M. de Chantal, arrived in Paris, to which she had been summoned by the Bishop of Geneva, accompanied by several Visitation nuns, the nucleus of the first monastery of the Order to be opened in the French capital. The Sisters were brought by the Founder himself to a small house in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, lent by Madame de Gouffiers, and it was here that, on May 1, 1619, the first house of the Visitation Order in Paris was established. On that same day, Saint Francis de Sales said Mass, gave Holy Communion to his spiritual daughters and their benefactors, and also preached a short sermon.

The nuns had a hard life enough in this house, subsisting as they did on a few gifts and loans ; there were two pounds of meat daily for fifteen or sixteen persons, without an entrée or dessert, and a barrel of wine lasted them for eighteen months. Saint Chantal used to say a *Pater Noster*

[5] *Op. cit.*, Vol. XIII, p. 68.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[7] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. VII, p. 515.

every day before the Blessed Sacrament to implore God to grant them their daily bread. The winter of 1619–1620 was extremely severe and the nuns had 'no other fire than the divine love which inflames the Seraphin.' As there was not sufficient accommodation, they had to use a garret that was neither snow nor rain-proof for a dormitory, and those who had not beds lay on straw mattresses. 'It was often necessary,' says Sister Guerin, who was then a novice, 'to share one's bed with girls who did not remain, and who suffered from revolting diseases, coughing and expectorating all night on the poor novices who never complained but turned these mortifications into a bundle of myrrh to be presented to their divine Spouse.' As the nuns had not enough chairs, they used to have to sit on the floor. Each of the Sisters washed her handkerchief at the well, for they had only one apiece. Poverty, however, exercises an attraction of its own and, after two months, Saint Chantal received two postulants and, on the same day, six Sisters took the veil and one was professed. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed, the holy founder preached, and the day was celebrated as a festival.

The new arrivals increased the difficulties of the little community, and in the month of August, the nuns moved to a small house in the Faubourg Saint-Michel which served them as an asylum for more than a year.

Saint Francis de Sales left Paris on September 13, 1619,[8] and when Saint Vincent de Paul saw the man whose presence had filled his heart with so much joy about to depart, the tears must surely have risen to his eyes. Saint Chantal, however, remained, and the dowry of Sister Helen Angela Lhuillier enabled her to purchase, on February 18, 1621, from John Zamet, Baron de Murat, the Hôtel du Petit-Bourbon, situated in the Rue du Petit-Musc, between the Bastille and the Île Saint-Louis. As the house seemed much too fine, the Superioress consulted Saint Francis de Sales and received the following delightful reply: 'The Zamet mansion is, it would seem, too beautiful; however, in default of a fairly beautiful mansion, we must rest content

[8] *Oeuvres* de Saint François de Sales, ed. Vitte, Vol. XIX p. 14. Letter to Mother Angela, September 12, 1619.

with one that is too beautiful.' Necessary alterations to the house prevented the transfer of the community until September 25.

Nothing further was now wanting on the material side, but a more important matter, in one sense, than food and lodging remained to be settled. In the dioceses in which they had been established, the Visitation nuns recognised the local Ordinary as their legitimate Superior and it was he who always delegated one of his best priests to carry out the duties of this office. Saint Chantal and Saint Francis de Sales together submitted Saint Vincent de Paul's name to the Bishop of Paris, Cardinal de Retz, and the nomination was accepted very early in 1622.[9] The new Superior inaugurated his functions by making a canonical visitation of the house. 'M. Vincent,' according to the Visitation archives,[10] 'expressed great edification at the virtues he remarked in our first mothers and sisters, especially at their spirit of mortification and cordial union which was such that one might say of our community what Saint Luke said of the first Christians, they were of one mind and heart.'

The monastery in the Rue du Petit-Musc was in good hands and Saint Chantal had no further reason for prolonging her stay in Paris. After the Visitation, Saint Vincent presided over the election of the nun who was to succeed the foundress and Anne Catherine de Beaumont was chosen. It was a happy choice and Saint Chantal, fully assured of the future of her daughters, bade them good-bye on February 22 and set off for Maubuisson.[11] The tears of the nuns and their benefactresses showed how sincerely her departure was regretted, and how greatly they desired to have her with them, but her place was beside Saint Francis de Sales who had sent word to her to join him.

Madame de Villeneuve, Helen Angela Lhuillier's sister,

[9] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. VII, p. 314.

[10] *Fondation du premier monastère de la Visitation Sainte-Marie de Paris*, MS., p. 27. This MS., composed in 1740, is preserved in the Visitation convent at Angers.

[11] These details relative to the first monastery of Paris are taken from the *Histoire chronologique des fondations de tout l'Ordre de la Visitation de Sainte-Marie*, Bibl. Maz., MS. 2430, and from the Angers MS.

endeavoured to soften the Bishop of Geneva's heart and received the following witty and charming reply: 'Just imagine how my heart is moved to tenderness at the fear you manifest in your last letter in regard to the return of our dearest Mother of Saint Mary to this province. Oh! if God had only arranged that we should all be together, how delightful that would be! But how can that be effected, my dearest daughter? Our mountains would spoil Paris and interfere with the course of the Seine, if they were there, and Paris would cause a famine in our valleys, if it were here amidst our mountains. Some day, or rather in that most holy eternity to which we aspire, we shall all be united together, if we live, in this period of transition, according to the will of God.'[12]

It was a great consolation for Saint Chantal to see Saint Francis de Sales again; but God soon demanded a new separation from her. On December 28, 1622, the feast of Holy Innocents, the soul of Saint Francis de Sales took its flight to Heaven. The whole Church bewailed the loss of the great Bishop of Geneva, and none more deeply than Vincent de Paul. Throughout the whole of the latter's life he manifested the greatest admiration for the virtues of that amiable prelate, a marked attraction for reading his spiritual writings, and a strong conviction that his name would one day be enrolled in the catalogue of the Saints.[13] On April 17, 1628, he made his deposition before the tribunal set up to collect information on the virtues and miracles of the servant of God, and was one of those who petitioned Pope Alexander VII[14] for his friend's Beatification.[15]

His profound veneration for Francis de Sales was increased by a miraculous cure which he witnessed, on January 30, 1623, in the first monastery of the Visitation in Paris. A nun who had recently been received, Clare Marie Amaury, felt her soul in the grip of a strange temptation:

[12] *Oeuvres de Saint Francois de Sales*, Lyons, 1918, Vol. XX, p. 121.

[13] See in particular his appreciation of the *Treatise on The Love of God* and on *The Introduction to a Devout Life* in the 1628 deposition. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 71, 81.)

[14] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 66, etc.

[15] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 584.

everything in the religious life, and even religion itself, became hateful to her. The very thought of the Eucharist, of the Saints, of the Saint of Saints Himself inspired her with feelings of hatred and aversion, to such an extent indeed that curses and blasphemies poured from her lips. The fervour of her companions excited her rage and, in choir, her invectives against Heaven were mingled with their prayers and chants. Her superioress recommended her to offer herself to God and she answered that her God was the devil. She envied the fate of the lost because they were eternally cursing God, and she felt at times a violent inclination to commit suicide so that she might join them the sooner. Bishops, members of religious Orders, spiritual guides of great experience examined her and decided that she was a case for medical treatment. Physicians tried all sorts of remedies in vain until, at length, the superioress, tired of their unsuccessful efforts, touched the unfortunate nun with the rochet of Saint Francis de Sales. This only increased the evil, but some days later, whilst Saint Vincent was making his visitation of the monastery, she was suddenly cured. Her health, which had been much impaired, was restored, and she began again to eat and sleep. She recovered so fully that she was entrusted with some of the most important offices in the monastery, amongst others that of mistress of novices, which she exercised in April, 1628. In the accounts which Saint Vincent has left us of this extraordinary event,[16] he scarcely refers to himself, merely remarking that he had seen the nun both before and after her illness. He certainly had a more important part to play than that if only because he was the superior of the convent, and if one wishes, as he did, to attribute the cure to the intercession of Saint Francis de Sales, there is nothing to hinder us at the same time from seeing in it the effect of his own fervent prayers and mortifications.

After Saint Chantal's departure, she entered into corres-

[16] There are, as a matter of fact, two accounts, one given by Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Ch. VII, pp. 331, etc., and the other in the deposition of April 17, 1628. The first is more complete. The *Année Sainte*, Vol. X, p. 225, enables us to secure a complete account by combining the two.

pondence with Saint Vincent de Paul. Most of these letters have unfortunately been lost and all that remains consists, for the most part, either of defective copies, or of autographs that cannot be read in their entirety on account of numerous erasures made by regrettably scrupulous persons. Saint Chantal, at the close of her annual retreat, was accustomed to send an account of the state of her soul to him whom she always regarded as her spiritual guide. Her letter of November 1627, is a good specimen of those simple and trustful interior communications. She has examined herself and recognised that she must still continue to labour at practising forbearance and humility. With respect to submission to the divine will, she declares everything was going well. 'It seems to me,' she writes, 'that I am just simply waiting for what God may be pleased to do with me. I have neither desires nor plans; I have no other desire than the wish that God Himself may act. . . . I have no views or feelings about the future, but I just do at the present moment what seems to me should be done, without any thought for the future.'

These dispositions enabled her to stand fast in the midst of trials, which were, in truth, many and various. The horror she experienced against doing anything whatever, a horror which rendered the weight of her office insupportable, the revolts of the inferior part, the fantasies of an imagination that was always at work, even during her exercises of piety, and finally, the external difficulties which kept coming on in succession and often increasing in number, all conspired to weigh down and exhaust both soul and body.[17]

This letter of 1627 makes us bitterly regret the loss of all the others, for Saint Chantal kept no secrets back from Saint Vincent de Paul. 'To whom,' she wrote to him once,[18] 'can I reveal and make known my weaknesses if not to my one and only Father, who knows how to bear with them? I trust your goodness will not grow weary of them.'

If we only had those letters, which Saint Vincent could never read without tears,[19] we might see, as he himself tells us,

[17] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 34.
[18] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 314.
[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 127.

how great and beautiful was the soul of the holy foundress, adorned as it was with the most sublime virtues ; we might also have a better understanding of her heroism in suffering ; assailed by thoughts against the Faith and other dreadful temptations, she could not bear the sight of her soul, so that she constantly averted her eyes from it, as if it were a living image of hell. Saint Vincent, who knew her well from those secret confidences, wrote : ' I never noticed any imperfection in her, but rather a continual practice of all manner of virtues. . . . She was one of the holiest souls I have known on earth. . . . I have no doubt that God will one day manifest her sanctity.'[20]

Jane Frances Chantal's confidence in her director did not extend so far as the giving up of her own views regarding the mode of government observed in her Order. Its monasteries, placed under diocesan authority, had as its ecclesiastical superiors, priests chosen by the Bishop and no one else was authorised to intervene. There was no common bond between the monasteries and this independence constituted a grave danger to the maintenance of uniformity in rules and customs. Such fears were all the better founded seeing that Denis de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons, had already interfered with the primitive design of Saint Francis de Sales. In order to obviate this inconvenience, Saint Vincent, together with Octavius Saint Lary de Bellegarde and Commander de Sillery, suggested the creation of a new body, namely, Visitors who would go from monastery to monastery and re-establish any primitive practices that had fallen into neglect.[21] His arguments, however, produced no effect on the mind of Saint Chantal. She intrenched herself behind the decision of the Bishop of Geneva who, she said, admitted no authority above that of the bishop's, and she added that she regarded herself as being bound in conscience to carry out the founder's intentions.

Saint Vincent replied : ' And so, my dear Mother, you have just now clearly stated . . . that you cannot approve the authority which I said the Visitor should have. Blessed

[20] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 125–126.
[21] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 45–47.

be God that that is the case ! I submit to this decision wholeheartedly and think it is the will of God made known by yours.' When he was about to finish the letter, the idea occurred to him that he might have displeased his correspondent and at once expressions of affectionate respect came hurrying to his pen : ' Our worthy Mother, who is so much our worthy Mother that she is mine alone, whom I honour and cherish more tenderly than ever child loved and honoured its mother since Our Lord ; and it seems to me that I love and honour her to such a degree that I have sufficient esteem and love for her as to be able to distribute some to the whole world, and that, certainly, without exaggeration.'[22]

Saint Chantal saw S. Vincent again in 1628, 1635 and 1641. In 1636, the Sisters of the first monastery asked her for a great favour and one which their love for her as their mother made them ardently desire ; they wished to share in her inheritance and the share they desired was her heart. They said that the presence of her heart in Paris and of her body in Annecy would help to promote union between the two convents. Moved by this consideration, she gave them a note, on April 13, couched in the following terms : ' I permit and give my consent for our dear Sister in Annecy to present my heart, after my death, to our dear Sisters of Paris, of the monastery in the Rue Saint-Antoine. . . .' On November 11, 1641, at the request of the Sisters who saw that difficulties might arise, she confirmed this deed.[23] Soon afterwards she left Paris and, in the following month, the sad news of her death at Moulins, where she expired on December 13, was conveyed to Paris.

Saint Vincent was the first to learn of the irreparable loss that had befallen the Visitation nuns, for God Himself made it known to him in a vision. We know this from one of his letters and from the detailed account he has left of this supernatural occurrence.[24] He does not mention his own name in the last document but suggests that his information

[22] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 85–87.
[23] *Arch. Nat.*, LL 1716.
[24] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 212.

was derived from ' a person worthy of being believed,' who would prefer to die rather than tell an untruth.

This person, he relates, ' having had news of the extreme gravity of the illness of our dear departed, knelt down to pray to God for her, and the first thought that occurred to his mind was to make an act of contrition ' for his sins ; ' and immediately afterwards there appeared to him a small globe of fire which rose from the earth and proceeded to rejoin, in the upper region of the air, another larger and more luminous globe ; and both of them being united together, rose still higher, entered into, and shone resplendently, in another globe infinitely greater and more luminous than the others ; and he was told interiorly that the first globe was the soul of our worthy Mother, the second, that of our blessed Father, and the third, the Divine Essence ; that the soul of our worthy Mother was reunited with that of our blessed Father, and both with God, their sovereign principle.' Some days later, Paris learned that Saint Chantal was no more. The day after the news was made known, Saint Vincent celebrated Mass for Saint Chantal. When he came to the *Memento* for the dead, he felt inclined to pray for the repose of her soul, for he remembered some words of hers that ' seemed to approximate to venial sin,' but the vision of the globes occurred again, and he came to the conclusion that the holy foundress was in Heaven. As soon as he had finished Mass, he asked himself whether or not he had been the victim of an illusion ; but his lofty idea of Saint Chantal's virtue led him to conclude that he had not ; and his doubt was entirely dispelled by the thought that he was not subject to see visions, and had never had any before.[25]

It had needed all the authority of the Bishop of Paris and the combined entreaties of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Chantal to induce Saint Vincent to undertake the spiritual guidance of the monastery of the Visitation established in Paris. If he had allowed himself to follow his own personal bent, he would have devoted all his time to poor country folk, the sick, prisoners, and souls in a state o

[25] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 126–127.

abandonment, pain and suffering. The designs of Providence corresponded with his inclinations, and he was soon to be furnished with an opportunity of devoting himself entirely to his chosen task, the preaching of missions in country places.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST BEGINNINGS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

DID Vincent de Paul in the midst of his numerous occupations—superior of the Visitation convent, chaplain to the de Gondis, parish priest of Clichy la Garenne and Chaplain General to the galleys of France—also find time for study? The diploma of licentiate in Canon Law granted to him by the University of Paris about 1623,[1] would seem to indicate that he did.

In 1624, he received two other titles in addition to those he already possessed; he became Prior of Saint Nicholas de Grosse-Sauve and Principal of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. The priory of Saint Nicholas de Grosse-Sauve belonged to the Order of Saint Augustine. When Sebastian Zamet, Bishop of Langres, united it to the Oratory, on June 23, 1623, the Chapter of Mamès laid claim to the right to its disposal and a lawsuit was begun. A compromise was effected which resulted in the recognition of the Oratorians' right to the benefice and they took possession of it on March 24, 1626. In the month of February, 1624, whilst the process was still pending, we find Vincent de Paul 'provided with the priory by His Holiness' granting power of procuration for the taking possession of the benefice in his name.[2]

[1] Collet states (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 113) that Vincent de Paul had received his degree of licentiate 'some time' before March 1, 1624. The first document to mention this degree is dated that day or rather the day after. The diplomas of licentiate were preserved in Saint Lazare after the Saint's death and produced at the Process of Beatification. (*Summarium ex processu ne pereant probationes*, p. 5.)

[2] The deed giving power of attorney was published on May 1, 1897, in the *Semaine religieuse* of Langres, shortly after its

It is not known whether this ever actually happened as there were other competitors in the field, and it is probable that the chaplain to the de Gondis preferred to surrender his claims so as not to be involved in a lawsuit. The Principalship of the Collège des Bons-Enfants was not offered to him under such conditions. Ever since the marvellous success of the mission at Folleville, Madame de Gondi had never lost sight of her plan of assuring the preaching of periodical missions to those who dwelt on her estates, by means of a foundation of 16,000 livres. In her will, which she re-made every year, she took care never to omit this clause, but her desire met with no response. Her chaplain knocked in vain at the doors of all the houses of the religious Orders in Paris for their superiors gave him nothing but excuses. However, the devout lady was not discouraged ; she prayed to God for enlightenment and God inspired her with the idea of suggesting to Vincent de Paul himself that he should carry out her intentions by establishing a community of missionaries. The General of the Galleys approved of his wife's plan, promised his own assistance and had no difficulty in obtaining the consent of his brother, John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris.[3]

The first question to be settled was where the new community was to live, but that was easily done, for the Collège des Bons-Enfants, close to the Gate of Saint Victor, and at that time almost uninhabited, was at the disposal of the Archbishop, and the acting Principal, Louis de Guyart. Doctor of Theology and Protonotary Apostolic, offered to resign if he were promised an annual pension of 100 livres, Pressed at one and the same time by the Archbishop, the General and his wife, Vincent de Paul agreed to everything. A few days later, on March 1, 1624, the letters[4] appointing him Principal of the Collège des Bons-Enfants were signed and, on the 6th, he took possession by proxy.[5]

discovery. It was written on a fragment of clipped parchment which served to attach the back fly-leaf of a *Missale lingonense* to the binding.

[3] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. XVII, p. 66 ff.

[4] Arch. Nat. H^5 3288.

[5] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 113. This procurator was his loyal collaborator, Anthony Portail, of whom we shall speak later.

This college, which should not be confused with a college of the same name in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, was nearly three centuries old ; it had never been solidly built, had been long left without repairs, and was now in a pitiable state of decay. Situated at the end of the Rue Saint-Victor, it occupied an area of about 1600 square metres that lay between this street, in which was the principal entrance, the old city wall of Philip Augustus, and the College of Cardinal Lemoine, from which it was separated, to the north, by the bed of the River Bièvre and, to the west, by a small courtyard. The chapel extended for seventeen and a half metres along the street, and its apse abutted on one of the two towers that flanked the Gate of Saint-Victor. A pedestrian entering Paris by the Rue Saint-Victor, after passing the chapel saw on his right a carriage-entrance opening directly on an inner court ; he then passed in front of two shops, the second of which, apart from the ground floor, was a four-storied building. The whole constituted the façade of the College. Above the carriage-entrance and the adjoining shop were two or three rooms, one over the other, lighted by windows opening out on the street. There were also two buildings in the interior ; one parallel to the main front,[6] and the other forming a side-wing. The latter, which was on the point of falling down, was unoccupied.

The college dated from the thirteenth century, and like colleges in those days, was not a teaching centre but simply a hostel in which students, whether foundation scholars or pensioners, were provided with shelter and sleeping-quarters. The number of scholars was never very large ;[7] in 1314, there were eleven foundation scholars,[8] and in 1336, fifteen pensioners,[9] and these are the highest figures available. In the fifteenth century, there was only one foundation scholar.

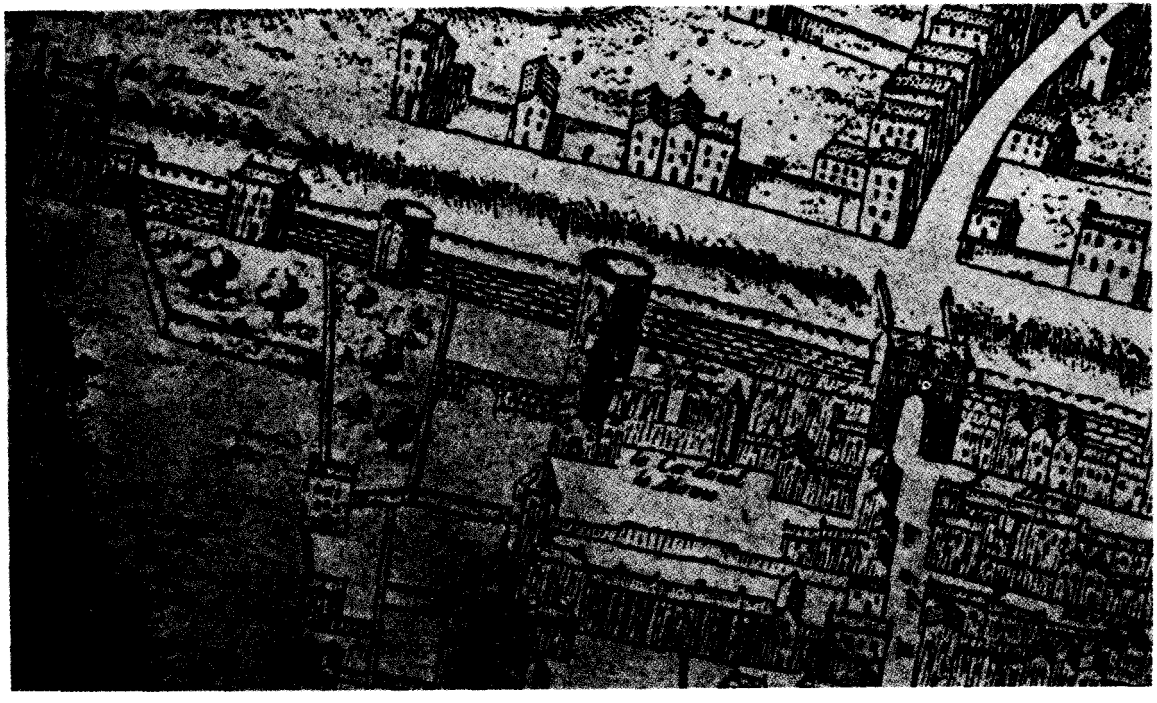
Between 1455 and 1478, when it seemed on the point of

[6] Arch. Nat. H^5 3288.

[7] Arch. Nat. M. 105. document 5.

[8] Vallet de Viriville, *Sépulture de Jean Pluyette* in *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de France*, 3rd series, Vol. V, 1862.

[9] Arch. Nat. S. 9373.



THE COLLÈGE DES BONS-ENFANTS AND ITS ENVIRONS
(Plan of Saint-Victor)

extinction, it received a new lease of life thanks to the skilful administration and generosity of John Pluyette, its first Principal, and a former Rector of the University, who in his will established two burses and bequeathed for their upkeep, nine houses, a large garden and an annual revenue of four *setiers*[10] of corn. The foundation scholars were to be chosen from the Pluyette family and, in case of its extinction, from the inhabitants of Mesnil-Aubry and Fontenay-en-France. They were to be presented by the churchwardens of these parishes and nominated by the Bishop of Paris. They were to be boarded ' as befits children of good family,' with the same bread, wine and meat as the Master's, lodged in well-ventilated apartments which were to be heated in winter. They were to pursue their studies until they took out a degree in Arts or, if considered incapable of that, were to be content with learning how to read and write. The Pluyette foundation provided, up to 1789, for fifty-two scholars of whom forty-one bore the name of Pluyette.[11]

When Saint Vincent took possession of the College, the two Pluyette foundation scholars, on account of the impossibility of maintaining the full value of the burses, were only partly provided for. The College still supplied lodgings, and continued to do so until 1639, for seven or eight pensioners, by means of an annual income of 350 livres, in rooms looking out on the Rue Saint-Victor, and on the ground floor of the building parallel with the main front.[12]

Vincent de Paul did not at once take up residence in the Bons-Enfants out of consideration for Madame de Gondi, who would not have endured being separated from him. It was, however, only fitting that he should not remain away from his companions and the difficulty was shortly afterwards removed by the death of Madame de Gondi. Not long before her death, she and her husband founded the Congregation of the Mission. The contract was signed on April 17, 1625 and, on reading it over, one can easily

[10] A *setier* contained 156 litres.
[11] Arch. Nat. M. 105, doc. 5 ; MM 534.
[12] *Ibid.*, doc. Nos. 5 and 8 ; H^5 3288.

recognise the hand of Saint Vincent.[13] The latter bound himself to form within a year an association of six ecclesiastics or as many as the revenue of 45,000 livres provided by the contract would permit, all of whom were to be ' men of proved doctrine, piety and learning,' free from all obligations in regard to benefices, and ecclesiastical charges and dignities so that they might devote themselves unreservedly, subject to the good pleasure of the episcopacy, to the salvation of poor country folk by preaching, catechetical instruction and the hearing of general confessions. If the foundress thus showed a preference for country districts it was because village folk are ' as it were abandoned ' whilst ' numerous doctors of theology and members of religious Orders preach, catechise, excite and preserve the spirit of devotion ' amongst the inhabitants of towns and cities.

Some of the statutes that were later to regulate the Congregation of the Mission may be found already in this document : community life under the direction of Vincent de Paul and, after him, of a superior elected by a majority of votes for a period of three years ' or any other period of time ' that might be judged suitable ; the renunciation of ecclesiastical charges, dignities and benefices, whilst the Superior is at liberty, in case he should be asked to supply a priest for a cure of souls, to present one of his own who had been a member of the Congregation for eight or ten years ; gratuitous missions ; the prohibition against preaching or administering the sacraments in places containing the seat of an archbishop, bishop or court of assizes, ' except in case of necessity ' ; and, in case a house should be established in such places, then preaching and the administration of the sacraments was to be confined to the domestic staff and within closed doors ; the obligation of preaching missions every five years on the de Gondi estates and the spiritual assistance of convicts ; after a month spent at missionary work, a period of recollection for three or four days and a period of twelve days preparation for the next mission ; in the month of June, seeing that country folk are then busily engaged, missions should cease and not be resumed until the

[13] The original is preserved in the National Archives M. 167. It has been published in *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 197 ff.

month of October ; during this time, the missionaries should give catechetical instruction in villages on Sundays and Holy days, assist the clergy in case they were asked, and devote themselves to study.

The founders forgot nothing. They let it be clearly understood that Vincent de Paul ' should continue to reside in their house ' so as to ' continue to render themselves and their family the spiritual assistance ' received from him ' for many years.' They desired to enjoy in perpetuity, both for themselves and their descendants ' all the rights and privileges granted to founders by the holy canons,' but renounced the right of nominating to posts in the Congregation.

The contract, by thus separating the superior from his community, might have gravely compromised the existence of the new Institute from the beginning, but Saint Vincent relied on divine Providence and It came to his aid. Two months after it was signed, Madame de Gondi expired, on June 23, 1625, assisted and fortified, as she had so long desired, by her saintly director. Her body was taken to the Convent of Carmelite nuns in the Rue Chapon, of which she had been one of the greatest benefactresses.[14]

The General of the Galleys was in Marseilles and it was Vincent himself who brought him the sad tidings.[15] Although he accomplished his delicate mission as carefully as possible, M. de Gondi was so deeply and permanently affected that the world had no further attraction for him.

[14] After Madame de Gondi's death, she was eulogised, not without emphasis, in a pamphlet entitled : *Lettre de consolation à Madame la marquise de Maignelay sur le décès de feu Madame le générale des galères, sa belle-soeur* (13 pp. oct. 1626).

[15] On July 5, 1625, the reliquary of Saint Genevieve was borne in procession through the streets of Paris. Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld, who presided, walked bare-footed, followed by the Canons Regular of Saint Genevieve, both mitigated and reformed, and a great number of the faithful. It is stated in a manuscript (Bibl. Ste. Gen, MS. 712, f° 86) that Saint Vincent wrote to a friend that the whole of Paris was edified at the piety of the reformed Canons of Saint Genevieve. We do not think this document is trustworthy. If the Saint had left for Marseilles on June 23, he could not have been in Paris on July 5.

Madame de Gondi had not forgotten Vincent de Paul in her will ; she left him a large sum of money but begged him ' for the love of Our Lord and of His Holy Mother ' never to leave her house, even after the General's death. Right up to the very end, this was her chief preoccupation and hence she also recommended her husband ' to keep M. Vincent by him, and to command his children to do the same after his death, begging him to remember and to carry out his holy instructions,' considering ' the good it would do their souls ' and ' the blessing that would accrue to themselves and to the whole family.' Her insistence on this point reveals the fact that she foresaw the opposition of him whom she was so jealously anxious to retain in her home. Without adverting to it, there was in truth a certain amount of pious egotism in her wishes, for the welfare of the new community demanded the presence of the superior amongst his disciples. M. de Gondi appreciated this truth better than his wife, and accordingly gave full permission to his chaplain to take up his residence in the Collège des Bons-Enfants. This sacrifice was all the easier inasmuch as he had already made up his mind to abandon the world and to embrace the ecclesiastical life in the Oratory, which he joined on April 6, 1626. God alone knows whether or not his first intention had been to become an humble Priest of the Mission,[16] and whether or not his chaplain had diverted him from it.

Sometime between October 20 and December 22, 1625, Vincent de Paul left the de Gondi mansion in the Rue Pavée.[17] A virtuous ecclesiastic, whom he had long known, Anthony Portail by name, joined him in the Rue Saint-Victor. Whilst waiting for God to send them some fellow workers, they secured the services of a priest who, at a salary of fifty crowns a year, shared in their apostolic labours. ' The three of us,'[18] said Vincent many years afterwards, ' used to go and give missions, passing from village to village.

[16] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. XVIII, p. 70 ff.

[17] In a receipt dated October 20, it is said that Vincent de Paul is then resident in the ' Rue Pavée ' and in a lease dated December 22 that he is ' in the Collège des Bons-Enfants' (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 60).

[18] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 8.

When we set out, we used to give the key to one of our neighbours or beg him to go and sleep at night in the house. . . . I had only one sermon myself, and I used to twist and turn it in a thousand ways ; it was on the fear of God. That is how we proceeded, and yet God was effecting what He had foreseen from all eternity. He gave some blessings to our labours and some good ecclesiastics seeing this joined us.'

The third missionary was in all probability Father Belin. We may at least suppose so if we bear in mind the following lines addressed to him by Saint Vincent on December 16, 1634 : ' Rest assured that Our Lord has made you a missionary, and that you played one of the chief parts in the conception, pregnancy, birth and progress of the Mission and that, were it not for the evident signs God has given you that He desired you to be at Villepreux . . . you would belong entirely to the Mission. As for me, I look on you as a perpetual and very perfect missionary.'[19] The sight of the zeal of these three priests and of the ever-increasing number of their missions could not but render episcopal authority favourably disposed towards them. Furthermore, John Francis de Gondi, the Archbishop of Paris, was a brother of the General of the Galleys and, accordingly, when the foundation contract was submitted to him, he did not hesitate to approve and even praise it. ' We accept, praise and approve it,' he states in a document dated April 24, 1626, ' and agree that the said ecclesiastics may establish themselves and reside in this city of Paris, on condition that they shall not go on missions in our diocese save to such places as we shall assign and after having received our blessing or that of one of our Vicars General, and that they shall, on their return, render us an account of what they have done during the said mission.' The reports demanded by the Archbishop have unfortunately been lost, and we are thus deprived of the interesting and edifying details in regard to these early days which they must certainly have contained.

Fortified by episcopal approbation, Vincent de Paul next turned to the organisation of his Institute. Three of his five collaborators consented to remain with him. They formed an association, in virtue of a legal document which

[19] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 288.

he had registered in the Châtelet : ' We, Vincent de Paul, Priest, Principal of the Collège des Bons-Enfants . . . after having made proof, for a considerable period of time, of the virtue and capacity of Francis du Coudray, priest of the diocese of Amiens, of Master Anthony Portail, priest of the diocese of Arles, and of Master John de la Salle, also priest of the diocese of Amiens, have chosen, elected, aggregated and associated, and hereby choose, elect, aggregate and associate to ourselves and to the aforesaid work, to live together as a Congregation, Company or Confraternity and to devote ourselves to the salvation of the aforesaid poor country folk, conformably to the aforesaid foundation, in accordance with the request which the aforesaid du Coudray, Portail and de la Salle have made to us, promising to observe the aforesaid foundation and the special rules to be drawn up in accordance with it, and to obey both us and our successors in the office of superior as subject to our direction, government and jurisdiction. The which we the undersigned du Coudray, Portail and de la Salle accept, promise and bind ourselves to observe inviolably.'[20] All three subscribed their names at the foot of the document, alongside the founder's.

Who were these three priests who were to be employed by God as the first stones of the new building ?

Anthony Portail was born at Beaucaire on November 22, 1590, and whilst still a student at the Sorbonne was providentially brought into contact with Vincent de Paul about the year 1610. The Saint, almost from the beginning of their intercourse, saw that the young man was destined for the priesthood and prepared him for it with the greatest care. Saint Vincent's example contributed at least as much as his teaching towards the desired result.[21] When Portail was ordained priest, he placed himself at Vincent's disposal and was for many years entrusted with the duty of helping the convicts ; he even dwelt in the same house with them in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. From there he moved to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. As he was excessively shy, this may have been the reason why he hesitated so long

[20] *Op. cit.*, Vol. XIII, p. 203.
[21] MS. of Brother Robineau (Arch. of the Mission).

before entering a pulpit ; he only decided to do so in 1630, and the line of congratulation is still extant which was sent him by the holy founder when he had summoned courage. Father Portail, during the thirty-three years of his life in the Congregation,[22] always showed himself to be a devoted auxiliary of Saint Vincent's. After having been his first disciple, he became his first Assistant, and his first collaborator in the spiritual direction of the Daughters of Charity.

Francis du Coudray was educated in quite a different school. He was born in the city of Amiens, and ordained priest in 1618. He had studied Hebrew and was regarded as so proficient in the language that he was asked to translate the Hebrew Bible into French. He heard the divine call some time in March, 1626, and it was not without many an inward pang that Francis du Coudray laid aside his work as a scholar to devote himself more directly to the service of souls under the guidance of Vincent de Paul. The following month brought the Saint another helper to whom he subsequently referred as ' a great missionary ' and of whom Augustine Potier, Bishop of Beauvais, said that, as far as he knew, he had never met ' a man so powerful in argument.' The new-comer was John de la Salle, born at Seux (Somme) on September 10, 1598. He had only thirteen years to live, but the ardour of his zeal compensated for the short span of his existence.

Two names are missing from the foot of the Act of Association, namely, those of Belin and Louis Calon, Doctor of the Sorbonne. All that we know of the former is what Saint Vincent tells us in the letter dated December 16, 1634, of which we have given an extract. According to the biographer of James Gallemant,[23] Louis Calon was one of those priests ' in whom sanctity, knowledge, zeal and simplicity were happily combined.' He entered the Collège des Bons-Enfants on July 1, 1626, with the intention of sharing the life and works of his associates, but was soon forced to abandon the idea on account of ill-health. He returned to

[22] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 88.

[23] *Vie du Vénérable prestre M. Jacques Gallemant*, Paris, 1653, pp. 319–328.

Aumale, of which he was parish priest, but for all that he never ceased to belong to the Congregation and to labour at the work of the missions.

On the day when, with his first companions, Vincent de Paul signed the engagement to labour together in the service of the poor country people, he also declared in writing, in the presence of a notary, that he handed over to his relations all that he possessed in his native place, namely, a sum of money that was owing to him and also a farm.[24] At least some months previously he had resigned the parish at Clichy, and this new sacrifice left Vincent de Paul even still more free to work at the establishment, organisation and development of his Congregation.

In the month of May, 1627, the King signed the Letters Patent by which the Congregation of the Mission acquired a legal status. This approbation displeased the parish clergy of Paris, who charged their Syndic, Stephen Le Tonnelier, parish priest of Saint Eustache, to present their objections to the Parlement before the Royal Letters were formally registered. The new Congregation would trespass on their rights and lessen the sources of their revenues, and hence they demanded guarantees and begged the Court to specify them in its declaration. The first was that the Priests of the Mission ' shall renounce any and every employment in the parishes and churches of all the cities in the Kingdom ' ; second, that they shall not enter any church save by ' express command of the bishop of the diocese and with the permission of the parish priest ' ; and ' shall not exercise any function during the ordinary hours of divine service ' ; lastly, that they shall not demand any wage or remuneration either from the benefice or the inhabitants.

The Priests of the Mission had already subscribed in advance to these conditions, which were indeed laid down in the foundation contract but, in the eyes of the parish clergy, it was ordinary prudence not to be satisfied with a mere promise and to demand an express prohibition from the supreme authority. Hence they petitioned ' that it may please the Court to bind and compel ' the Priests of the Mission and ' to ordain that none of them shall enter the

[24] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 61.

aforesaid Congregation who has not been bound to make the aforesaid most express renunciation, so that they may not in future be able to have a pretext, through lack of the aforesaid renunciation, for usurping the rights of the parish priests.' The Syndic then proceeds : ' Although, indeed, all Congregations in the beginning and source of their first institution may be most pure and established for considerations of the most eminent piety,' it happens that ' in the course of time, ambition and avarice alter them completely.' Hence, so many communities founded ' on similar pretexts ' remain either useless and without fruit or, if they do produce some fruit do so ' by trespassing on parishes in small towns and country villages ' of which they are daily making themselves Masters.

Before the Syndic concluded his petition, he revealed what may really have been at the back of his mind : the Priests of the Mission are not as disinterested as they allege ; their request is wanting in sincerity. ' It is certain,' he remarks ' that no matter what pretext they may allege . . . for refusing, their real intention is to arrive imperceptibly at a share of the benefices, and to have it declared at some future time that the revenues of the parish priests should be divided and shared, half of the proceeds going to the parish priest who carries out divine service, and the other half to whomsoever the bishop shall have entrusted the mission of preaching and catechising.'[25]

Parlement was not so suspicious ; it commanded the King's Letters to be registered, whilst insisting on the guarantees demanded by the Syndic and accepted in advance by the interested parties.

As soon as the Congregation of the Mission was legally authorised, Vincent de Paul thought of resigning the Collège des Bons-Enfants in its favour. On June 8, 1627, at the urgent request of the Saint, and after a preliminary enquiry conducted by Denis Leblanc, Vicar General of Paris, the Archbishop united the establishment, with its property and employments to the new society.[26] This act of union, the validity of which was to be contested by the University in

[25] *Op. cit.*, Vol. XIII, p. 227 ff.
[26] *Op. cit.*, Vol. XIII, p. 208.

the second half of the eighteenth century, raised no opposition at the time.

The eyes of the founder were turned above all towards Rome from whence he desired the word of approbation that would assure the future of his Institute. In the month of June, 1628, he addressed his first petition to the Sovereign Pontiff, and also induced both the King and the Papal Nuncio to support it. He recounted the origin of the foundation, indicated the character of the work, stated the needs it was intended to meet, enumerated the functions of the missionaries and mentioned the good results hitherto obtained ; he then drew up a list of the favours the concession of which seemed to him to be useful or even necessary for the Congregation : the right to establish itself wherever a bishop might call it ; the authority of the Superior General over all the members of the body, in whatever establishment they might be ; permission to receive gifts ; exemption from Ordinaries in all that concerned the appointments of subjects, internal discipline and financial administration ; faculties to preach, catechise, hear confessions and establish the Confraternity of Charity in all places, with the bishop's consent ; and divers other powers relative to absolution from censures and reserved cases, commutation of vows, discussions with heretics and the reading of their books, the Forty Hours, portable altars, and matters pertaining to restitution and indulgences.[27]

Despite the urgent recommendations of persons in high places, Propaganda, in accordance with the observations of the Cardinal Reporter, rejected the petition at a plenary assembly, held on August 22, 1628, in the Pope's presence. The limit of concessions Propaganda declared itself disposed to make was the formation of a society limited to twenty or twenty-five members, which should not be either a Congregation or a Confraternity, confine its activities to France, and work under the authority of the Ordinaries.[28] Rome had not even yet pronounced on the petition when Vincent de Paul was preparing and forwarding another, very slightly different from the first in substance and form. This too was

[27] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 42 ff.
[28] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 42, note ; Vol. XIII, p. 225.

rejected on September 25.[29] Did he suspect that his designs were being secretly combated by a man whom he loved as a father and venerated as a saint, by Cardinal de Bérulle himself? The latter wrote, at the end of 1628, to Father Bertin, who represented him in Rome : ' The design of which you inform me and on behalf of which those who are petitioning, in this matter of missions, in various and, in my opinion, oblique ways, should render it suspect and compel us to depart from the reserve and simplicity in which it seems to me one should abide in the management of God's affairs, if all persons conducted them in this spirit.'[30]

Victory is for those who persevere and refuse to be discouraged, especially when, having been enlightened as to the causes of a preliminary failure, they take, after mature deliberation, all the necessary precautions to eliminate them. The words : ' The Congregation had decided that the petition be absolutely rejected,' did not intimidate the holy founder. The principal and, perhaps, the sole cause of the reverse was the line of action taken in Rome itself by those who opposed his designs. The only means of succeeding was to have a regular agent in the Eternal City and as Francis du Coudray seemed to Saint Vincent the man best qualified to carry on negotiations he was sent there. Saint Vincent wrote from Paris to tell him what tactics he should adopt :[31] ' You should have them informed that the poor people are being lost from want of knowledge of those things that are necessary for salvation and from their inability to confess their sins ; that if His Holiness were aware of this need, he would have no rest until he had done all in his power to rectify it ; and that it is our knowledge of these facts which has brought about the establishment of the Company so that it may, to some extent, apply a remedy ; that, in order to do so, it must live as a community and observe five points as essentials to this design : (1) it should be left to the bishops to send missionaries into whatever part of their dioceses they may please ; (2) the said priests should

[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 52.

[30] Arch. Nat. M. 216, 3rd packet, copies of Cardinal de Bérulle's letters, f° 26 V°.

[31] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 115.

be subject to the parish priests, wherever they are giving a mission, during that period ; (3) they should not accept anything from these poor people but live at their own expense ; (4) that they do not preach, catechise or hear confessions in cities in which there is an Archbishopric, Bishopric or Court of Assizes, with the exception of ordinands and those who make retreats in our own houses ; (5) that the Superior of the Company should have entire jurisdiction over it ; and that these five maxims should be as it were fundamentals of this Congregation. Observe that M. Duval considers that nothing whatsoever should be changed in this project of which I am sending you the details. Words do not matter in the slightest, but the substance must remain whole and entire ; for nothing can be altered or omitted without causing the greatest harm. That, too, is his idea, without my ever having mentioned it to him. So, stand fast then, and make them understand that this matter has been pondered over for many years and has also been tried.'

We may guess the contents of the memoranda sent from Paris to Rome from the tenor of the petition presented by Father du Coudray to obtain the authorisation of the Holy See. This document gives an admirable résumé of all that is needed to supply a general idea of what the Congregation stood for : its origin, utility, aim and works. We may see how postulant clerics were not to be admitted until they were seventeen years old and that, in order to be incorporated in the Congregation, it was necessary to have lived in it for a period of twelve months, to be judged suitable by the superiors and to have the intention of persevering in it until death. Father du Coudray showed himself to be a skilful negotiator for, on January 12, 1633,[32] Pope Urban VIII by the Bull *Salvatoris Nostri* granted all his requests. This pontifical document delegated the Archbishop of Paris and his successors in perpetuity to grant approval, in the name

[32] It is true that the Bull is dated January 12, 1632 ; but the ecclesiastical year then began on March 25, and not on January 1, hence its January 12, 1632, corresponds to January 12, 1633, of the usual system of reckoning. Moreover, the negotiations with a view to approbation continued after January 12, 1632 ; this date, taken in its current acceptation, cannot therefore be accepted.

and authority of the Holy See, to the Rules and Constitutions that would be laid before them.[33]

A year before this memorable date in the history of the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent de Paul had transferred the seat of his Institute from the Collège des Bons-Enfants to the Priory of Saint Lazare, situated to the north of Paris, in the parish of Saint Lawrence. This important event deserves more than a passing mention.

[33] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 257 ff.

CHAPTER X

THE UNION OF PRIORY OF SAINT LAZARE WITH THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION[1]

WHEN the founder of the Mission took possession of his new home, Saint Lazare had already a long history behind it. A charter of Louis VI's dated 1122,[2] refers to a bridge situated 'near the lazar-house.' This building, which consisted of a few huts, was taken under the protection of Louis VII. A monk named Odon who was an eye-witness tells us that the King visited it on June 11, 1147, the day on which he set out to Saint Denis for the oriflame.[3] As a token of his special benevolence he granted the lazar-house the right to collect all wood needed for domestic purposes from the Royal Wood of Vincennes. He handed over its government to the Knights of Saint Lazarus and added an old castle and a chapel to the buildings. Like all lazar-houses, its patron was Saint Ladre or Saint Lazarus, who was raised by Our Lord from the dead at Bethany and who, in the Middle Ages, was confused with the poor man of that name who was seen by the wicked rich man in Abraham's bosom.

[1] The chief works or monographs consulted for this chapter are : du Breuil, *Theâtre des antiquitez de Paris*, 1612 ; *Saint Lazare* par Jean Parrang, in the *Petites Annales de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Jan. 1903, pp. 13 ff ; Louis Abelly, *La Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu*, Bk. I, Ch. XXII and XLI ; *Histoire des chanoines réguliers de la Congregation de France* from 1630 to 1640, MS. 603 Bibl. Saint Gen. 5 vols. folio, Vol. III, Ch. XIII, f° 57 V° ff ; and the documents published in Vol. XIII of *Saint Vincent de Paul.*

[2] This charter has been published by M. de Lasteyrie in the *Cartulaire General de Paris*, Vol. I, p. 214.

[3] (The sacred banner of Saint Denis ; a banderole of red silk on a lance, received by early French Kings from Abbot of Saint Denis on starting for war. Conc. Ox. Dict.)

SAINT-LAZARE
(Plan Gomboust)

The Prior or Master, chosen, as a rule, by the Bishop of Paris, from amongst his own clergy, was assisted in the administration of the house, by a sort of confraternity made up of ecclesiastics and lay-folk, both men and women, and even of lepers, all of whom lived as a sort of community, each in his or her own category, without vows and under the rule of Saint Augustine. The patients, all of whom were citizens of Paris or bakers, made a vow of obedience to the Prior on admission, in presence of an Apostolic Notary, and presented an account of all their possessions which, after their death, went to the house, in accordance with the regulations.

It was thought that bakers were more exposed to leprosy than those of any other craft and, accordingly, the bakers of Paris took a lively interest in the leper-hospital of Saint Lazare. They rallied to its assistance in times of need, and every week, right up to the early years of the seventeenth century gave a loaf of bread from every baker's shop ; and, after 1600, a Paris *denier* called ' the *denier* Saint Lazare or Saint Ladre.'[4] They had their own chapel in the Church of Saint Lazare in which they met on the last Sunday of August for a solemn service, deferring the expenses, for that day, of the ' blessed bread.'

Saint Lazare became one of the chief ecclesiastical seignories of the Kingdom, had its own armorial bearings, on which the risen Lazarus figured, and enjoyed ' high, middle and low jurisdiction.' A sheriff, nominated by the Prior, presided over the Court which tried cases on Mondays and Thursdays every week. There were prisons within the enclosure and at Villeneuve-sur-Gravois[5] for the punishment of the guilty, and stakes and iron-collars[6] on the squares of Villeneuve and Saint Lazare. Kings and Queens, before their solemn entry into the city of Paris, betook themselves to Saint Lazare and were housed in a building known as ' The King's Lodgings,' where the King received the oath

[4] A *denier* was a small copper coin, worth a fraction of a farthing. (T.)

[5] An old quarter in Paris, situated to-day in the 2nd Arrondisement, to the south of the Boulevard de Bonne Nouvelle.

[6] The iron collars (carcans) were used to attach the criminal to the post or stake at which he was exposed to public view.

of fidelity of all the various classes of the city. They halted again at Saint Lazare after their death. The bearers of the Royal corpse paused at the Church of Saint Lazare where the coffin passed from their hands into those of the monks of Saint Denis. Absolution was imparted ; the bishops of the Kingdom in turn sprinkled holy water on the bier, and the procession thereupon resumed its march to the famous Abbey.

The Lazar-house was also regarded with a kindly eye by the Sovereign Pontiffs. Celestine III (1191), and Nicholas IV (1289) took it under their protection ; Innocent III (1198) exempted it from tithes, and Clement VI (1343) confirmed all privileges granted by his predecessors. The Confraternity of Saint Lazare, with a Proper Office, was established in 1521. In 1513 or 1514, Stephen de Poncher, Bishop of Paris, transferred the administration of the Priory from the Knights of Saint Lazarus to the Canons of Saint Victor. This donation was not absolute and irrevocable, and the prelate's choice of these monks did not imply the loss of his right to dismiss them, in case circumstances might demand a change.[7]

The monastic enclosure of Saint Lazare was the largest in Paris and comprised about ninety-two arpents of land.[8] It included the whole area bounded to-day by the Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis and the Boulevard La Chapelle, that is to say, the space now occupied by the Saint Lazare prison, the Gare du Nord, the Lariboisière Hospital and the Church of Saint Vincent de Paul. Wheat, barley and lucerne were extensively cultivated. The Saint Lazare of the first years of the seventeenth century, as shown in the 1609 plan, comprised two groups of buildings intersected by a road running through the enclosure, almost on a line with the present Rue Chabrol. To the north of this road, strung out along the Saint Denis road were detached houses, separated from each other by gardens and, right at the very end, stood a small chapel. These were the houses and chapel for the lepers. To the south, within the quadrilateral now formed by the Rue du Paradis, the Rue du

[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 255 ff.

[8] An *arpent* varied from one to one and a half acres. (T.)

Faubourg Saint-Denis, the Rue Chabrol and the Rue d'Hauteville, stood a huge pile of buildings : a Gothic church with its cloister, the Canons' house of residence, the prison of the seignory, a house of detention for lunatics or unruly young men, a dove-cot, a granary, a windmill, stables, cattle-sheds, a slaughter-house and various other buildings ; the whole being intersected with courtyards and gardens. The small, unlovely Gothic church dated from the thirteenth century and had been repaired at the beginning of the seventeenth. The main entrance was on the Saint Denis Road. Along the northern end ran a cloister of which each extremity was connected with a wing of the main building, thus forming an irregular square by the junction, on one side, with the chapel, and on the other, with a third wing.

The monks of Saint Lazare also possessed property in Paris, Argenteuil, Belleville, La Chapelle, Le Bourget, Cormeilles, Drancy, Gonesse, Lagny, Marly, Rougemont and Sevran. Moreover, Saint Lawrence's Fair lay within the jurisdiction of the Priory which also owned fifty-six houses in La Villette Saint Lazare, not to speak of the church, presbytery, curate's house and the convent of Saint Perrine.

If the revenues were large, the maintenance of the building entailed a very heavy outlay but, whether through avarice or neglect, repairs were being continually put off and hence the walls were falling to pieces so that the whole place presented an aspect of lamentable decay. In the course of time, lepers became more and more rare so that, during the whole of the seventeenth century, only two were admitted : Anthony Langlois in 1607,[9] and another in 1634 or 1635.[10] The prisons contained two classes of persons ; young rakes handed over to the care of the Prior by their relations, and three or four poor lunatics.

The community of Saint Lazare, in 1632, consisted of eleven members : Adrian Le Bon, born at Neufchâtel-en-Brie, in 1577 or 1578, had been Prior since 1611 ; Nicholas Maheut, Sub-Prior ; Claude Cousin, Guest-Master ; Claude Cothereau, Bursar ; Richard Levasseur, Sacristan ; Adrian

[9] Arch. Nat., Y 146, f° 244, document dated March 31, 1607.
[10] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 292.

Descourtils ; James Lescellier ; Francis Caigne ; Claude de Morennes ; Anthony Flamignon and Francis Lepelletier. The Prior and his community had not been on good terms for a long time ; in 1630, things became worse ; Adrian Le Bon lost courage and resolved to exchange his Priory for another benefice. He received some very advantageous offers but, before coming to a decision, consulted friends who told him he should strain every effort to smooth over the difficulties and suggested that he should hold a conference with his monks in the presence of four Doctors of Theology. The meeting took place in the house of a Theologian whose knowledge and virtue were widely esteemed. The Prior and Sub-Prior, the latter acting as the spokesman of his fellow-religious, stated their causes of complaint and the arbitrators, after hearing both sides, drew up an agreement by which both parties promised to abide.

This solution, however, did not cause the Prior to modify his plans. One day, in the course of a conversation about M. Vincent and his little band of missionaries, the idea occurred to him that, by establishing them in Saint Lazare, he would have a share in the good they were doing by their missions. Nicholas de Lestocq, the parish priest of Saint Lawrence encouraged the Prior in this idea and even agreed to accompany him to the Collège des Bons-Enfants and to take part in the interview with the Founder of the Mission. The very first words of Adrian Le Bon left Vincent de Paul completely stunned, as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt. The Prior noticed this and said :

' What is wrong with you, Sir, you are trembling.'

' It is quite true, Sir,' replied the Saint, ' that your proposal has terrified me. It seems to me to be so far above us that I should not even dare to think about it. We are poor priests ; we live quite simply ; our whole ambition is to be of service to poor country folk. We are deeply touched by your kindness and thank you very humbly for it.'

' I hope that is not your last word,' replied the Prior, ' your company will increase ; you will be cooped up in this house ; the day will come when you will not know where to turn to provide accommodation for your community ; the possession of Saint Lazare will relieve you of that worry.

It is natural that you should want time to think the matter over ; I will come back in six months' time and I hope by then you will have arrived at a better understanding of your own interests.'

Adrian Le Bon kept his promise and, six months later, returned with the parish priest of Saint Lawrence. Once again their combined eloquence failed to make any impression on M. Vincent's humility. ' We have just come into existence,' he said, ' we are only a handful, and we do not like publicity or display. I beseech you to think of somebody else besides us.' The discussion was still going on when the bell rang for the midday meal. Adrian Le Bon followed the Superior to the refectory, and the good order and modesty of the community who listened in silence whilst a book was being read edified him profoundly and strengthened his resolution to bring his design to a successful conclusion.

During the next months, more urgent and more frequent attempts were made. The Prior and the parish priest returned to the Collège des Bons-Enfants more than thirty times. ' I cannot tell,' says Nicholas de Lestocq,[11] ' with what pertinacity we pursued him. Jacob did not show as much patience in gaining Rachel or as much insistence in obtaining the blessing of the angel as the Prior and myself did in winning M. Vincent's consent when we were urging him to accept. We cried out more loudly after him than the Canaanite woman after the Apostles. *Raucæ factæ sunt voces meæ.* I would gladly have carried this Father of missionaries on my back to Saint Lazare and forced him to accept, but he did not regard the external aspect and advantages of the place or its other possessions, and never even visited it during the whole period.'

The Prior only secured a victory over Saint Vincent by attacking him on his weak side—his humility. He told him he should be on his guard against holding fast to his own ideas and advised him to fall in with those of others. ' Sir,' said the Prior, ' what sort of a man are you ? I have the consent of all my monks ; I am waiting only for yours ; all those who are interested in you advise you to accept. Do you

[11] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVII, p. 272.

think you are right and all the others wrong? Let us refer this whole matter to a trustworthy man, to any friend whom you can choose yourself, and let us follow his advice.' The Prior may possibly have foreseen, when he made this proposal, that the Saint would select Andrew Duval, a Doctor of the Sorbonne, his most trusted adviser, and the Prior may also have had a preliminary conversation with Duval in order to win him over to his own side. However that may be, Andrew Duval was in favour of accepting, and M. Vincent, confronted with a decision coming from a man whom he regarded as inspired by Heaven, submitted.[12] The parish priest of Saint Lawrence is not the only witness of Saint Vincent's disinterestedness throughout the whole affair; it is proved clearly from the Saint's own writings. Hence it is surprising to come upon the following passage in *The History of the Canons Regular of the Congregation of France*:[13] 'Father Vincent, finding the place very suitable and useful for his designs, induced some very powerful persons to mention the matter to the Prior.' And further on: 'Father Vincent, who clearly foresaw the difficulty that would arise in regard to taking possession of the monastery without the permission and goodwill of the Cardinal (Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld) and the religious of the Congregation, went to the Cardinal and then to Father Faure and put his designs before them quite frankly, begging them not to place an obstacle to God's work or to hinder the great good their Company was planning to effect in the diocese and throughout the whole of France.'

It is possible, and even probable, that before Vincent de Paul gave a definite consent, acting on the advice of Andrew Duval, he went to see Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld the Abbot, and Father Faure, the Prior, of Saint Genevieve to have their assurance that they would not oppose the design; but it is a pure fairy-tale to say that he was the first to think about Saint Lazare and to do all in his power to gain possession of it.

It was no easy matter to draw up the contract. It was necessary to reconcile the interests of two communities

[12] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. XXII.

[13] MS. 603 Bibl. Sainte Gen. Paris, Vol. III, Ch. XIII.

different in spirit, practices and functions, who should have to live in the same house ; and the process of securing an agreement had to be effected by two men, remote from each other by training, habits and mentality, and representing opposite interests. For instance, were the Canons to be separated from the missionaries or were they to share the same apartments, the same dormitory for example ? Le Bon was for the second solution, Vincent for the first. The latter feared lest the free and easy habits of the Canons might prove an obstacle to community observances ; the former hoped that contact with the missionaries would help to improve his Canons. ' I am afraid,' wrote Saint Vincent to Lestocq, ' that in the course of time, difficulties may arise if we are all together in the same dormitory, because we observe silence from after night prayer until after dinner next day, when we have an hour's recreation, and then after recreation until after supper in the evening, when we have another hour's recreation, at the close of which, we again observe silence and do not speak, during that period, save on necessary matters, and even then in a very low tone of voice. . . . Now, there is much reason to fear that these gentlemen would not care to bind themselves to that and, if they did not, we should utterly ruin an essential observance.' Hence he proposed to remove the Canons from the dormitory and to provide each of them with an apartment of his own, furnished, and supplied with the necessary linen.

Another cause of disagreement was the question of assisting at the Divine Office. Saint Vincent quite agreed that the Canons should take precedence, as the Prior requested, but he could not accept the proposal that his missionaries should be bound to chant the office every day and to wear the insignia of Canons, such as the amess[14] and the domino.[15] The first would have interfered with their ministry, and the second might have led to an idea that they proposed to become Canons.

When he had put his views before Nicholas de Lestocq

[14] Fur worn by Canons over the arm.

[15] A small mantle falling from the shoulders to the waist, worn over the rochet by bishops and certain privileged ecclesiastics. (T.)

who was to convey them to the Prior, Saint Vincent ended by saying that his Congregation rather than 'turn away from God's design' on it, would much prefer to remain in its state of poverty. Adrian Le Bon yielded to these arguments, especially to Saint Vincent's determination.

If Saint Vincent had resisted the Prior's entreaties[16] for so long, he did so not only because of the value and importance of a property which he did not consider suitable to the simplicity in which he desired to establish his Congregation, but also because he foresaw the opposition it was bound to meet with from the Order of Saint Genevieve. As soon as Father Faure, the Superior General of the Order in France, heard of the proposed union he did everything in his power to divert Adrian Le Bon from his design, and asked Charles de Beaumanoir de Lavardin, Bishop of Mans, who had the greatest influence over the Prior, to pay him a visit and win him over to the Superior General's side. The prelate had several interviews with Adrian Le Bon in which he reminded him of the laudable efforts of Father Faure and Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld to re-establish regular observance in the Abbey of Saint Genevieve, of the results that had been obtained, and those that might be expected. Furthermore, he pointed out to the Prior how blameworthy it would be, in the circumstances, if a son of Saint Augustine were to bring strangers into his house, instead of his own brethren, and he strongly advised him to leave the Priory to the Order of Saint Augustine of which the Congregation of Saint Victor was a branch.

M. Vincent, however, now that the will of God had been made known to him by the voice of Andrew Duval, was just as determined to effect the union as he had hitherto shown himself reluctant to accept the offer that had been made him. He paid personal visits to Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld and Father Faure to beg them not to oppose the Prior's project. He received a favourable reception from the Cardinal who willingly agreed to his request but he could not overcome Father Faure's opposition.

The latter put forward his views in a long statement which he presented to John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris.

[16] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 137 ff.

De Gondi, instead of discussing the reasons, contented himself with replying that the Bishop of Paris had always nominated the Prior of Saint Lazare and that he was fully determined to preserve his rights. Father Faure then withdrew his claims and sent word to the Prior and M. Vincent to that effect.[17]

The contract was signed on January 7, 1632, in the presence of nine religious of the Priory, of the Saint and of two notaries. The Canons called attention in the preamble to the fact that, for many years, cases of leprosy had been becoming more and more rare, that there was only one leper at the moment in Saint Lazare, and that that was the usual state of affairs. They added that the Congregation of Saint Victor, to which they had formerly belonged had, on December 5, 1625, in Chapter assembled, declared itself dissolved, and that they were consequently free to dispose of the Priory as they pleased. If they gave their preference to the Priests of the Mission it was because, seeing that the revenues of the Priory had been intended for the corporal welfare of lepers, it seemed more ' conformable to the founder's intention ' to apply them to the spiritual assistance of ' poor country people, remote from cities, infected with the leprosy of sin,' and left in ignorance of the principal truths of religion, and that this was a vocation in which the community established by Vincent de Paul had specialised.

Adrian Le Bon reserved to himself, for life, the apartments he occupied, his title of Prior, ' freedom to go to church to assist at divine service and to his right of precedence there as well as in the Chapter and the Refectory,' free disposal of the Rougemont estate and all its dependencies ; he also requested that the full and peaceful possession of the simple Priory of Saint Mary Magdalen of Limouron, in the diocese of Chartres, should be assured to him, and an annuity for life of 2100 livres. It was further stipulated that, on his death, his body should be buried with all the honours accorded to benefactors ; that, every year, on the anniversary of his death, a solemn service should be held in the

[17] *Histoire des chanoines réguliers de la Congrégation de France*, Vol. III, Ch. XIII.

Priory Church for the repose of his soul, and that an epitaph should remind posterity of this obligation.

Next follows a list of the privileges granted to the religious on which an agreement had been reached : freedom to reside in Saint Lazare under the jurisdiction and obedience of the Archbishop of Paris, to occupy rooms looking out on the Saint Denis Road ' and other most suitable quarters,' an annual pension of 300 or 500 livres according as they would or would not remain in the Priory, free medical attention, medicines and nursing, in case of illness, a solemn service when they died, and, at the end of a year, a right to the title of benefactors and founders, for whom two solemn services should be held every year in the Church of Saint Lazare, one on the first free day after the Octave of the Epiphany and the other on Trinity Monday. In virtue of these clauses and others of which the enumeration would be long and wearisome, the Prior of Saint Lazare, conditionally on the Archbishop's approbation, handed over the administration of the Priory to the Holy See ' to be united, annexed and incorporated in perpetuity ' with the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission.[18]

On January 8, the day after the contract had been signed, the Archbishop of Paris accorded his sanction and the Missionaries took possession of Saint Lazare. The prelate, in his official statement, insisted on the formal mention of the fact that he retained all his jurisdiction, authority and right of Visitation, in spiritual and temporal affairs, over the Lazar-house and the Priests of the Mission established in the Priory. These priests should number at least twelve, eight of whom should be constantly occupied, apart from vacation time, in preaching free missions, lasting one or two months, according to the needs, in the diocese of Paris. He also laid on Saint Vincent the obligation of receiving into the Priory, for a period of fifteen days, all such clerics as he should send there who were to be boarded, lodged and prepared for Holy Orders.[19]

The King's Letters Patent[20] were forwarded in the course

[18] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 234 ff.
[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 248.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

of the month, and the Provost and Sheriff of Paris gave their consent on March 24.

The registration of the Letters Patent by Parlement was retarded by the opposition of the Abbot of Saint Victor's, supported by Louis de Mesgrigny, Abbot of Quincy, and the parish priests of the city, faubourgs and suburbs of Paris. The monks of Saint Victor claimed Saint Lazare as the property of their Order ; there was nothing new about these demands as they had already been formulated when the contract was still merely a project. If no attention was paid to their claims the reason was that they themselves, by the Capitular Act of December 5, 1625, had placed their houses under the jurisdiction of the Bishops. Hence Saint Lazare had not been dependant on the Abbey of Saint Victor for nearly seven years. This Act, recalled in the text of the Concordat, had deprived them of all rights over the Priory, but in spite of all that they were resolved to plead. Saint Vincent, who hated lawsuits, was on the point of renouncing possession of Saint Lazare, but was prevented from doing so by Andrew Duval.[21]

During the whole course of these discussions, Saint Vincent showed an admirable detachment. He wrote to a friend : ' You are aware that the monks of Saint Victor are contesting our right to Saint Lazare but you cannot imagine what dutiful submission I have rendered them, in accordance with the Gospel's teaching, although in truth, their claims have no reasonable foundation, as M. Duval has assured me and as all those who are acquainted with the business in hand have told me. The result will be whatever Our Lord pleases and, indeed, He knows that His goodness has rendered me as indifferent on this occasion as I have ever been in any other matter.'[22] On the day on which judgement was delivered, he went to the High Court of Justice and remained prostrate in prayer in the *Sainte Chapelle* beseeching God, not for success, but that His will might be done. Parlement declared that the opposition of the monks of Saint Victor was groundless and, after deciding on August 21, that it would examine the Concordat, gave orders, on

[21] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVIII, p. 278.
[22] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 151.

September 7, that the Letters Patent should be duly registered.[23]

In the course of the lawsuit to which the claims of the monks of Saint Victor had given rise, M. Bignon, the Advocate General and a great friend of the Order of Saint Genevieve, observed defects in the Concordat which would destroy its validity ; he called Father Faure's attention to the fact and advised him to contest the Concordat. Saint Vincent was notified and hastened to avert this new danger. He called on Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld and Father Faure and requested them to renew the promise they had already given to leave him in peaceful possession of the Priory of Saint Lazare. The Abbé de Saint-Cyran also spoke on his behalf to First President Le Jay and to the Advocate General, Bignon. The steps that were then taken produced the desired result.[24]

Saint Vincent, nevertheless, was not yet quite satisfied. In the contract there were two clauses which he disliked, and he made up his mind to have them removed. The first was that which consigned the Priory of Saint Lazare to the Holy See so that it might be united and incorporated by Rome with the Congregation of the Mission. This method, he believed, would take a very long time and would prove to be not only difficult and costly but also useless, seeing that the Lazar-house depended on the Archbishopric of Paris. The second clause was that in which the Archbishop reserved to himself the right of Visitation over Saint Lazare, in temporals and spirituals. Although any further alteration of the Concordat seemed almost impossible after the approbation given by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, yet Saint Vincent did not hesitate. On December 29, 1632, he obtained from the Prior a deed by which the administration of Saint Lazare was referred, not to the Holy See, but to the Archbishop of Paris ' to be granted, transferred and committed to the Priests of the Mission.' The Prior's declaration arrived much too late and all the necessary authorisations

[23] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. XXII, p. 101.

[24] *Histoire des Chanoines réguliers de la Congrégation de France*, Vol. III, Ch. XIII ; Interrogatory of the Abbé de Saint-Cyran (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 38, 105, 106, 114–115).

had to be obtained over again. Saint Vincent was in no way dismayed and, in a short time, obtained the approbation of the Archbishop, the King, the Parlement and the city of Paris.[25]

In the new decree, John Francis de Gondi no longer spoke of submitting the union to the good pleasure of the Holy See, but still maintained his right to make a Visitation as far as temporalities were concerned. Vincent de Paul paid the Archbishop a visit and begged him to renounce it. 'Before we came to Saint Lazare,' he wrote subsequently,[26] 'our predecessors presented an annual statement of accounts to the Bishop of Paris and hence His Grace the Archbishop wished us to do the same; but I earnestly begged him to dispense us from it. As he was unwilling to do so, I told him we would prefer rather to withdraw, and would infallibly have done so, if he had persisted. It is difficult for Missionaries who are constantly coming and going to write out exactly what they spend in the city and in country places, because they incur various unavoidable little expenses which would seem superfluous to an auditor. And besides, people sometimes forget things with the result that, in order to find out the exact state of your account, when you present it, and to strike a balance between what you have paid and received, it becomes necessary to make suppositions, as some Companies do, and such conjectures may cause harm and may even be sins. I told His Grace of Paris so.'

If, amongst the obligations imposed on Saint Vincent by the Concordat of January 7, or arising from it, there were some that weighed heavily on him, there were others that afforded him pleasure. He was delighted to find that there were in the house three or four lunatics who had been entrusted to the Prior by their relatives. During the lawsuit begun by the monks of Saint Victor, he asked himself one day what he should find hardest to bear, in case the Priory were taken from him, and the thought of these poor madmen came up before his mind; the severest trial would be to have to abandon them.[27]

[25] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 267 ff.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 70.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 21.

There was another obligation which he dearly cherished, and that was gratitude to those who had given his Congregation such a magnificent home. He frequently prayed to God to apply to the monks all the fruit of the good deeds performed by his associates; he always fell in with their wishes, when his conscience allowed him to do so, and showed them the greatest respect in all circumstances.[28]

The Sub-Prior, Nicholas Maheut, who died shortly afterwards, a victim of the plague, was assisted in his last moments by Saint Vincent. The contagious character of the disease did not prevent him from showing the Sub-Prior every attention; he constantly visited him, for Saint Vincent was incapable of hesitating between imprudence and ingratitude.[29] Some years later, the Sub-Prior's brother asked him to send a line of recommendation to the Venerable M. Olier, the parish priest of Saint Sulpice.[30] He gladly did so and wrote at the foot of the note: 'Monsieur Olier knows the obligations we are under to serve the relations of those here who had adopted us as their children.'

Saint Vincent in particular paid Adrian Le Bon the most respectful and most delicate attentions. When he returned from a journey, his first visit was to the Blessed Sacrament, and his next to the Prior. He also supped with Adrian Le Bon every Sunday evening and if, in the course of the afternoon, he were called into the city on business, he made all haste to finish it lest the Prior might be kept waiting.[31] In case he heard that any of his community had been wanting in respect towards the Prior, he was deeply grieved, reproached the culprit for his offence, and went to present his excuses to the offended Prior with as much humility as if he were himself partly responsible for the fault.[32] Adrian Le Bon was extremely touchy. During the first six years especially, he suffered a great deal and made others suffer just as much. If anyone reproached him for

[28] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVII, p. 270.

[29] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 185; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, Sect. I, p. 114.

[30] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 572.

[31] Brother Robineau's MS.; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVII, p. 270.

[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XI, p. 105.

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having resigned the Priory, if, on returning from the city, the door were not opened quickly enough ; if he heard a caller had come to see him and gone away because the porter had quite honestly believed he was not at home, he experienced the liveliest regret that he had not retained the administration of the Priory, and said so to all round him.[33] ' It was, indeed, a great pity,' Saint Vincent remarked one day. ' And what could be done ? I had to go and throw myself at his feet and ask pardon for all those who had in any way displeased him, and also acknowledge that every one of us was guilty. He then used to grow calm but, if something else happened, the whole business had to be gone through all over again. I think he must have seen me at his feet more than fifty times. But should I not have done so ? It was quite right ; they are our benefactors who have put the bread into our mouths and to bear with some little annoyance is a very small price to pay for that.'

Apart from such momentary outbursts of temper, Adrian Le Bon was quite content to see his Priory in the hands of the Priests of the Mission. He even completed his generous deed by making them, on January 12, 1633,[34] heirs of all his possessions and, on February 11, 1645,[35] handed them over the farm at Rougemont. On the day of his death, April 9, 1651, Saint Vincent gathered together all the Missionaries in the house round the Prior's bed, and asked them to kneel down and recite the prayers for the dying along with him. When all was over, despite the emotion which rendered him almost speechless, he reminded his confrères of the bonds of gratitude that bound them to the deceased Prior. The solemn funeral service, the epitaph engraved on a marble slab in the Priory Church, and the circular letter which he sent on this occasion to all the houses of the Company testified to his profound gratitude.[36]

Nevertheless, Adrian Le Bon's magnificent gift did not cease to be a burthen to Saint Vincent, as the costs involved

[33] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 638.
[34] Arch. Nat. Y 173, f° 329 V°.
[35] Arch. Nat. S. 6698, documents 1 and 2.
[36] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XLI, p. 189 ff; Bk. III, Ch. XVII, p. 271.

in acquiring the Priory were very considerable. A generous benefactor, Nicholas Vivian, King's Councillor and Master of Accounts, came to his assistance, on January 20, 1632, by handing him over ten thousand livres to establish missions within the jurisdictions of the Parlements of Toulouse, Bordeaux and Provence.[37] This was a large sum of money, but to the costs of acquiring the Priory had to be added those of essential improvements and, above all, the cost of repairs which promised to be very high, considering the tottering state of the walls.

Saint Vincent relied on Divine Providence, which had always come to his assistance, to settle these material difficulties. Thanks to Its help, his Company could now develop easily and without fear of the inconveniences arising from narrow quarters. The house of Saint-Lazare, so empty in 1632, became in a short time a centre of intense religious life whose influence was to make itself felt over the whole of France and even other countries. The clerics of the Collège des Bons-Enfants, accompanied by their professors and the greater number of the priests and lay-brothers, moved into Saint-Lazare. Laymen went there to make retreats, clerics to prepare for Holy Orders, ecclesiastics to take part in the Tuesday conferences, the wealthy to contribute to the battle against want and misery, and Doctors from the Sorbonne to consult on the measures to be taken against heresy. A building situated at the end of the enclosure was transformed into a petty seminary. The asylum admitted, as in the past, penniless lunatics ; the prison, young men sent by their parents ; and the leper-hospital, unoccupied from 1610 to about 1634, had at least one patient in 1635.

Saint Vincent was the life and soul of the house ; he educated, trained, directed and stimulated ; his clear intellect saw everything and his firm will provided for all ; his activity was unceasing and his enterprises developed and multiplied. The day was at hand when a new foundation, that of the Daughters of Charity, was to provide him with a marvellous instrument for assisting the poor and consoling the afflicted.

[37] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 331.

CHAPTER XI

MADEMOISELLE LE GRAS : THE FIRST DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

WHEN Vincent de Paul left the Bons-Enfants to take up his residence in Saint-Lazare, he knew that he was imposing a sacrifice on the devout souls who lived in that district and who were accustomed to go to him for spiritual direction ; no doubt, he consoled them with a promise that he would visit the College as frequently as possible. This separation was particularly severe on a devout widow, *née* Louise de Marillac, who, by her marriage, had become Mademoiselle Le Gras.

The Marillac family derived its name from a hamlet in the neighbourhood of Mauriac,[1] from which it originally came. Some of its members occupied high posts in the diplomatic service, the Church, the Judicature and the Army. Charles de Marillac, Bishop of Vannes, and subsequently Bishop of Vienne, was sent as Ambassador to Constantinople ; his brother Bernard, a Friar Minor, became Bishop of Rennes ; one of their nephews, Michael, became Keeper of the Seals and another, Louis, a Marshal of France. The eldest brother of the two last, who was also called Louis, did not reach such exalted positions ; his sole claim to glory lies in the fact that his daughter became a collaborator of Saint Vincent's in founding the Daughters of Charity. Lord of the Manor of Villiers-Adam, then co-Lord of the Manor of Ferrières en Brie,[2] before becoming Lord of Farainvilliers, he bore the title, in 1587, of ' ensign of a Company of the King's men-at-arms.'[3] He was then

[1] P. de Vaissière, *L'affaire du maréchal de Marillac*, Paris, 1924, p. 14.

[2] Arch. Nat. Y. 130, f° 32 v° ; Y. 134, f° 304.

[3] Arch. Nat. Y. 130, f° 32 v°. ' *Ordonnances des roi* ' : ' A name given to troops that did not form part of a regiment, men-at-arms, light cavalry, etc.'

residing at Ferrières with his wife, Martha de la Rosière, who died shortly afterwards, without leaving any children.[4]

Louise was born on August 12, 1591. Her first biographer, Gobillon,[5] states that her mother was Margaret Camus, but it is hard to follow him on this point for this name is wanting in all the genealogies of the family, even from those drawn up at the instance of her two uncles and controlled by the official genealogists or prepared for the use of the magistrates of the Council and of the Parlement. What can be stated with certainty is that on January 12, 1595, when Louise was between the age of three and four, she had a stepmother in the person of Antoinette Le Camus, aunt of the Bishop of Belley and widow of Louis Thiboust, by whom she had four children, three sons and one daughter ;[6] and that Innocente, the future wife of John d'Apremont,[7] Lord of Vendy, was born of this second marriage. Gobillon says that she was a Parisian, which is quite possible, but it should be noted that her father was still residing at Ferrières on December 5, 1591, and only settled in the capital some time between 1592 and 1594.[8] His frequent changes of residence would seem to indicate a restless disposition ; we find him in the Rue Antoine on January 2, 1595 ; ten days later in the Rue des Fauconniers ; in the Rue de Jouy in 1597 ; back in the Rue Antoine between 1597 and 1600 ; in the Rue Saint André des Arts, in May, 1601 ; in the parish of Saint Gervais, at

[4] Bibl. Nat. P.o. 1855 ; Doss. bleus 428 ; Chérin, 130 ; MS. fr. 20, 229 and 20, 235 ; Arch. Nat. MM 821.

[5] *La vie de Mademoiselle Le Gras*, Paris, 1676, p. 6. The birth of Louise de Marillac is involved in some obscurity. Whoever wishes to study the question fully, should not neglect the elements of a solution provided by the Arch. Nat. in sections Y. 134, f° 190 v° ; Y. 140, f° 491 v° ; Y. 187 f° 234 ; the Bibl. Nat., Dossier bleu 428, 11427, f° 8 v°, and f° 53–54 ; fr. 22,445, f° 226 ; d'Hozier 75, Camus, f° 13 ; p.o., Marillac, 316 ; and the genealogies in the Titles section.

[6] Bibl. Nat., MS. f.f. 32, 588, pp. 127, 141, 821 ; Carrés d'Hozier 598 ; Doss. bleu 631 ; Nouveau d'Hozier 313 ; Arch. Nat. Y. 135, f° 264 v° ; Y. 156. f° 139 ; Y. 157, f° 90 ; Y. 158, f° 210 v° ; Y. 159, f° 167 v° ; Y. 126, f° 10, 38 v°, 86, 246 ; Y. 180, f° 111 v°, 118 v°.

[7] Bibl. Nat. fr. 32,838, p. 115.

[8] Arch. Nat. Y. 132, f° 431, v°.

the end of the same year ; in the Rue d'Arcis, in 1602 ; and that probably does not exhaust the list.[9]

We do not know where Louise spent her early years especially from the time when her stepmother and four children took up their residence with her father. When she grew a little older, he sent her as a pupil to the Royal monastery of Saint Denis at Poissy, conducted by Dominican nuns, of whom the Prioress was Joan de Gondi, a sister of the Bishop of Paris. He may have chosen this school for Louise because one of the nuns was a cousin of his own, also called Louise de Marillac, and a woman of remarkable virtue, for Hilarion de la Coste has given her a place in his *Lives of ladies illustrious for their piety and learning* ; and of exceptional literary tastes, since she composed hymns, *Meditations for all the Feasts of the year*, a *Dialogue between two virgins on the recreations of nuns*, and a number of books of verse, as well as a translation of the *Office of a Virgin*, the *Penitential Psalms* and a *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*.[10]

' Some time afterwards,' says Gobillon,[11] without going into further details, her father removed her from school, and placed her in a much more modest establishment in Paris so that she might learn there under the guidance of a ' skilful and virtuous mistress ' all that a young lady of her rank was required to know. There was a striking contrast between her new school and the monastery at Poissy, for here they lived very simply and Louise, seeing the difficulties in which the head mistress was placed, accepted work from outside and gave her the proceeds. She had also sufficient influence over her companions to induce them to follow her example. She cut firewood and performed other manual work usually done by domestic servants.

To manual labour was added the cultivation of the mind. Louise had a great taste for painting, in which she took lessons and of which she was so fond that she continued to

[9] Bibl. Nat. P.o. 60, 68, 70, 71, 76, 80, 90 ; Cabinet d'Hozier 76, f° 13 ; Arch. Nat. Y. 130 f° 32 v° ; Y. 134, f° 104 v°, 190 v° 304.

[10] P. Hilarion de Coste, *Les éloges et vies des reynes, princesses, dames et demoiselles illustrès en piété, courage et doctrine*, Paris, 1647, 2 vols. oct. Vol. II, p. 106.

[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

cultivate it, in the midst of all her weighty occupations as a Superioress, right up to the last years of her life. She confined her choice of subjects to those of a religious nature : some of her artistic productions went to her own family ;[12] others remained in her community ; there were some of her works in Saint-Lazare and the Foundling Hospital, but few of them are now in existence. A few small water-colours, characterised by a simple freshness and grace are extant and have been attributed to her. One represents a pleasant landscape in which a young girl is seated, engaged in writing the name of Jesus ; the words, ' This is the name of Him I love,' are inscribed around the medallion. Another represents a shepherd surrounded by his sheep ; he holds one of them on his knees so that it may quench its thirst at the wound in his side, whilst others drink of the blood that has fallen from the wounds made in his feet by the nails. At the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity, there is still shown a large picture of the Sacred Heart, at the foot of which is inscribed : ' This picture was painted by Mlle Le Gras, our most honoured Mother and Foundress.' The Saviour's eyes are closed, His arms extended, the head inclined to the right, and the hands and feet pierced ; over the breast, there is a heart but without the now customary flames and crown of thorns. A sort of cloak envelops the body, and forms an unpleasant-looking boss or bulge behind the right shoulder, beyond which it extends considerably. An examination of the picture reveals that the original canvas wants twenty-five centimetres on each side ; it was too small for the frame intended, and hence had to be enlarged. It was very likely on this occasion that the inscription at the foot was added.

Up to 1891 the picture was hung in the Chapel of the Artisans, which is separated from, but not independent of, the Cathedral of Cahors.[13] We cannot linger here to enquire whether the rays from the heart did or did not form part of the original painting, or whether the inscription is correct or incorrect ; we shall only observe that nowhere,

[12] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[13] *Louise de Marillac et le Sacré-Coeur*, in the *Petites Annales de Saint Vincent de Paul*, 1900, p. 161.

in her devotional writings, letters or exercises of piety which she bequeathed to her Daughters, is there any trace of devotion to the Sacred Heart. We may also state that the Mother-House of the Priests of the Mission possesses a similar picture ; the same representation of the Saviour, with the exception of a few trivial details, the same inscription with the same mistake in spelling, but without a heart.

Louise was an apt scholar ; she loved reading and study, and was not repelled by those of an abstract nature. Her father, Gobillon states,[14] taught her ' philosophy to train her reasoning powers and to supply her with an entrance into more elevated sciences.' He used to converse with her frequently, Gobillon adds, that he might enjoy the wisdom of her reflections and the extent of her knowledge. If this were so, the child's precocity is remarkable, for she was only thirteen years old when her father died, on July 25, 1604.[15] Although the family possessions went to Innocente, Louise was not forgotten in the will,[16] and Gobillon states that the following words refer to her :[17] ' She has been my greatest consolation in this life ; she was given to me by God to comfort my soul in the afflictions of life.' The uncertainty that exists about this period of her life does not permit us to state where she was in 1604, or what happened to her after she had lost her father. She may, perhaps, have still been at school, and remained there for some years longer.

The thought of how she was to live in the future soon preoccupied her mind. Whilst her father was still alive, her first biographer declares,[18] she was thinking of becoming a nun and was attracted to the Capuchin Order. These nuns, who were better known in Paris as Daughters of the Paisson, possessed at this time a monastery in the Rue Saint Honoré, presented to them by the Duchess of Mercoeur. This, she thought, was the life to which God was calling her, and she even took a vow to serve God there all her life.[19] Her vocation

[14] *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

[15] The date given by all the genealogies in the section for Titles.

[16] Bibl. Nat. P.o., Marillac, doc. 316.

[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

[18] *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

[19] *Pensées de Louise de Marillac*, p. 6.

was not doubtful if only moral qualities had to be considered, but the soul does not enter the cloister alone ; it has to take the body with it, and the latter must be able to endure the austerities of convent life. Father Honoré de Champigny, Provincial of the Capuchin Fathers, from 1612 to 1621, did not think she was strong enough. This was a cruel disappointment to Louise, but her uncle, Michael de Marillac, helped her to support it and, very probably, took her to live with him.

This eminent magistrate, who had first been Councillor to the Parlement, then Master of Requests, Councillor of State, Minister of Finance and finally, Keeper of the Seals (1626)[20] had, with Cardinal de Bérulle, helped to introduce the Carmelite nuns into France. He assisted at Mass every day, went to Holy Communion several times a week, slept on the bare ground and fasted frequently. One of his sons, Octavian, became a Capuchin and was later Bishop of Saint Malo ; one of his daughters, Valentine, entered the Carmelite monastery of Pontoise and lived there the life of a saint, under the name of Mary of the Blessed Sacrament.

It was probably on the advice of her uncle that Louise married, on February 5, 1613, in the Church of Saint Gervase, Anthony Le Gras, Esquire, Chief Secretary to the Queen Regent, Marie de Medicis, and originally from Montferrand in Auvergne,[21] ' a man of good life, God-fearing and careful to keep himself from all reproach,'[22] who was also charitable to the poor, in this following the example of his ancestors, one of whom had established the hospital at Puy. She now became known as *Mademoiselle* not *Madame* Le Gras, as the latter title was then reserved exclusively for the wives of Knights or for those who possessed important seignories. The desire of the young couple for a child was fulfilled by the birth of Michael Anthony, on October 18, 1613 and, on the following day, he was baptised, the godparents being René de Marillac, Councillor of the King in his Great Council, and Valence de Marillac, the wife of

[20] Some biographers of Mlle Le Gras state that he was Chancellor. This is not correct.

[21] It now forms part of the town of Clermont-Ferrand.

[22] Mlle Le Gras' will.

M. d'Attichy, Superintendent of the Finances of the King and of the Queen-Mother.

The Le Gras were then living in the parish of Saint Merry. Before 1623 they had left it, and taken up house in the parish of Saint Saviour, in the Rue Courteau-Villain, which now forms that part of the Rue Montmorency stretching from the Rue Beaubourg to the Rue du Temple. Eighteen thousand livres were expended on extending and repairing their new home to which they also added a tower. Anthony, who was kept busily employed at Court, left all domestic affairs in the hands of his wife who looked after her son, superintended the servants, showed herself exacting as far as good order and cleanliness were concerned, and was desirous that God should be fittingly honoured in her home. Two of Anthony's clerks, moved by the example under their eyes, became religious ; one of them entering the Order of Saint Francis of Paula, and the other the Benedictines of Saint Maur.

Her leisure hours belonged to the poor. One of the maids subsequently testified that serving the poor was a pleasure to her ; she brought them preserves, biscuits and other dainties, combed their hair, cleaned those who were verminous and mangy, and buried the dead. She frequently visited those who were sick in hospital, and always had a kind and edifying word as well as some little gift for the patients. Her example was followed by some other ladies of her locality, and some who then rivalled her in the exercise of charity may quite possibly have been noble ladies such as Madame de Bragelone and Madame Bailleul, who afterwards collaborated with her, under the guidance of Saint Vincent.

Her charity towards the poor formed a sharp contrast with her harshness towards herself. Her body was her only enemy, and she employed hair-shirts, hair-cloths, disciplines, fasts and night-watches to bring it into subjection. She banished every desire to dress beautifully and attractively, and wore plain, simple, modest clothes. She had no taste whatever for what are called worldly distractions and felt in need of the serious thoughts produced by religion. Her usual books were *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Spiritual Combat*, and the writings of Saint Francis de Sales and of

Louis of Granada. She preferred prayer and spiritual retreats to worldly amusements, and on public festivals and holidays, such as the Carnival, she spent the day with the Capuchin nuns, uniting herself more closely to God in prayer.

This passion for spiritual things needed control, for if she had been left to herself she would easily have overstepped the bounds. Moreover, in the depths of her soul lurked a profound melancholy, a sort of permanent uneasiness accompanied by scruples and doubts which frequently troubled and sometimes tormented her. Her faults and failings assumed exaggerated proportions in her eyes, and she was clearly in need of firm and sure spiritual guidance. She had the good fortune to meet Saint Francis de Sales, and to have three wise councillors in succession : a layman, a bishop and a priest ; Michael de Marillac, John Camus and Saint Vincent de Paul. The Bishop of Geneva became acquainted with Mlle Le Gras whilst he was residing in Paris for some months in 1618–1619. Having learned that she was ill, he honoured her with his visits, and we may easily guess the nature of her interviews with him. She revealed the secrets of her heart, told him of her fears, asked his advice and, at the voice of the holy prelate, so full of charm and unction, felt calm and peace return to her soul. Francis de Sales departed, but Michael de Marillac remained. Although a layman, the devout magistrate possessed a combination of qualities which rendered him an excellent spiritual guide. Well versed in the science of the saints, nourished at the best sources of spiritual doctrine, a saint himself and a keen and penetrating psychologist to boot, he spoke as Saint Francis de Sales had spoken and as Saint Vincent de Paul was to speak later. We have five of his letters to his niece.[23] The earliest is dated, June 1, 1619. ' Be always most courageous ' he wrote ' in seeking for God and in conforming yourself entirely to whatsoever He pleases, and walk with humility and confidence in God.' Humility, confidence, conformity with the Divine Will—these three recommendations come ceaselessly from his pen, and nothing

[23] The originals are preserved in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity.

was better suited to his devout niece's spiritual state. 'Humble yourself before God,' he wrote on September 1, 'for the failings you may have committed in submitting your soul in His sight, and await from Him all the graces of which you stand in need. Do not strive to force God to grant you more graces than He wishes to give. Remain humble and tranquil at the sight of your own faults for faults are our inheritance and nothing else is to be expected from us.'

We must believe that she stood in need of these lessons, because, in one form or another, they are to be found in every letter. 'God,' he wrote on another occasion, 'is not bound by our designs and proposals, and those find Him everywhere who seek Him in the way He wishes to communicate Himself, and not in that which they imagine is useful and profitable to themselves, for often the usefulness thus imagined in our minds is merely dictated by our own feelings. . . . The poor soul that knows itself . . . is satisfied with submitting itself to God and has no desire to prescribe the way in which He should guide it. It welcomes what comes, uses all things with humility, gratitude and profit, ever remains poor in itself and is satisfied with doing the best it can, without being worried by its deficiencies ; for that is not in its power.'

Mlle Le Gras, in examining her conscience, observed defects and faults in her soul which clearly revealed to her how false was the good opinion she entertained of herself and, in order to escape from this illusion, it seemed to her that the best way was never to lose sight of her own wretchedness. It was an excellent remedy, no doubt, but insufficient if not supported by the conviction that the grace of God was necessary to secure its efficaciousness. If it were unaccompanied by confidence in God, it was simply pride under another form. Michel de Marillac pointed this out to her. 'To wish to acquire such a state of soul by one's own efforts is an act of power and capacity of which the soul does not think itself incapable, since it wishes to effect it . . . to force oneself to do something presupposes that one has a belief in one's own power to do it.' That is to have far too high an opinion of oneself. God should be thought of first ; we

should pray to Him ; expect all things from Him and look upon ourselves as His instruments. ' The more the soul that is faithful to God strips itself of its own anxieties and activities, the more it will clearly see what should be done and what left undone. Let its practice be to be with God ; let it seek and love Jesus Christ ; let it bind itself to Him ; let it honour His life, works and sufferings ! As for all the rest, the mere fidelity of the soul that adheres to God, Who is wanting in none of those things of which the soul is aware or desires, will supply it with plenty of opportunities.'

The letters of Michel de Marillac, whilst permitting us to penetrate a little into the inner life of Mlle Le Gras at this period, also supply us with some details on family matters. The death of Octavian d'Attichy, followed three years later by that of his wife, Valence de Marillac, left their seven children far too young to manage the large property bequeathed them at Attichy, near Pontoise. Michel, who had been appointed their guardian, seems to have entrusted his duties to Anthony Le Gras who discharged them with boundless devotion and disinterestedness. His wife could afterwards write of him that ' he had lavished both his time and his health ' on the d'Attichy's affairs[24] and ' entirely neglected his own,' but she does not say that she herself was equally solicitous. She consulted her uncle about the felling, sale and replanting of trees on the d'Attichy property, and it was she who took little Magdalen to school at the Ursuline convent.

The orphans were not always sufficiently grateful to their benefactors and one of them so far forgot himself as to write an insolent letter to his aunt. As soon as Michel de Marillac heard of this, he was deeply grieved, scolded the culprit and asked for his forgiveness. ' I beseech both of you to excuse him. Age and experience will moderate his temperament, for he is well-born and we must believe that it was some other passion that aroused him. . . . Incidents such as this take place with those who allow themselves too much liberty because of their relationship. I will not fail to speak to him about it, when I see him.' The culprit was either Achilles, who became a Jesuit, or Louis, who became a monk of the

[24] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 345.

JEAN-PIERRE CAMUS, BISHOP OF BELLEY

Order of Saint Francis of Paula and was subsequently Bishop of Riez and then of Autun. Their brother, Anthony, afterwards Marquis d'Attichy, died young, slain in a fight, in 1637, when he was barely twenty-five years old. They had four sisters : Genevieve, who became the Duchess of Astri ; Anne, Countess of Maure ; Henrietta, who joined the Carmelites, and the youngest of all, Magdalen, who became an Ursuline nun.

The insolence of a young d'Attichy was a very slight trial when compared with those she was so soon to meet with, for, after ten years of married life, her husband's health began to fail and the most devoted care and attention did not produce any improvement. The question came up before her mind : ' For what does God intend to punish me ? ' and the vow she had made to become a Franciscan nun rose up in her memory. Despite this promise, she had married ; God was punishing her because she had broken her solemn word, and there was no need to look for any other explanation of her husband's sufferings. She went to Camus, the Bishop of Belley, who was then in Paris, and confided her troubles to him. He told her : ' Think no more about the past ; the sacred bonds of matrimony bind you just now ; all that you can do, and I give you permission to do it, is to make a vow that you will remain a widow in case M. Le Gras dies before you.' She was quite pleased with the Bishop's solution of her difficulty, and made this solemn promise, on May 4, 1623, the Feast of Saint Monica, probably in presence of the prelate, whilst he was celebrating Mass.

Camus also recommended her to read the Holy Scriptures assuring her that in them she would find consolation and inspiration and, in order to make it easier for her to obtain the Archbishop's permission, gave her the following note, dated May 8, 1623 : ' I believe that the authorities may permit, not only without danger, but even with utility, M. Le Gras and Mlle his wife to read the Holy Bible in French, in the translation made by the theologians of Louvain.'

Peace was restored, but not for long. On May 25, Ascension Thursday, instead of rejoicing with the faithful, she felt darkness closing in on her, and this was followed

by a profound depression. It was useless for her to meditate ; the same idea still haunted her. The vow she had taken forbade marriage, and hence she should separate from her husband ; there were no grounds for hesitation. If her spiritual guide had forbidden her, it was simply because his duty compelled him to do so. As she grew more and more troubled, it occurred to her that, as her director was about to leave Paris for a long period, she should do without any spiritual guide ; she asked herself did God really exist, and was the soul really immortal. She seemed like a dismasted ship, buffeted by storms, drifting at the mercy of the waves over an immense ocean, unable to make a course and threatened with utter destruction.[25] In her despair, she wrote to Michel de Marillac, then at Fontainebleau, and though we have not the letter, we may well imagine it was a long cry of distress. This was not, perhaps, the first time he had received confidences of such a nature from his niece ; at any rate, he replied, on May 28, with what might have been expected from him. Do not reason about your doubts ; you will only entangle yourself in them still more deeply, but 'support this state of uncertainty in peace.' It would be folly to abandon your spiritual guide just at the very moment you are in greatest need of him ; you might just as well give up God Himself Whose representative he is. 'One must always be open with God, without any self-justification, and find one's stability in the peace one possesses in this state of uncertainty, whilst relying on nothing whatever but the mercy of God.' If we have not confidence in Him, then 'I know not where one can find assurance in this world ; whoever finds it apart from God is, in my opinion, well worthy of compassion.' Before concluding, he added a few words on reading the Bible : 'As to the permission you possess, or the note in support of your application, that is a matter which should be settled by word of mouth, and I do not know what is the attitude of our new Archbishop in this matter.[26] When I shall be in Paris, I will most gladly support you to the best of my ability.'

[25] Mlle Le Gras' own account ; the original is preserved in the Mother-House of the Priests of the Mission.

[26] John Francis de Gondi, first Archbishop of Paris.

His excellent advice was wasted. It would have needed Saint Francis de Sales, who was then dead, to rescue the tormented soul of Mlle Le Gras from the darkness in which she was wandering. As she could no longer consult him, she implored his assistance and, after ten days of incredible agony, light returned to her soul.

'On Whit-Sunday,' she wrote, 'whilst hearing Mass or praying in the church, my mind was enlightened all in a moment.' The church, according to Gobillon, was that of Saint Nicholas in the Fields.[27] Whilst she prayed, she heard a voice within her telling her to remain with her husband, and that a time would come when she would belong to a community vowed to the service of the poor and would, like its other members, bind herself to God by the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She saw in spirit a house out of which Sisters were coming and after a time returning. Such a sight astonished her for in those days all women bound by the three vows were religious and as such lived within the cloister. At the same time, she received an assurance that God would send her a director, and she goes on to say that : 'He let me see him then, as it seems to me, and I felt a reluctance to accept him ; however, I acquiesced.' A year and a half went by before she made her first confession to Saint Vincent de Paul, to whom she here refers. As she was firmly persuaded that this revelation about the future was from God, her doubts about the existence of the Supreme Being vanished and, as a result, her belief in the immortality of the soul was strengthened. In her joy at living once more in the light, her thoughts went back to Saint Francis de Sales who had, as she believed, obtained this great favour for her. She never forgot what she owed, on this occasion, to the great Bishop of Geneva, and her confidence in him grew stronger and stronger.

After this violent storm had passed away, another cross still remained with her, a heavy cross, and one that grew heavier day by day. The disease from which Anthony Le Gras suffered was incurable, but its progress was very slow and of a nature to render the victim morose and peevish. She bore with his fits of impatience and caprices,

[27] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

and nursed him day and night with unwearying care and devotion. In the course of the Autumn, there was a violent crisis which, however, did not prove fatal. Whilst she was rejoicing in her husband's temporary recovery and also at the news of the approaching arrival of the Bishop of Belley, the latter sent word that he was unable to come. 'Oh ! my dearest Sister,' he wrote, 'what a blow to your heart ! Your beloved husband has been on the point of death and your poor Father, who is now writing to you, cannot go to Paris this winter ! Do not grieve over yourself, my dearest daughter, but grieve over me, separated from my home and friends, and relegated to a place of exile that has nothing amiable about it except the most lovable will of Him Who renders all things amiable. . . . So I must leave Paris alone, and those two foremost pulpits in Paris, in which, to tell the truth, I am not worthy to appear, and this because it so pleases Him Whose will is our life. O Jesus ! Soul of our souls, preserve my dear daughter to me ; bless her with Thy gracious hand, her and her husband, child and house ; pour forth Thy consolations on this dear soul, of which, as Thou knowest, I think so highly since I am, in Thee, her most humble brother and friend.'

The consolations which the Bishop hoped and prayed for were slow in coming. M. Le Gras recovered from one attack only to fall into another and little Michel, who was then between ten and eleven years old, was sluggish, lazy, vague and not over-intelligent. Mlle Le Gras also suffered from the fact that she was unable to find a priest in Paris who could see clearly into her soul, and give her suitable spiritual direction.

It was at the end of 1624, or early in 1625, that she confided, for the first time, the secrets of her conscience to Vincent de Paul.[28] Gobillon says that she did so on the advice of Camus. It is almost certain that before she came to a decision she had first met and realised the worth of Vincent de Paul. They both lived in the parish of Saint Saviour's, quite close to each other, and one may reasonably suppose that they had met, at least in the parish church, where the holy priest's air of devout recollection cannot have

[28] *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

failed to impress her whilst she prayed. Moreover, Mlle Le Gras used to visit the Visitation Convent of which Saint Vincent was Superior and she was a particular friend of the Superioress, Mother Catharine de Beaumont. It would not be surprising, therefore, if she had been the first to take steps to meet Saint Vincent and, if this is so, then Camus simply intervened to give his approval to her choice, or to help her to obtain Vincent's consent because, attracted as he was to giving country missions, he hesitated to act as spiritual guide to individuals. It was in this fashion then that relations were established between those two great servants of God, relations which Death alone was to sever after thirty-five years of fruitful collaboration in good works.

The first good impressions were strengthened as time went by ; and when Mlle Le Gras saw that she was fully understood, her ideas anticipated, and that she was being really directed, she thanked God from the bottom of her heart. Saint Vincent's spiritual guidance became a necessity to her, and his absences from Paris hard to endure. When she learned from his own lips, in the month of June, that he was going to Marseilles to break the news of his wife's death to the General of the Galleys, she was quite upset and wrote to the Bishop of Belley to say so. She received this reply : ' Forgive me, dearest Sister, for telling you that you attach yourself a little too much to those who guide you, and rely too much on them. Here is M. Vincent in eclipse, and Mlle Le Gras quite upset and disconcerted. You should see God in your guides and directors and see them in God ; but sometimes one should look to God alone, Who, without man or the pool of Probatica, can cure our paralysis. . . . I do not care to see these little weaknesses and shadows in Mlle Le Gras whose spirit seems to me to be so clear and strong.'

The ' little shadows ' were not dispelled by the prelate's good advice. She saw the time when she made her annual retreat drawing near and was frightened, for she could not see how it could be of any assistance to her soul, whilst her director was absent. Camus advised her to put herself under the direction of an Oratorian, Father Ménard, of a Carmelite nun, Mother Magdalen of Saint Joseph, or of a Visitation nun, Mother de Beaumont, but it is probable that she had

not to make a choice for, it would seem, Saint Vincent returned sooner than she had anticipated. The death of Madame de Gondi was an additional trial for Mlle Le Gras inasmuch as Vincent de Paul, who was now his own master, left the Rue Pavée to reside in another part of the city, on the other bank of the river, in the Collège des Bons-Enfants, the Mother-House of his Congregation. In future, she would have to traverse a great part of the city to see him, just at the moment when the state of her husband's health imperiously demanded her presence at home.

Two or three weeks after All Saints' Day, Anthony Le Gras had an attack of high fever which threatened his reason and, when the crisis was past, he made a promise to serve God faithfully for the rest of his days, which, indeed, were passed in a state of constant suffering and continual prayer. The fearful pains that racked all his limbs did not allow him a moment's repose, not even at night, but his soul triumphed over the body, his patience extorted the admiration of all who approached him and he scarcely ever let his mind wander away from the thought of Jesus on the Cross whom he took as his model. His wife never ceased to hope, despite the serious nature of the disease, for she was well aware that supernatural means frequently produce results when all medical resources have failed. She wrote in various directions asking for prayers for the invalid from persons who she knew were pleasing to God. The Bishop of Belley replied : ' Behold your cross, and why should I be disturbed at seeing it on the shoulder of a daughter of the Cross ? You are not in need either of skill, advice, books or intelligence to bear it well ; may God grant that you may not be lacking in courage.' Mother de Beaumont's desire too, was that she might have courage, based on confidence in God. ' I hope,' she wrote, ' that the hand which has inflicted the blow will heal you. O ! be meek and courageous, and bear patiently what has been given you with so much love. Do you imagine that God makes you suffer for any other motive than that you may merit ? One must lay aside all reasoning. It is not for you to know the reason why, but to be wholly submissive to God's good pleasure. Be so, then, my dear daughter, and do not reflect too much over what you see and suffer, but

rather unite your will with that of the Heavenly Father, to do and to suffer all that He may please ; and, after that, do all you can for the health of your dear husband, leaving the outcome to the good pleasure of God.'[29] We do not know what was Saint Vincent's reply, as he was absent from Paris just then but the following sentence from Mother de Beaumont's letter : ' I have no news whatever about M. Vincent,' would seem to indicate that Mlle Le Gras was surprised at his silence.

A jubilee year was beginning, and Louise complied with all the conditions for gaining the Indulgence ; instead of making her usual confession, she preferred to make a general one as, in her case, a tendency to go back on the past was a habit, nay, even an abuse. She thought she would thereby acquire peace of soul, but Camus reproached her gently for this tendency in the following words : ' You are always in favour of general confessions, when Jubilees come round. . . . But a Jubilee is not intended for that purpose but rather that we should rejoice in God, Our Saviour, and cry aloud : *Jubilemus Deo, salutari nostro.*'

In the meantime, Anthony Le Gras' illness was running its course. Violent hæmorrhages supervened and these naturally hastened his end. He died during the night of December 21, 1625, after a seventh attack of hæmorrhage. His wife was by his side, bathed in tears, and received his last sigh after she had heard him say, and she never forgot the words : ' Pray to God for me ; I can do so no longer.' It was a heavy blow to the poor widow for she had always found, in the soul of him whom she had now lost, an echo of the feelings that animated her own in regard to religion. ' For a long time back,' she wrote, ' he no longer had any affection for things that might lead to mortal sin, and he had a great desire to live devoutly,' and she adds, a little further on, that he was accustomed to recite the office of Compline every day. As soon as morning dawned, Mlle Le Gras went to her parish church, saw the parish priest, M. Hollandre, went to Confession and received Holy Communion for the repose of the soul of him whom she mourned. She received

[29] The original letter is in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity.

many messages of sympathy but did not receive the Bishop of Belley's condolences until the month of March. 'At last, my dearest sister,' he wrote, 'the Saviour of our souls, after having taken your spouse to His bosom, has now placed Himself in yours. O heavenly Spouse, be for ever the Spouse of my sister, who chose you to be so, when her heart was yet divided ; but remain upon her breast, O Lord, like a bundle of myrrh, soft to the touch but bitter to the taste, and grant her sweet consolations in the unavoidable sorrows of her widowhood. O, my dearest friend, this is the time when the Cross must be clasped and pressed close to the heart, since you have now no other support upon earth ; now is the time for you to tell God that He must remember his word. And what is that word, my dearest daughter ? That He will be a father to the orphan and a judge to the widow ; a judge, my dearest sister, to defend her cause and judge her adversaries. Now is the time when we shall see if you love God as you should, since He has taken away from you him whom you loved so dearly.' The Bishop's words of hope and encouragement arrived at an opportune moment, for Louise had fallen back into her usual state of worry and anxiety. Accordingly he again wrote to her : 'I do not know why your spirit is troubled and believes that it is in darkness and abandonment. For what reason ? You are no longer divided. You now belong entirely to your heavenly Spouse, having no longer an earthly one. You determined long ago to have no other spouse, and now that He has broken your bonds and when you should offer Him a sacrifice of praise, you are astonished. Oh ! daughter of little faith, what do you fear ? You must be told what Our Lord said to Mary at the resurrection of Lazarus : if you had more confidence, you would see the glory of God upon you.'

She experienced these crises of weakness and discouragement more especially when Saint Vincent was away from Paris and his return protracted. In order that she might approach him more easily when he was in the city, she left her home in the Rue Courteau-Villain, in 1626, and went to reside in the Rue Saint-Victor, close to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. Her son was still with her and as he was now thirteen years old, it was time to think of his future. In the

course of the following year she placed him in Adrian Bourdoise's seminary where, at that time, the future grammarian of Port-Royal, Claude Lancelot, was being educated.

The death of her husband and separation from her son left her more leisure, which she devoted to pious exercises and good works. Her rule of life, written in her own hand, enables us to follow her hour by hour in those far-off days of her earthly existence. This precious document bears no date, but seems to have been written in 1628 ;[30] it is merely a plan, and was submitted for the approval of Saint Vincent who certainly altered some details, though he let the substance stand.

' In the name of God, may I live in this way, if I am permitted ! '

' May the desire for holy poverty be ever in my heart so that, freed from all things, I may follow Jesus Christ and serve my neighbour in all humility and meekness, living all my life in obedience and chastity, honouring the poverty of Jesus Christ, which He so perfectly practised.' Poverty, chastity and obedience are the substance of the three vows of religion and Mlle Le Gras waited with some impatience, which Saint Vincent moderated, for the moment when she could embrace a mode of life in which she could fully conform to the obligations she had assumed on May 4, 1623, and renewed on each anniversary of that day. The rule of life goes on : ' May my first thought, after my night's repose, be of God, making acts of adoration, gratitude and abandonment of my will to His most Holy Will, bearing ever in mind my lowliness and powerlessness ; I will invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit, in Whom I shall have the greatest confidence for the accomplishment in me of His most Holy Will, which shall be the sole desire of my heart.' The words ' confidence ' and ' accomplishment of the most Holy Will of God ' were very familiar to Louise as she had so frequently heard them on the lips of her directors. If we turn over the pages of the printed collection of letters addressed to her by Saint Vincent we shall not have to go far to find them, for they may be seen in a letter written on October 30, 1626, which comes first in

[30] The original is in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity.

the order of time. He had gone to give a mission in a small hamlet in the Department of the Marne and, as he had not time to let her know before leaving Paris, he sent her his excuses : ' Our Lord, if He so pleases, will turn this little mortification to good, and will constitute Himself your director ; yes, He will certainly do so and in such a manner as to enable you to see that it is Himself. So then, my dear daughter, be humble, full of submission and confidence, and always wait in patience for the manifestation of His Holy Will.'[31]

Whilst Mlle Le Gras was waiting for further enlightenment as to her vocation, she lived in the world like a nun. She rose at six o'clock from All Saints' Day to Easter, and at half-past five from Easter to All Saints. Then came vocal and mental prayer, which lasted from three-quarters of an hour to an hour, on the Gospel, Epistle and the life of the saint of the day. Then came Prime and Terce of the Office of Our Lady, ' quietly and preserving the feelings experienced during mental prayer. Then, if there are any household orders to be given, I shall arrange about them whilst dressing.'[32] She kept a maid, and as she needed not only a capable but also a very devout one, it was difficult to fill the post, whenever a vacancy occurred. Saint Vincent was then consulted and assisted her in the search. He had to choose, on June 5, 1627, between a girl twenty-eight years old and another twenty-two ; the former from Burgundy and the latter from Aubervillers.[33] The girl selected remained with Louise for four years and, in 1631, her place had to be filled. ' As for the person you wish to discharge,' he wrote,[34] ' there is no difficulty about providing one according to your wishes, but the girl of whom you spoke to me would not suit, at least I think not. You need an entirely new and devout maid who will respect and fear you, or one who has the same ideas as yourself. Ask for such a one from God.' The presence of a maid relieved Mlle Le Gras of a multitude of

[31] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 26.
[32] *Rule of Life*. (The original is in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity.)
[33] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 29.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

material cares, and she was thus enabled to satisfy her taste for exercises of devotion.

At half-past eight o'clock in summer and at nine in winter she went to Church to hear Mass, 'sometimes,' she remarks, 'with the Church's intention alone, and sometimes I make use of the points in *Philothea* or in another book called *Dosithea* for meditation during Mass.' She used to go either to her parish church of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet or to the College Chapel of the Bons-Enfants, which was closer to her lodgings and had the additional attraction of the presence of Saint Vincent. She used to go to Holy Communion three times a week, on Sundays, Tuesdays and Saturdays and also, perhaps on Fridays; to these may be added Holy Days and certain anniversaries and, from time to time, in exceptional circumstances, she made novenas of Communions, with the permission of her spiritual guide. Any feeling of anxiety or the slightest scruple of conscience caused her to refrain from Holy Communion, and Saint Vincent considered that such conduct was not to be commended.[35] 'As regards the scruple which made you refrain from Holy Communion this morning,' he wrote to her once, 'you have not acted quite rightly. Don't you see quite clearly that it was a temptation and thus bound to give an opening to the enemy of Holy Communion? Do you think you will be more capable of drawing nigh unto God by moving away from, rather than by approaching Him? Oh! certainly, that is an illusion.' On the other hand, if it were a question of her physical fitness, he recommended her not to approach the Sacrament. 'Our Lord,' he said to console her in such a deprivation,[36] 'is a continual Communion to those who are united to His will and His non-will.'

As soon as Mass was over, Mlle Le Gras finished the office of Our Blessed Lady, whilst continuing to reflect on 'the great love God has had for us by instituting the Holy Sacrifice for our sakes.' On her return home at half-past nine or ten o'clock, according to the season, she set to work and had plenty of occupation, whether in making clothes for the poor, or altar linen and vestments, or in indulging

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 111. [36] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

in what she used to call ' my little amusements in the way of images,' that is to say, painting.[37]

If Saint Vincent were in need of shirts, linen or clothes for his poor,[38] it was to her or to Mlle du Fay he turned. His college chapel, for which he never asked anything, was neatly furnished, thanks to the gifts he received from these devout women to whom he used to send in return a gracefully phrased expression of thanks, as, for example, these few lines to Mlle Le Gras : ' This note . . . is to thank you for the very beautiful and acceptable altar-cloth which your charity has sent us, and which, as I think, filled my heart with delight, as I saw your heart therein ; I saw it quite suddenly on entering the chapel, for I had not known it was there. This feeling of delight lasted all day yesterday and still persists, with an indescribable tenderness, and has given rise to several thoughts of which, if God be so pleased, I shall tell you ; in the meantime, I shall content myself with saying that I pray God to adorn your heart with His perfect and divine love, as you adorn His house, with such beautiful gifts.'[39]

At eleven o'clock, Mlle Le Gras knelt down and read a chapter of the New Testament, and then had a meal. At midday, she spent seven or eight minutes in thought in honour of the moment in which the Word was made flesh. ' I will endeavour not to be idle in the future,' she goes on, ' and hence, after this half-quarter of an hour, I will set to work, labouring gaily either for the Church, the poor or the good of the household and this will last until four o'clock. If I am obliged to pay or receive visits, then I shall devote these hours to doing so.' Observe the word ' obliged.' Louise de Marillac wasted no time on useless visits, and was quite content with such as were imposed on her by necessity, charity, her obligations to society or any other reasonable motive. Her visits were, in fact, almost confined to those paid to Saint Vincent, the members of the Marillac family, the Visitation and Carmelite nuns, a few dear friends, such as Mlle du Fay, and the poor. The latter attracted her more than friends or relations and it was, for her, a joy to help

[37] *Pensées de Louise de Marillac*, p. 35.
[38] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 39.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

and comfort them, so much so, indeed, that even in days when such expeditions might have proved injurious to her health, she sometimes allowed her heart to get the better of her head. Fortunately, Saint Vincent was at hand ever on the watch and, in case of necessity, a line from his pen confined her to her home, yet his prohibitions were always based on supernatural motives and were of such a nature as to lessen the charitable widow's disappointment. 'You will honour,'[40] he said to her, 'the inaction of the Son of God (and also of Saint Joseph) Who, having all the power of Heaven and of earth in His hands has, nevertheless, willed to seem to be powerless'; and, in another place; God will grant you the grace 'of some degree of humility, of compassion for the suffering, or knowledge of self, and of your powerlessness to tend to that to which your fervour would aspire.'

To return to her rule of life. 'At four o'clock, even though I am in town, provided I be not bound by the laws of charity or of good manners, I will retire to the nearest church to recite the Vespers of the Our Blessed Lady and, whilst doing so, devoutly recollect myself so that I may then spend half an hour in mental prayer.' After that, she returned home and worked until six o'clock, when she read a pious book for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then had a meal at half-past six. After half an hour's recreation and another half an hour's work, she examined her conscience in the sight of God, going over the events of the day, humbling herself profoundly both for the graces received and the faults committed, 'yet trusting always in His mercy and goodness.' Before retiring to rest, she recited Matins of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. The rule also refers to 'frequent ejaculatory prayers and raising of the soul to God' which should be made as often as possible, and at least four times an hour. To refresh her memory, she re-read, once or twice a week, what she had written on May 4, 1632, after she had bound herself to serve God for the remainder of her life. On Sundays, she added the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* to her usual prayers and, throughout the whole year, she honoured the particular day of the week that was sanctified by the fact

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

that Christmas Day had fallen on it, by reciting the hymn, *Jesu, nostra Redemptio.*

She had a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin and, as the Rosary was one of her favourite forms of prayer, used to recite five decades every day in honour of the joyful, sorrowful or glorious mysteries. On the first Saturday of the month, either before or after Holy Communion, she renewed 'her vows and good resolutions' by reading an act of protestation that recalled them to her mind; her baptismal vows and the vow she had made to remain a widow; resolutions to practise humility, obedience, poverty, patience under sufferings, charity, the avoidance of sin and entire abandonment to God's designs in her regard. This 'act of protestation' was followed by 'an act of oblation' which began as follows: 'Most Holy Virgin, pray take me under thy protection.'[41] In the second formula, Mlle Le Gras sings the praises of Mary as virgin, spouse, mother and widow. She passes in review, in order to exalt, the various stages of Mary's life and the virtues by which she had sanctified them; her Immaculate Conception, the anticipated fruit of the Redemption; her birth; her spotless life in the Temple of Jerusalem; her confidence in God in the marriage state; her constant union with her divine Son, present within or living near her; her resignation under trials; her detachment from all things here below; her zeal for the salvation of souls; the intensity of her love, which shattered the life of her body and lastly, her triumphant Ascension. Contemplating Our Lady in Heaven, she thus addresses her: 'May this lovely soul, chosen from out of a thousand millions, be glorified throughout eternity, for the adherence she has given to the designs of God; and glorified without end be that sacred body, united to that worthy soul, by the proofs of love the Blessed Trinity will bestow on it throughout all eternity.'

Mlle Le Gras was devout, but she sometimes attached far too much importance to trifling details. Saint Vincent, seeing that she was depressed because she had failed to

[41] The originals of both these documents are preserved in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity. They are published in *Pensées*, pp. 7 and 10.

carry out a resolution to adore the humanity of Our Saviour thirty-three times a day, in honour of the thirty-three years He spent on earth, wrote to her : ' As for all those thirty-three acts to the holy Humanity and the others, do not distress yourself when you fail to observe them. God is Love and He wishes us to go to Him by love. So do not therefore regard yourself as being bound by all these good resolutions.'[42] ' God wishes us to go to Him by love ' and, consequently, He wishes us to wage a merciless conflict against all that might hinder us from loving Him, that is to say, against our natural inclinations. Mlle Le Gras perfectly understood this. ' I will strive to the best of my power,' she goes on in her rule of life, ' to mortify my passions and especially vanity and over-eagerness.' To bring her body into subjection, she took the discipline two or three times a day, for the space of a *Pater*, *Ave* and a *De Profundis* ; she wore a penitential girdle on the mornings on which she went to Holy Communion, and on every Friday, morning and evening ; she fasted rigorously on Fridays, the vigils of Feasts of Our Lord and the Apostles, and on every day during Lent and Advent ; all through the year she took only two meals a day, unless necessity or social obligations constrained her to partake of a third.

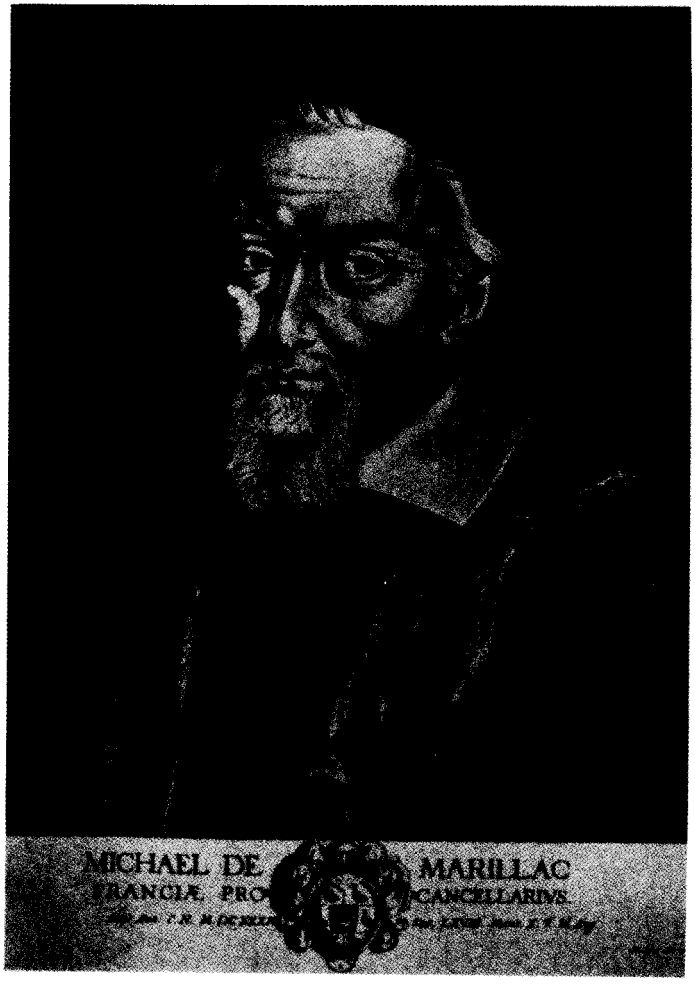
This was certainly a very rigorous rule of life but Saint Vincent was ever at hand to insist on such modifications and relaxations as he considered essential. For instance, we see him on one occasion, eliminating the discipline[43] and replacing the horse-hair girdle by a belt of small silver rosettes, and, another time, insisting on the use of flesh meat during Lent.[44] No doubt, he also lessened or entirely prohibited acts of mortification whenever she was even slightly unwell or indisposed.

Mlle Le Gras was specially in need of remembering the words : ' God is love and wishes us to go to Him by love,' during her spiritual retreats ; for it was chiefly then that her examination of conscience revealed all sorts of sins which she magnified beyond measure, and hence arose exaggerated feelings of fear and even terror, which caused her to dread

[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 86.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

the effects of divine justice. In her rule of life, she expressed a desire to spend the time between Ascension and Pentecost every year in retreat, to which another retreat of from eight to ten days before Advent should be added. Saint Vincent reduced the eight or ten days to six, and did not leave her to her own devices during these spiritual exercises but watched her closely. He drew up the programme, selected the subjects for mental prayer and the books for spiritual reading and was fully aware of all that was going on in his penitent's soul from her confessions and consultations with him.

It was, in all probability, in May, 1626, that Louise made her first retreat under the direction of Saint Vincent, and certain indications lead us to suppose that the advice given in the following letter refers to this retreat : ' It seems to me that you could not begin your spiritual exercises at a more suitable time. Religious of both sexes make their retreat, as a general rule, just now. So, if you please, begin to-morrow, Monday. Three periods of half an hour each will suffice for mental prayer ; two in the morning, at eight or at ten o'clock, and the third in the afternoon at four. . . . You should finish on Saturday, and go to Mass every day. You might say that you were engaged, and put off all those who have unavoidable business to transact with you until immediately after dinner, and, even then, you should be brief. . . . You should go to Holy Communion on Thursday next, and take the subjects for mental prayer only from those which the Bishop of Geneva places at the beginning and the end of the *Introduction.* You may divide them up in such a way that they will suffice, and you may make use of them all, and even some of them twice, according to the attraction Our Lord may bestow on you. Read the *New Testament,* in addition to the other books I suggested to you. Write me a summary account every day of what happens, the state of your mind and body, and strive not to be over-eager about anything ; and do all things peacefully and quietly, just as you might imagine the dear Bishop of Geneva would. . . . Conduct yourself in such a way during the retreat that we may be able to suggest that you should make others. I forgot to tell you not to overburthen yourself with rules and devotional exercises and to strengthen yourself to carry out



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really well whatever exercises you perform, as also your daily actions and employments, in short, everything should be directed towards doing really well whatever you actually do. Do not tolerate for a moment those ideas about singularity which formerly harassed you ; it is simply a trick the devil would like to play on you.'[45]

Saint Vincent did not warn Mlle Le Gras against over-eagerness without reason. Souls, such as hers, that hunger after God need to be put on their guard against an excessive fervour which might easily bring about mental distress and bodily fatigue. In his advice to her for the retreat she made in 1632, he still counsels moderation : ' As for your little retreat, carry it out peacefully according to the plan given in the Bishop of Geneva's *Introduction*, but make your mental prayer only twice a day, one hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening ; and you might read, in the meantime, something from Gerson or from the lives of holy widows to whom you have a special devotion ; and you might spend the remainder of the time in thinking over your past life and what still remains of it to you. But do all most peacefully and quietly . . . and be content with doing so for six days.'[46] Some of the notes made by Mlle Le Gras during her retreats have been preserved, and show her to us with eyes fixed on Jesus Christ,[47] Her Model, Master, King and All ; this is the thought to which she ever returns. If she thinks of self it is only to acknowledge that she is nothing because she can discover in her soul nothing but graces and miseries, and the sight of the former renders that of the latter even still more painful. The approach of Christmas leads her to venerate the Infant Jesus in the Crib ; she admires His poverty and obedience, and begs to share in His states of subjection and of abjection. During the week preceding Pentecost, she goes back in spirit to the Upper Room and there, amidst the Apostles, envies their fervour, zeal, ' great and entire dependance on God's Providence ' and their calm whilst waiting for the coming of

[45] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol I, p. 383.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[47] In the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity. (Cf. *Pensées*, pp. 12–33.)

the Holy Ghost. 'I am bound,' she writes, 'to wait with perseverance for the coming of the Holy Spirit, although I know not the time of His coming; but whilst accepting this state of ignorance as well as that of the ways by which God intends me to serve Him, I should abandon myself to His dispensation so that I may be entirely His and, to prepare my soul, I should voluntarily renounce all things to follow Him.'

On the day after her husband's death, Mlle Le Gras, now bound by the vow she had taken on May 4, 1623, not to think any longer of matrimony that she might more freely serve God, opened out her heart to Saint Vincent who told her not to make definite arrangements about the future until after much prayer and reflection. He also promised to think over the matter himself, and recommended her to be patient. The years 1626, 1627, 1628 passed by without any decision having been come to, and the time seemed long to the devout widow. Often, but in vain, did she remind Saint Vincent in letters and conversations, of her desire to settle down; he simply told her, in one form or another, to wait for the hour fixed by God's Providence. 'Ever honour the inaction and the hidden state of the Son of God. Let that be your centre, and that is what He asks of you now, for the future, and for ever. If His divine Majesty does not let you know, and in such a way as that you cannot be deceived, that He desires anything else of you, do not think about, and do not occupy your mind about, any such matter. Tell me about it, and I will think enough for both of us.'[48] On another occasion, he writes, '*Mon Dieu*, my daughter, what great treasures are stored up in divine Providence and how sovereignly do they honour Our Lord who follow and do not encroach upon It! Yes, you may say to me, but it is for God's sake I distress myself. It is no longer for God's sake you distress yourself, if you are distressing yourself in order to serve Him.'[49] It is quite possible that, during this period of her life, she felt attracted again to the cloister and offered some opposition to Saint Vincent who, to set her free from her scruples, thought it better to take

[48] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 26.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

her out of herself by inducing her to take up an active and absorbing life of charity.

'One day,' writes Abelly,[50] 'this faithful servant of Jesus Christ felt herself strongly moved at prayer, to devote herself to the service of the poor'; she wrote to her director, who replied: 'I cannot express how ardently my heart desires to see yours to know how this has come to pass within it, but I mean to mortify it, for the love of God, in Whom alone I desire your heart may be occupied. Well, now, I imagine the words of to-day's Gospel have touched you deeply, for they make a profound impression on a heart that loves with a perfect love. Oh! what a tree you have prepared to-day in the eyes of God, since you have brought forth such fruit. May you be for ever a tree of life bringing forth fruits of love!'[51]

Saint Vincent, as a matter of fact, was in need of helpers and women-helpers by preference who would visit the Confraternities of Charity whose numbers were increasing. He accepted Mlle Le Gras' offer all the more readily as for her the contemplative life was full of danger, and he gave her a set of regulations for the Charities as well as a memorandum on how to establish, visit and organise them. On the day of her departure, after she had received Holy Communion at his Mass, she went to receive his blessing and advice, and then took the coach, laden with linen and medicines, accompanied by a maid-servant and often by other devout ladies, her rivals in charity. She defrayed all the expenses of the journey out of her own purse whilst, it is true, restricting expenses to the barest essentials. She lived in the simplest manner during her journeys, as was shown by the vehicles in which she travelled, the inns at which she stayed and the food of which she partook. It would have seemed to her most unbecoming if, whilst travelling for the poor, she did not travel like them. On her arrival, she assembled the members of the Confraternity, gave them instructions, stirred up their zeal, sought out new members, put new life into what was growing cold, raised up what had fallen and brought to perfection whatever had been established. And

[50] *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIII, p. 105.
[51] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 51.

this was not all. She visited the poor in their own homes, distributed alms and nursed the sick ; she gathered young girls around her to teach them the truths of religion and the duties that derive from them. If there were a schoolmistress in the place, she instructed her in her professional duties and if there were none, she set about training one.

There is a little catechism, still extant and written in her hand,[52] which is very probably the one she employed during these expeditions. It is written in a simple, clear, sober style and its theological statements are perfectly accurate. ' Is one long in hell ? For all eternity '—' Is eternity more than a hundred years ? It is more than can be told, for one never comes out of it.' In her explanation of the *Pater Noster*, this is how she comments on the petition : ' Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' ' By this fifth petition,' the Catechism says, ' we condemn ourselves, if we bear any enmity towards our neighbour and refuse to forgive him for the evil he has done us. It is just the same as if after Mary refused to give Joan some bread, she went and said to another girl : " give me some bread just as I have given some to Joan " ; that would be just the same as if Mary asked not to be given any. Others say : " I forgive him but I do not want to see him ever again " ; now such people ask God to send them to hell, where He will nevermore be seen.' Any child could understand such language as that. Some of the questions recall customs and practices long since dead and gone. ' What is given us in the cup after Holy Communion ? Wine, to rinse the mouth.' Others suppose an age in which devotion occupied a more prominent place than it does in ours. ' Before and after meals, say the *Benedicite*, and the thanksgiving ; from time to time, during work, think of God and say : " God sees me." . . . In the evening, before going to bed, an examination of conscience should be made and, after having asked God's forgiveness and said the *Confiteor*, the name of Jesus should be repeated five times, in honour of Our Lord's five wounds and as a form of penance.'

Provided with her little catechism and Saint Vincent's

[52] The MS. is now in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity. (Cf. *Pensées*, pp. 102 ff.)

instructions, Mlle Le Gras traversed, on several occasions, the dioceses of Paris, Beauvais, Senlis, Soissons, Meaux, Châlons and Chartres, despite her feeble health and infirmities. As a general rule, she spent the winter in Paris, looking after the poor in her own district.

The first place she visited was Montmirail, where Saint Vincent then happened to be. He wrote to her from there, before her departure, on May 6, 1629 : ' I am sending you the letters and memorandum you will need for your journey. So set out now, Mademoiselle, in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His divine goodness may accompany you, that it may be your comfort on the road, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter against rain and cold, your soft couch in weariness, your strength in labour and that it may, in the end, bring you back to us in perfect health and superabounding in good works.'

' You might go to Holy Communion on the day of your departure, in honour of the charity of Our Lord and the journeys He undertook for the same end and out of the same charity, the pains, contradictions, weariness and toils He then experienced, and that He may be pleased to bless your journey, bestow on you His Spirit, and the grace to act in that same spirit and to bear your trials in the manner in which He bore His.'[53]

Montmirail was only the first stage in her journey, for she had to visit all the Confraternities in the district. ' It will be quite sufficient,' Saint Vincent wrote to her, ' if you remain for one or two days in each place on the first visit, and you can return next summer if Our Lord allows you to see that you can render Him some other services. When I say two days, your charity will, if there be any necessity, remain longer, and will also cause you to write to us.' Nor was this all, for Saint Vincent gave her a hint of another expedition to be made in the diocese of Chartres. The considerable gaps to be found in the printed correspondence prevent us from following Mlle Le Gras' movements during the next few months. Her saintly director sent her wherever a Charity was in danger. On December 19, although unwell, she went to Asnières and, on February 5, 1630,[54] visited the

[53] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 73. [54] *Pensées*, p. 123.

Charity at Saint-Cloud. It was the anniversary of her wedding-day but, from a spirit of poverty, she did not venture to ask for Mass to be celebrated that morning for her intention. Saint Vincent appreciated her wishes and even went beyond them, for he said a nuptial Mass. When the time for receiving Holy Communion arrived, the thought occurred to her that she was the spouse of Christ and that it was her duty to leave all things and follow Him. She remained for a considerable time at Saint-Cloud, and was still there when Saint Vincent wrote to her on February 19 : ' I praise God that you have health enough for the sixty persons for whose salvation you are labouring, but I beg you to let me know exactly whether or not your chest is affected by so much talking, and your head by so much noise and business.'[55]

At the period to which we have now arrived, there was only one Confraternity of Charity in Paris, that of Saint Saviour's founded in 1629. It was natural that Mlle Le Gras should wish to have one in her own parish and she accordingly set to work to establish one during 1630, probably immediately after her journey to Saint-Cloud. It may seem surprising that Saint Vincent had delayed so long in supplying Paris with an institution that had already proved so useful to the poor. Some years previously, the Procurator General, Mathew Molé, had asked him to meet Froger, the parish priest of Saint Nicholas, and Hollandre, the parish priest of Saint Saviour's, and to discuss with them the best means of establishing a branch. These deliberations came to nothing, and it certainly seems that Hollandre was the chief obstacle, for scarcely had his successor taken up office than he again set to work and carried out the project.[56] The parish of Saint Nicholas, in which both the founder of the Charities and his zealous collaborator resided, only takes the second place. As usual, Saint Vincent guided Louise de Marillac and when she spoke to him of handing over the funds of the Confraternity to a curate, he dissuaded her from doing so ' on account of the many disadvantages that might thereby arise.' Saint Vincent did not care to state exactly on paper what these disadvantages were, but simply

[55] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 75.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

added, a few lines later on : ' Experience teaches us that it is absolutely essential that women should not be dependant on men in this matter, especially where money is concerned.'[57]

In the other Charities, the members took it in turn to cook the food intended for the sick. Mlle Le Gras found it difficult to impose such an obligation on the members of the Confraternity of Saint Nicholas as some of them were, or might be, ladies of rank. Saint Vincent put an end to her hesitation. ' If you now relieve each member of the Charity of the duty of having the food cooked, you will never be able to impose it in future ; and if anyone now undertakes to have it cooked elsewhere at her own cost, out of charity, she will in a short time find it expensive ; and if you pay money to have it cooked, it will cost a good deal ; then again, after some time, the ladies of the Charity will say that the soup should be brought to the sick by the women who prepared it, and in this way your Charity will be a failure.'[58]

The members now began to provide food for the sick, each on her own day and at her own expense. When the number of associates had reached half a dozen, Saint Vincent thought it was time to think about a formal establishment of the Confraternity ; this would entail a certain amount of expense which he reduced to a minimum. ' If you obtain permission to establish the Charity from the Chancery of the Bishop of Paris,' he wrote to Louise,[59] ' you will have to pay something ; but if M. Guyard hands it over to you, you need not pay anything. You might have it sealed with the small seal, and that will cost only five sols.'

Mlle Le Gras was placed at the head of the Confraternity and held the first place both in rank and devotedness. Contagious diseases had no terror for her and, one morning after she had visited a victim of the plague, she received the following little note from her director. ' I confess, Mademoiselle, when I first heard it, my heart was so deeply touched that, if it had not been late at night, I would have gone off on the spot to see you. But the goodness of God towards those who give themselves to Him by carrying out

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

the works of the Confraternity of Charity,—for not one of its members has ever caught the plague,—has given me the most perfect confidence that no harm will befall you.'[60] In 1631, there were six parishes with Charities : Saint Saviour, Saint Nicholas, Saint Eustache, Saint Benedict, Saint Sulpice and Saint Merry. Shortly afterwards, Saint Paul, Saint Germain l'Auxerrois and Saint Andrew followed the example and in a short space of time there was scarcely a parish in the city and suburbs that had not a branch of its own. A spirit of exclusiveness and the high social standing of the ladies rendered the establishment of confraternities in the city much more difficult than in country places.[61]

Paris did not absorb all Louise de Marillac's energies. In the month of May, 1630, we find her at Villepreux where a regrettable misunderstanding nearly put an end to her labours. The parish priest, we do not know why, had not been previously informed of her arrival, or at least he officially ignored the meetings she was holding in his parish. He complained to Saint Vincent who asked her to go and present her excuses, and even to leave Villepreux if this ecclesiastic so desired. 'Our Lord,' he added,[62] 'will, perhaps, derive more glory from your act of submission than from all the good you might be able to do. A beautiful diamond is worth more than a heap of stones, and an act of the virtue of acquiescence and submission is of greater value than a number of good works done to others.' The parish priest was mollified by her apology and withdrew all opposition. She set to work again, but so great was her ardour that she was overcome by fatigue and had to stop. Saint Vincent was quite unaware of the fact, or rather, he learned of her illness and recovery at the same moment. 'Blessed be God,' he wrote to her in reply,[63] 'I beseech Him to strengthen you utterly and in such wise that some day it may be said that these words of Holy Writ are applicable to you : *Mulierem fortem quis inveniet.*' A great deal of work was needed to re-establish the Charity at Villepreux on a sound footing. The zeal of its first years had sadly dimi-

[60] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 185.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 100. [62] *Ibid.*, p. 82.
[63] *Ibid.*,

nished ; the visitation of the sick left much to be desired and the members were not approaching the Sacraments as frequently as formerly ; there were also complaints that the Superioress ' in the distribution of the food, gave more to some of the poor and less to others in accordance with her own preferences.' The book of Rules dated from 1618 and some alterations were clearly needed, for experience had shown the usefulness and suitability of some new ones that had been inserted in more recent regulations, such as the election for life of members of the association and the practice of going to Holy Comunion on the anniversary of their deaths.[64]

On the arrival of autumn, despite the first spell of rigorous weather, Louise de Marillac set out once more on her apostolic journeys. She fell ill again at Villiers-le-Bel and, according to her usual custom, waited until she had recovered before informing Saint Vincent of the fact. He wrote at once in reply : ' This is . . . to tell you of the consolation I have experienced at your recovery, and how strongly I hope for a perfect cure ; but how can that be since you have to talk so much, and the air is very biting and you have a cold ! '[65] However, a mere cold presented no terrors to this valiant servant of the poor and, as soon as she had finished at Villiers, she moved on to render the same services to the Charity at Montmirail.[66]

Saint Vincent, on his side, was not idle. On the invitation of Augustine Potier, Bishop of Beauvais, he went to that city to rid it of the ' sturdy beggars ' who infested its streets and churches. After studying the situation, he believed that Confraternities of Charity would put an end to the evil. He established a branch in each of the eighteen parishes of the city and divided it up into districts to render the distribution of alms more easy.[67] The King's Lieutenant took umbrage at the meetings which the charitable priest was holding and may quite possibly have suspected him of sinister designs. He sat down and drew up a formal com-

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 84. [65] *Ibid.*, p. 93. [66] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[67] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIII, p. 108 ; Delettre, *Histoire du diocese de Beauvais.* Beauvais, 1842–1843, 3 vols. oct. Vol. III, p. 407.

plaint in which he stated 'that about fifteen days ago, a certain priest named Vincent, arrived in this city, who, in contempt of royal authority, did, without communicating any notice to the royal officers or any other body of the city interested therein, cause an assembly to be held of a large number of women, whom he persuaded to form a Confraternity, to which he gives the specious name of Charity and which he wishes to set up to aid and to supply with food and other necessaries the poor sick folk of the said city of Beauvais and to go, each week, and quest for coppers which they intend to devote to this purpose; and that this has since been carried out by the said Vincent, and such a Confraternity has been erected, into which he received three hundred women or thereabouts, who, to carry out the above exercises and functions meet frequently; and that this should not be tolerated.' And so the King's Lieutenant, enraged at the audacity 'of the priest named Vincent' demanded that an enquiry should be held and forwarded to the King's Procurator General.[68] If the records of this enquiry could only be discovered, the hyper-zealous official would have rendered an invaluable service to the biographers of the man whom he was inclined to regard as a conspirator.

The work begun by Saint Vincent was completed by Louise de Marillac. December's snow and frost did not paralyse her activity, but Vincent's suggestions and advice did something to moderate it.[69] 'Blessed be God,' he wrote, 'that you have arrived in good health. Oh! take every care to preserve it for the love of Our Lord and His poor members, and take care not to do too much. It is a trick of the devil's, by which he deceives devout souls, to urge them on to do more than they are able so that they may not do anything at all. The Spirit of God graciously incites us to do whatever good we can reasonably perform, so that it may be carried out perseveringly and over a long stretch of time. Act then in this way, Mademoiselle, and you will be acting according to the Spirit of God.' The warning was not without value.

[68] Feillet, *La misère au temps de la Fronde et saint Vincent de Paul*, 5th ed., Paris, 1886, p. 212. (D'après les Arch. du Comité d'Histoire de France.)

[69] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 95.

Although Mlle Le Gras had a great deal of work to do in Beauvais, she bravely supported its weight and acquitted herself perfectly of her mission ; thanks to her gift for organisation and also to the advice of her director who, by a word, dispelled all doubts and banished hesitations. The most minute details were closely examined and each of her questions received a clear, definite and well-reasoned reply. For instance, who was to bring wine to the sick? Not the treasurer, because she should be 'free to supervise the actual working, the admission and discharge of the sick,' and this was quite enough for one woman ; not the inn-keeper's wife, who would have to be paid ; not the nurse, because she would ask for an additional six *sols* a day for this extra work. 'Eh ! *bon Dieu* ! she would carry off all the liquid assets of the Charity in no time.' Should a uniform rule be laid down about attending the funerals of the poor cared for by the Confraternity? By no means. 'It would be well to insert in the Rule that the Sisters of the Basse-Oeuvre district should attend the funerals of the poor who die there, and also those of Saint Giles ; as for the other districts . . . it is quite sufficient if the ladies of one parish assist at the funerals of the poor only in their own parish, because the Sisters of the district of Saint Saviour, of Saint Stephen and of Saint Martin, have too many sick and dying to be able to go to all the funerals, and the other parishes are suburban, each one of them constituting a district of its own.'

Then come questions about drugs, lodgings, collections for the poor and her relations with the Bishop of Beauvais. Saint Vincent did not let even one of these points escape him, and his letter even refers to the triumphal reception Louise had had on her arrival. He makes use of it to teach her a lesson in humility : 'Unite your spirit,' he says, 'when you are honoured and esteemed, to the mockeries, contempt and harsh treatment which the Son of God endured. Surely, Mademoiselle, a really humble soul humbles itself just as much when honoured as when despised, and acts like the honey-bee which makes its honey from the dew that has fallen on wormwood as well as from what has fallen on the rose.'[70]

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

The meetings organised by Mlle Le Gras were intended for women only, and many responded to her appeal. Some men who were curious to know what was being done at these meetings, stole into the house, tiptoed to the conference chamber, put their ears to the folding-doors and withdrew, writes Gobillon, 'ravished with joy and overcome with astonishment.'[71] On the day she left Beauvais she was followed by a large crowd who cheered her outside the city boundaries. The carriage was surrounded and advanced with difficulty ; a child fell and one of the wheels passed over its body. She uttered a cry of terror, raised her eyes to Heaven to implore the help of the Most High and then, looking back, was delighted to see the child rise up unhurt.

In all probability she spent Christmas in Paris and did not leave it for the rest of that winter. The last days of March and the first fortnight of April were devoted to the Charity of Montreuil-sous-Bois. Saint Vincent, before sending her there, had gone himself to see what were the needs of the Confraternity and found that a complete reorganisation was essential. New elections should be held, and the general regulations should be adapted to local circumstances. The parish priest had been previously prevailed on to accept the projected reforms and was quite prepared to render her task more easy ; he secured lodgings and gave her permission to instruct young girls.[72]

Saint Vincent set about enlarging and amending the regulations and when he had finished wrote to Louise to ask her to examine them : 'If there is anything to be deleted or added, let me know.' He suppressed house to house collection of alms, and that for a curious reason : 'The people there are a scoffing lot, and the women might throw up the whole thing.' The places of deceased members should not be filled as long as the total number of members exceeded sixty, and all members should be regarded as belonging to the Confraternity of the Holy Name of Jesus, even those who had not been members before joining the Charity. Louise's success at Montreuil was not as great as might have been

[71] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 42.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

expected, and Saint Vincent reminded her of the fact on the Monday or Tuesday of Holy Week : ' God has not been pleased that you should do anything more for the Charity ; He should be praised, and we must think that, for the present, He does not desire anything further. Now, as your girls have been instructed, is there anything else to be done, and why should you not return to-morrow ? '[73] So she returned home and the poor of her own parish of Saint Nicholas had the joy of celebrating Easter with her.

When the hot summer months had gone by, Saint Vincent suggested a new round of visits to the Confraternities in Champagne : Montmirail, le Mesnil, Bergères, Loisy, Soulières, Goudron, Villesneux. In order to avoid the unpleasantness she had met with elsewhere, he wrote to announce her arrival to the steward of Father de Gondi's[74] estates and to the parish priests of these various localities. The letter written to the parish priest of Bergères has been preserved, and gives us the substance and, perhaps, even the actual tenor of those sent to other ecclesiastics. ' His Lordship, the Reverend Father de Gondi, having observed the great good wrought by Mlle Le Gras at Montmirail and Villepreux by the instruction she gave the girls in those places, desires to procure the same benefit for those of your parish and has begged this good lady to be kind enough to go and see you with that object, and to this her Charity has consented. She is then, about to depart and I very humbly beg you to be good enough to let me know that you, Sir, will be very pleased that Our Lord presents you with this opportunity for doing good to the souls committed to your care, and I trust, Sir, that you and your parishioners may have this consolation, in case God is pleased to grant her a similar benefit in your regard as He has granted in those other places where she has been. Now, in order that your people may know in time of His Lordship, the Reverend Father de Gondi's design, you will, if you please, inform them of the fact during your sermon and urge them to send their daughters to this lady's lodgings at whatever time she may suggest. She is also very well informed about the Charity and I beg

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[74] The General of the Galleys was now an Oratorian Father.

you, Sir, to enable her to see the women of the Confraternity.'[75]

Somewhat later, Saint Vincent saw that these letters did not suffice ; he had forgotten about the Bishop of Châlons, or rather he had not thought it necessary to look so high ; difficulties, however, were to come from that quarter. The prelate manifested some surprise on hearing that a lady had left Paris to teach Christian doctrine in his diocese, and to organise the Charities. When Mlle Le Gras heard of this, she hastened to ask Saint Vincent's advice, which was not long coming : ' If,' he wrote, ' His Lordship of Châlons has not sent for you and if he is close at hand, it seems to me that it would be well if you went to see him and told him quite simply and frankly why R. F. de Gondi asked you to be kind enough to go to Champagne and what you are doing there. Offer to omit whatever he may wish from your proceedings, and to abandon the whole affair entirely, if such be his pleasure ; that is the spirit of God. I can see no blessing on anything but such a course. His Lordship of Châlons is a holy personage. You should look upon him as the interpreter of God's will in this matter. If he wishes you to alter anything in your mode of acting, please do so exactly ; if he wishes you to return here, do so peacefully and gaily, since you are doing God's will. But if he is at a distance and gives you leave to continue, please go on teaching the little girls. If some grown women should chance to be amongst them, all right ; but please do not let them be told, during the sermon, that they are to attend ; you might just tell all the Sisters of the Charity to see you together. Honour in this method of proceeding the humility of the Son of God's in His.'[76] It was not only the humility of the Son of God that Mlle Le Gras honoured, but also His obedience. The anything but friendly attitude of the Bishop caused Saint Vincent to recall her : ' Please return here,' he wrote, ' you shall not fail to have the reward you would have gained if you had instructed all the girls in those districts. Oh ! how happy you are in resembling the Son of God in this that, like Him, you have been forced to withdraw from a

[75] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 119.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

MADEMOISELLE LE GRAS, *née* LOUISE DE MARILLAC

province in which, thank God, you are doing no harm ! ' He saw quite clearly that she would regard herself as personally responsible for this rebuff, so he added : ' I beg you not to think for a moment that this has happened through any fault of yours. No—such is not the case ; it is simply an arrangement of God for His greater glory and for the good of your soul. The most remarkable feature in the life of Saint Louis is the tranquillity with which he returned from the Holy Land without having succeeded in his design ; and you may never, perhaps, have a better opportunity of giving more glory to God than now. So use it then according to the measure of the grace which Our Lord has always made manifest in you.'[77] When she received this letter, written on All Hallow's Eve, October 31, two months had passed since she had left Paris. This unexpected return was no doubt a blow, but Saint Vincent's kind words helped to soften the pain and prevented her from feeling discouraged.

Her presence in the capital was more needed than ever on account of the multiplication of the Confraternities of Charity, and hence her journeys through the provinces began to grow rarer. In June, 1632, she went to Villeneuve-Saint-George to infuse fresh life into the local Charity which was languishing, to organise elementary schools and, taking occasion of its proximity, to visit the branch at the village of Crosnes. ' There will be no danger whatever,' Saint Vincent wrote before she left, ' if you instruct only the girls. That will help you to win the mothers to God. As for the Charity, you will find only nine Sisters of the Confraternity, and you will try to gain some others.'[78] He was quite well aware of the difficulties that confronted his helper and, on that account, rendered her the utmost assistance. He looked out himself for a schoolmistress, invited his great friend, Nicholas Pavillon, the future Bishop of Alet, to preach one Sunday on her behalf, and urged Madame Goussault and Madame Pollalion to lend her their aid. After announcing the approaching arrival of these two great ladies, he added : ' O my God ! what a delightful little Company ! I beseech Our Lord to link together all your hearts in One,

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 134. [78] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

and may that Heart be His, and may He give you strength in all your labours.'[79]

The Charities of Villeneuve and Crosnes were certainly not the only ones she visited in 1632, and it was probably in the course of that year that she went to Serain, Sannois, Franconville and Herblay.[80] The Confraternity at Sannois was badly in need of her presence to restore it to its former vigour. No procurator had been elected, and the accounts had been kept for a year by a worthy man who had no proper mandate. The Sisters left the duty of preparing meals for the sick to the treasurer alone and she, as the fancy took her, distributed meat, or eggs, or other sorts of food, or was even content with giving them a little money. She kept both keys of the cashbox, although the Superioress should always have one in her possession. Lastly, very few of the Sisters went to Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month. At Franconville, it was not the treasurer but the procurator who had concentrated all authority in one person ; he disposed of the funds as if he were absolute master, lent money on pledges and had twenty-five debtors. The fear which he inspired prevented the members from making even the shadow of a remonstrance. There had been no election held for a long time, and it was not even those who had been chosen at the last election who now filled the posts, but their predecessors. The sick, however, were regularly visited and helped, but what they received depended on the whim of those who went to see them. Herblay was much more consoling. The Sisters there had preserved their first fervour. There were, however, two desiderata : they were averse from collecting alms, and the treasurer did not keep her accounts. Before Mlle Le Gras left, she told them to be very faithful to the regulations, in particular to carry a candle in processions and at the funerals of their companions, and to go to Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month.

[79] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 161.

[80] The originals of the reports of the visits which she made at Sannois, Franconville and Herblay are preserved in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity. (Cf. *Pensées*, p. 125 ff.) There is a reference to her visit to the Charity at Serain in a letter of Saint Vincent's (Vol. I, p. 179).

In 1633, she set off on another tour of inspection and, this time, to the districts around Beauvais. She visited in turn Verneuil-près-Creil, Pont-Saint-Maxence, Gournay, Neufville-le-Roy, Bulles.[81] She lodged with a baker at Verneuil. There were only two sick people under the care of the Confraternity : a man and a woman. She expresses her regret that they had divided the town into districts because, as there was only one district in which there were any sick persons, it was always the same Sisters who visited. Moreover, the Sisters delay too long before speaking to the sick of the last Sacraments, and the sort of food that is given them depends far too much on caprice. The treasurer keeps far too tight a hold on the purse strings ; she is very loath to accept sick people to be cared for by the Confraternity, and declares much too easily that they have been cured; through her fault, many have had relapses. There are no meetings and the rules were not read. There was some praise, however, to temper these criticisms. The Sisters are as a rule very united ; they go to Holy Communion on the days appointed ; they faithfully tend the sick and pay their respects to the dead. The Superioress regrets that only those who have had to sell all their possessions are regarded as poor, for there are some who are just as badly off as if they had nothing, since it was impossible for them to sell their properties, which have been mortgaged to the hilt. The Charity has some money in hand, and is wondering what use might be made of it ; the Marchioness of Verneuil thinks that a house should be bought for the sick, but others would prefer the acquisition of a plot of land. Cattle are not kept on account of the diseases that decimate them.

Pont-Saint-Maxence was her second halt, and she put up in the *Fleur de Lys* inn. Her enquiry showed that the Charity was going on well, and that there were only two points that needed amendment : the meal was given only at midday, and the sick did not get sufficient soup. Otherwise, everything was going on very well, whether there was question of the duties of the members towards the sick or towards the dead. Union reigned amongst the Sisters, and they rivalled

[81] The Mother-House of the Sisters possesses the reports of these visits. (Cf. *Pensées*, p. 127, etc.)

each other in zeal and devotion ; husbands strongly encouraged their wives ; and ever since the Confraternity had been established, the whole parish had become more fervent. Persons suffering from contagious diseases were not forgotten, and received monetary assistance ; as it was discovered that some of them slept on straw, six pairs of blankets were presented to them. The Charity lends furniture to those who have none ; it possesses altar furniture which it employs in the rooms of sick persons who are about to receive Holy Communion. The house to house collections amount to four livres and more a week. The Sisters are afraid of taking interest on their funds lest the amount of alms might fall off.

Her third halt was at Gournay-sur-Aronde. Here the Sisters are faithful to their three daily visits ; there are not many sick, but there are always a few, ' considering this small number, the members have not thought it necessary to prepare the meals in a special pot ; each uses her own.' Here too, regret has been expressed that the rules of the Confraternity exclude from the ranks of the poor all those who possess some property. The Sisters attend the monthly Mass, receive Holy Communion and afterwards recite the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus. Sick persons who have no home of their own are lodged by a woman at the rate of five sols a day, and this is a heavy burthen on the Charity whose funds are almost exhausted, and which does not own any sheep, lambs, altar or picture. It defrays out of the proceeds of the collections stipends for Masses to be said for the Confraternity or its deceased members, and this has excited the unfavourable comment of outsiders. There is just one shadow in the picture : ' The Sisters,' we read in Louise's report, ' are rather rough, and not as united amongst themselves as in other places.'

On the following Saturday, she arrived at Neufville-le-Roy and took up her residence in the inn. The Sisters are, generally speaking, faithful to their daily visits and to their Holy Communions ; all are not perfect, far from it ; too many difficulties are raised about accepting patients ; each Sister does just as she pleases about the choice of food for the sick ; neither the monthly Mass nor the Litany of

the Holy Name of Jesus is said ; the parish priest's excuse is an alleged prohibition of the Bishop of Beauvais. The Confraternity possesses fifteen or sixteen livres in cash, six sheep and six lambs, and defrays half the expense of their keep. Here, as elsewhere, regret is expressed that the Charity confines its attention to the sick who possess nothing. To those who expressed surprise at this, Mlle Le Gras said : ' The Confraternity owns very little, and that little must be reserved for the most unfortunate ; persons with some property can make provision ; if they have a field, let them sell their grain before the harvest ; if they have a house, let them look out for a purchaser, reserve the right to live in it for their own lifetime, and then pay their debts out of the purchase money, reserving the surplus to live on.' Sick persons sometimes endeavoured to be accepted as patients of the Confraternity by practising a little trickery. One woman handed over all she possessed to her relatives and then as she owned nothing, fulfilled the required conditions, but her hopes were disappointed for fraud was, we may be sure, not encouraged.

From Neufville she went on to Bulles, where she was told the Sisters made their three daily visits and brought the meals fully cooked to the sick but here, too, she learned, as the report states, that ' each of them wishes to take home with her whatever she thinks likely to satisfy ' the sick. However, for the moment, there is no difficulty about that, as there are no sick to be looked after. They neglect monthly Communion and also Communion for deceased members. Nevertheless, they honour the dead as they have a full service for each deceased Sister, consisting of Matins, Lauds, a Requiem High Mass and the *Libera* ; the people think that this is going too far. Their ranks are, unhappily, divided, and relations are so strained amongst them that some refuse to visit the sick in the company of others. They would like to have some medals as they have none, and Mlle Le Gras hopes that the gaining of Indulgences will give them a greater desire to go to Holy Communion ; she has nothing but praise for the procurator, a most charitable man, ' highly intelligent and well disposed.' The Confraternity possesses fifteen or sixteen crowns,

palliasses, mattresses, bolsters, coverlets, plenty of linen, fifteen or sixteen sheep, and ten or twelve lambs, kept by private individuals for their own advantage ; the first six died, but more will be purchased.

The Confraternities needed some such visitations if their first fervour was to be maintained, or if they were to be roused out of a state of laxity into which they might fall in the course of time. As Mlle Le Gras could not be everywhere, Saint Vincent appealed to the zeal of other devout ladies of his acquaintance, of whom he had a large number. We shall only mention the names of Mlle du Fay, Mlle de Pollalion, Mlle Sevin, Madame Goussault, Mlle Guerin, Mlle Dupresne, and Mlle Laurent. Nor was he inactive himself, and he also employed his Missionaries in this particular form of good works. He saw almost at once that there were certain lamentable wants. Mlle Le Gras, as has been said, was accustomed to gather little girls about her, on these journeys, and teach them the catechism, but such instruction was not of much avail for, once she had gone, the lessons were at an end. A resident schoolmistress was needed in every village.

Paris itself was, in this respect, better off than the country districts, but here obstacles of another nature prevented the Confraternities from functioning efficiently. The Ladies who had joined were, for the most part, members of the aristocracy or of the upper middle class, and thus unaccustomed to hard work ; moreover, several had joined merely to be in the fashion. One could scarcely think of asking them to prepare the soup themselves for the poor of the Confraternity, to carry it through the streets and to climb the narrow stairs that led to the garrets of the poor. And, even if they were willing, they would not have been allowed to do so by their families. Hence, all this work was handed over to their servants with the result that the unfortunate poor were roughly treated, badly served, and even occasionally exploited. Saint Vincent immediately perceived the real solution of this problem and believed that every difficulty would be cleared away if he could place at the disposal of the ladies a few kind-hearted girls who felt attracted towards the poor and who desired to devote themselves to their welfare.

God placed in his hands the instruments of which he stood in need.

The first young girl who came to him for this mission of charity was called Margaret Naseau, and on several occasions he himself has told us all about her in the most simple and moving language. 'Margaret Naseau, of Suresnes,' he said, 'was the first Sister who had the happiness to point out the road to others, both as regards teaching young girls, and nursing the sick poor, although she had scarcely any other master or mistress save God. She was only a poor, unlettered girl who minded cows. Urged by a powerful inspiration from on high, the idea occurred to her to teach children and accordingly she bought an alphabet but, as she could not go to school to learn, she went and asked the parish priest or the curate to tell her what were the first four letters. On another occasion, she asked what were the next four, and so on with the rest. Afterwards, whilst still looking after her cows, she used to study her lesson. If she saw anyone pass by who looked as if he knew how to read, she used to say: "Sir, how should this word be pronounced." '[82]

In this way, the young shepherdess, by dint of determination, succeeded in acquiring some book-learning and, as soon as she knew how to read, she thought of opening a school. Before deciding, she went to Vincent de Paul, who was preaching a mission in the neighbourhood, and after telling him how she had educated herself so far, she said: 'Sir, I have a great desire to teach other country girls; would that be good?' 'Yes, yes, indeed' he replied, 'I advise you to do so.'

She began to teach and had the joy of seeing two or three of her pupils devote themselves, after her example, to the education of children, sometimes in one village sometimes in another. She devoted most of her time and attention to Villepreux; numbers increased; and big girls were soon found alongside the little ones. To those who could not come by day, she devoted her nights. 'And all that,' Saint Vincent goes on to say, 'without any motive of vanity or self-interest, for her sole design was the glory of God Who

[82] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 77.

provided for all she most needed without her ever thinking about it. She herself told Mlle Le Gras that on one occasion, after being without bread for several days, and not having told a soul of her distress, on her return home from Mass, she found sufficient food to last her for a very long time.' Providence seldom spoiled her in this way, and her life was made up of privations. ' She often fasted for whole days together, and lived in places without a roof.' It would have been easy for her to live more comfortably, but she preferred to stint herself that she might be able to assist young men, by supplying them with means to study, to embark on an ecclesiastical career. Thanks to her, several of them became priests.

Virtue is, as a rule, accompanied by trials, and of these she had her share. ' The harder she worked at educating the young, the more the village folk ridiculed and calumniated her. Her zeal only became more ardent. . . . As soon as she heard that there was a Confraternity in Paris for the relief of the sick poor, she went there, urged by a desire to be employed in it ; and although she had a great love for carrying on the education of youth, nevertheless, she gave up this charitable work to take up the other which she considered more perfect and needful ; and so God arranged that she should be the first Daughter of Charity, Servant of the sick poor of the city of Paris. She induced other girls to join whom she had helped to detach from every vanity, and to begin to lead a devout life.' The Confraternity of Saint Saviour had only just begun, and she became its mainspring. After a brief apprenticeship, she was acquainted with all that nurses of those days could have been expected to know. When the Charity was established in the parish of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, her presence was judged to be indispensable and the same held true of Saint Benedict's. She returned, however, to Saint Nicholas and was, up to her death, the right arm of Mlle Le Gras. ' In the parishes,' Saint Vincent adds, ' she was just as charitable as she had been in the country, and gave all she could whenever an opportunity presented itself. She could not refuse anything, and would have liked to bring everybody back to the house. She was remarkably prudent, never complained, and was loved by all because in her there was nothing but what was

lovable. Her charity was so great that she died from having made a poor plague-stricken girl sleep in the same bed as herself. When she was attacked by the plague, she bade goodbye to the Sister with whom she was living, as if she knew she was about to die, and went to the Hospital of Saint Louis, her heart filled with joy and conformity with the will of God.' Margaret Naseau was carried off by this scourge, at the end of February or quite early in March, 1633, and she certainly deserved to have Saint Vincent himself as her panegyrist. All through the ages, she will remain the ideal type of the true Daughter of Charity.[83]

We should like to know the names of those who were drawn by her example and advice to the Charities of Paris or to the village schools. It is probable that ' dear Germaine ' to whom Saint Vincent so frequently refers in his letters to Mlle Le Gras, was one of her pupils. Germaine took Margaret's place at Villepreux, and kept school there for five or six years. Louise, in one of her journeys through Champagne, took Germaine with her, either to acquire a fuller knowledge of the girl or simply as a treat. As a matter of fact, Germaine suffered at times, in the little village, from boredom and occasionally thought of leaving and going elsewhere. She would seem to have been somewhat difficult, to judge from a phrase in a letter from Saint Vincent to M. Belin, the de Gondi's chaplain at Villepreux, ' *Mon Dieu*, Sir, how I pity you ! Oh, well, Our Lord will reward you for all you suffer, and endure from her.'[84] Germaine was far from being as fine a character as Margaret. Madame Goussault introduced Mary Joly to Saint Vincent, who was charmed with her and wrote to Mlle Le Gras :[85] ' Mary has replied and told me most humbly, affectionately and earnestly that she is ready to do whatever you wish, and as you wish, and that her only regret is that she has not sufficient judgement, strength and humility to do it, but that you will tell her what to do, and she will carry out your instructions exactly. Ah ! what a really good girl she seems to be ! I do think, Mademoiselle, that Our Lord Himself has given her to you to be employed by you.' Mary's native

[83] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 187.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 406.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

place is unknown, but what is certain is that one of these kind-hearted servants of the poor came from Montdidier,[86] and the other from Beauvais.[87]

In the autumn of 1633, the Charities in Paris were adequately staffed,[88] but there was a shortage of teachers for village schools.

Each of the new arrivals spent four days on retreat before she took up work, and made a serious preparation for her new vocation. There were two meditations in the morning and two in the afternoon ; the subjects for meditation were taken from a treatise by Busée. The books for spiritual reading were Louis of Granada's *Sinner's Guide* and the lives of saints who were most remarkable for their charity. They also made a general Confession and prepared themselves to follow a rule of life. In this fashion, the four days of retreat went by and whatever free time remained was devoted to prayer. Several, perhaps the greater number, of these girls did not know how to read, so Mlle Le Gras had to teach as well as to direct them in the spiritual life. The rule of life, or order of day, was drawn up by her direction, and all the meditations, no matter what the subject, were aimed at the service of the poor.[89] When the retreat was over and the active life begun, Saint Vincent superintended the moral formation and religious instruction of his young collaborators whom he recommended to the parish clergy.[90]

A life dedicated to the service of the poor demands a combination of virtues which when brought into contact with the world may easily be lost, if precautions to protect them be not multiplied. Perseverance in such a vocation implies constant preoccupation with the pursuit of personal perfection, and Saint Vincent attached the utmost importance to this permanent striving after holiness. The dangers to young girls straight from the country were obviously very great, and four days of retreat were scarcely sufficient to strengthen their wills against the seductions of a great city like Paris. It was of little avail to induce them to make good resolutions ; what was really needed was a more profound

[86] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 215. [87] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
[88] *Ibid.* [89] *Ibid.*, p. 197. [90] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

and, consequently, a more prolonged influence exerted on their souls ; in fact, a real transformation of their whole inner life. In that way alone could decay and defection be avoided, or rather lessened. Now such a transformation required a preliminary training of at least some months ; moreover, such a period of training had another advantage inasmuch as it constituted a sort of reserve fund for the Confraternities, thanks to which it would be easy to fill up vacancies in the Charities, and to supply nurses for those which would afterwards be estabished. Again, this reform implied another : the girls were not united by any common bond, for they were attached to different Confraternities and depended on the ladies who were their employers. Louise had authority over only those of Saint Nicholas, and the union of all into one community, under the direction of the same Superior, offered undoubted advantages.

On November 29, 1633, Saint Vincent thought the time had come to add this element of perfection to his work. He selected three or four girls whom he placed under Louise de Marillac's guidance. Her house, near the Church of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, became their home and there under the eye of God, their probation was begun.[91] Louise, ever since her husband's death, had felt attracted towards a community life and Saint Vincent had all the difficulty in the world to calm her impatience. ' You belong to Our Lord and to His holy Mother,' he wrote to her once, ' hold fast to them, and the state in which they have placed you,[92] until they let you see they require something else of you.'[93] On another occasion, he wrote : ' Courageously resist all feelings that you may experience contrary to this, and rest assured that you will, by this means, be in the state that God demands of you before moving you on to another, for His greater glory, should He deem it expedient.' His constant lesson was : ' Leave things to God ; let Him act.' ' I beseech you, rely on Him, and you will have the fulfilment of all our heart's desires.'[94] At times even, his exhortations have a touch of reproach : ' I beg you once for all not to

[91] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[92] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 79.
[93] *Ibid.*, p. 87. [94] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

think about the matter until Our Lord lets you see what He wills, for just now He is giving you sentiments that are contrary to it. We desire many good things with a desire that seems to be according to God, and yet such is not always the case. But God permits this so that the mind may be prepared to be in harmony with its desires. Saul sought an ass, and found a Kingdom ; Saint Louis sought the conquest of the Holy Land, and found the conquest of self and a crown in Heaven. You are seeking to become the servant of those poor girls, and God wishes you to be His own and, perhaps, of more persons than you could in this particular way ; and even if you were only His own, is it not enough for God that your heart is honouring the tranquillity of His Son ? And it will be in a fit and proper state to serve Him. The Kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit ; He will reign in you, if your heart is at peace. So be at peace then, Mademoiselle, and you will be honouring, in royal fashion, the God of peace and love.'[95]

As the time for the realisation of his plans drew near, the more did his language grow imperative : ' Our Lord means to make use of you for something that concerns His glory, and I hope He will preserve you for it.'[96] The moment was not now far distant when her aspirations were to be fully satisfied, and if Saint Vincent still showed some hesitation it was because the ground was not yet sufficiently clear of obstacles. One doubt still remained. Writing in May, 1633,[97] he says : ' As for that matter of what you ought to do, my heart is not yet sufficiently enlightened, before God, in regard to a difficulty which prevents me from seeing if it is the will of His divine Majesty.' What precisely was this difficulty ? It was, in all probability, the opposition which he foresaw the prejudices of the times would raise to ' a community of women ' who were ' free to go through the streets and into houses.' In those days, nuns and the cloister meant one and the same thing, and the members of every community of women were looked on as ' religious ' in the strict sense of the term. Saint Francis de Sales had striven against this tendency but had failed : the Daughters of the

[95] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 113.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 186. [97] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Visitation, who had in the first instance been founded to visit the poor in their homes, had, under pressure from the Archbishop of Lyons, been forced to abandon this work, and to live within the cloister. It is true that long before Saint Francis, and even in the seventeenth century, there were nuns of the regular Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the Low Countries, Flanders, Picardy and even Lorraine ; Sisters of the Cell, Sisters of the ' Faille ' and Grey Sisters, who were bound by solemn vows and yet were free to leave their convents to help the sick in their homes.[98] But these communities had in very many instances ceased to carry out their external ministry and were, moreover, so very little known that Saint Vincent was unaware of their existence for he states, over and over again, that nuns as such are cloistered. What, for example, can be more categoric than : ' It cannot be maintained that the Daughters of Charity are " religious," because they could not be Daughters of Charity if they were, for to be a " religious," one must be cloistered.'[99]

The existence of such Sisters was unknown to all around him, and hence his work was regarded as an innovation. When the Procurator General, Blaise Meliand, was asked to approve of the Institute and told that the Sisters did not wish to be ' religious ' in order to be at liberty to visit the hovels of the poor, he said : ' That is without example.'[100] This, in all probability, was the difficulty which kept Saint Vincent back, but he did not look upon it as insoluble ; the Sisters should retain their secular dress, and should have neither vows nor veils nor a grille. Expressions commonly employed by religious should be excluded from their vocabulary ; the Superiors should not be called ' Mothers ' ; their residences should not be called ' convents ' but ' houses ' ; the period of formation should not be called a ' novitiate,' but a ' seminary.' Mass should not be heard in their houses

[98] *Henri Lemaitre* : *Les Soeurs hospitalières à domicile* in the *Revue d'Histoire Franciscaine*, Vol. I, No. 2, April, 1924 ; Hélyot, *Histoire des ordres religieux et militaires*, new edition, Paris, 1792, 8 vols. oct. Vol. VII, p. 301. (The Sisters of the ' *Faille* ' were so called from the head-dress worn by Flemish women. T.)

[99] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 662.

[100] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 4.

nor the Blessed Sacrament reserved nor should they have regular chaplains. As for divine worship, they should mingle with the crowd of the faithful in the parish church. In this way, there would be less tendency to regard them as 'religious'; they would be laywomen, 'children of the parish,' nothing more.

The following months were spent in reflection and negotiations for there were a thousand points to be settled before making a beginning. Letters followed letters, and plans, plans, until, little by little, the project began to take definite shape. In August or September, Saint Vincent wrote again to Mlle Le Gras: 'I think your good angel has done that of which you tell me, in the letter you have written to me. It is four or five days since he communicated with me in regard to the Charity of your Daughters, for it is true that he has frequently reminded me of it, and that I have often thought about this good work; we shall talk about it, please God, on Friday or Saturday, if you do not send for me sooner.'[101] The day chosen by divine Providence was not far off as may be seen from the following passage in another letter: 'We must . . . see each other before definitely arranging about the girls, and this cannot be done until towards the end of the week; nevertheless, please send them back here, for twelve or fifteen days. . . . It would be well, however, to let them know that they should be in a spirit of indifference. And it is certainly necessary to train them in the knowledge of solid virtue, before making use of them.'[102]

November 29, 1633 arrived, a day ever memorable for the Company of Daughters of Charity for it was on that day it came into existence, but it is also a day enveloped in mystery for we have absolutely no information as to what actually occurred. In all the preliminaries of this foundation Saint Vincent had loyally followed the indications of divine Providence as they had been made known to him by the results obtained and the difficulties encountered, and hence he could truthfully say, at a later period, to all the Sisters assembled together: 'Who would have thought that there

[101] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 218.
[102] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 219.

would be Daughters of Charity when the first girls came to some parishes in Paris? O! no, my Daughters, I did not think of it; nor did your Sister Servant either, Mlle Le Gras, nor Father Portail. God was thinking about it for you. It is He, my Daughters, who may be called the author of your Company; He is more truly and really so than anyone else.'[103]

[103] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 113.

CHAPTER XII

THE FOUNDATION OF A CONFRATERNITY OF CHARITY FOR THE HÔTEL-DIEU OF PARIS

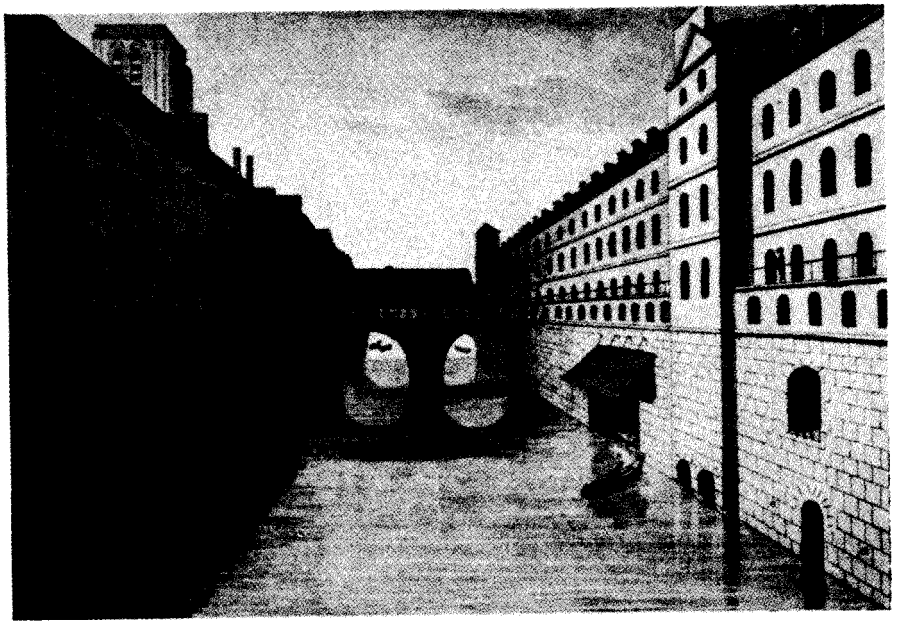
ON the day on which the first Daughters of Charity met in Louise de Marillac's home to begin their probation, Saint Vincent had no idea that only three months later, he would be laying the foundation of a new sort of Confraternity destined to spread its benefits to thousands and thousands of wretched human beings, and confined no longer to a single parish, but scattered over vast provinces. This Confraternity, at first, confined its activities to the sick of the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, but, before entering on this subject, we shall first cast a rapid glance over the organisation of that vast building, especially from the religious standpoint, as it then functioned.

The smallest modern hospital would be a real marvel if placed alongside one of the great hospitals of those days. Whilst to-day hygienic preoccupations dominate all others, in those days the chief idea was so to economise space as to receive as many patients as possible. The beds almost touched each other, and some of them contained, in one fashion or another, two, three, four and sometimes even six patients. The first step towards improvement was made in 1612[1] when the dying were placed in a separate ward ;[2] it was only in 1786 that each patient had a separate bed.

Spiritual authority absolutely depended on the Chapter which exercised its powers through two of its members who were elected on Saint John's Day for the term of one year. These two delegates, who were called visitors, had discovered an easy way of simplifying their duties by transferring them

[1] *L'Hôtel-Dieu de Paris et les Soeurs Augustines*, par Alexis Chevalier, Paris, 1901, p. 254.

[2] Registers of the Academy of Science, November 22, 1786.



THE HÔTEL-DIEU OF PARIS IN THE XVIIth CENTURY

to a priest, whom they appointed head chaplain or, as he was then called, ' Master in Spirituals.' They scarcely ever intervened except to settle disputes between the Head-Chaplain and the staff and to make an annual visitation. Every year, on the Feast of Holy Innocents, accompanied by the Dean of the Chapter, they inspected the Church, Sacristy, Registers, the Legate's Chapel and the quarters of the Augustinian nuns who served the Hospital. They took this opportunity to interview the nuns, to enquire into how they carried out the regulations, and to remind them, if necessary, of their duties and to take all such measures as were deemed necessary for the preservation of good order.[3]

In 1652, there were fourteen chaplains. If we bear in mind that six of these were specially charged with the care of the church, the religious services and hearing the confessions of the nuns, a seventh with admitting patients and keeping the books, an eighth with giving Holy Communion and administering the Sacraments of Baptism and Extreme Unction, we shall find that there were only six left to impart religious instruction and to hear the confessions of the sick. Such an arrangement was laughable, for the number of patients admitted every day was from fifty to eighty,[4] and the annual number of patients was estimated at from twenty to twenty-five thousand.[5] The chaplains, moreover, were the slaves of old customs which they had found in existence when they took up work, and which they had no inclination to modify. When patients were admitted to the Hospital, Confession was mentioned to them at the gate and once again at the approach of death, and that was all.[6] It would obviously have been far better, before urging them to purify their consciences, to devote some time to instruct and prepare them for the Sacrament, to allow the emotions produced by separation from their families time to subside and, above all, it would have been far better not to give them an occasion for thinking that their stay in the hospital was regarded

[3] Fosseyeux, *L'Hôtel de Paris aux XVII*e *et XVIII*e *siècles*, Paris, 1912, oct. p. 3 ff.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[5] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX, p. 133.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

as of lesser importance than the reception of the Sacrament of Penance. On the other hand, it was imprudent to wait for a patient's last moments, for nothing is as uncertain as the hour of death, and no man knows if he will then be in such a state as to be capable of understanding his position and of repenting his sins.

The Company of the Blessed Sacrament was disturbed at hearing that many of the patients died without Confession and, in 1632, decided to send two of its members every Monday to the Hôtel-Dieu ; one ecclesiastic and one layman. Whilst the priest was hearing one man's confession, the layman taught another how to examine his conscience.[7] The Baron de Renty and Boudon, the future Archdeacon of Evreux, outshone all the other members of the Company by their assiduity and zeal in this duty. In the following year, the Confraternity did even better. At its request, seven communities in Paris, the Minims, Jesuits, Fathers of Christian Doctrine, Discalced Carmelites, Reformed Dominicans, Bernardines and Oratorians, permitted two of their members to visit the sick once a week.[8] If they had persevered in this practice, the remedy would have produced excellent results but unfortunately such was not the case.

Nicholas Lesecq, ' Master in Spirituals,' had other things to think of than the securing of a Christian death for those at their last gasp. He had beggared his parents before piling up such a mountain of debt himself that he was sold up by the sheriff and bastinadoed by the military. He gambled, blasphemed, stole and indulged in violent quarrels. His house in the Rue Plâtrière was close to the Duke of Epernon's, who was then in disgrace and Lesecq built a gallery to spy at his ease on the prisoner. The Chapter did everything in its power, despite the administrators, to keep him in office, but was forced to dismiss him in 1635.[9]

The Augustinian nuns were not likely to profit much from such a director and, in fact, they did not ; their general conduct was influenced by his presence, by the bad example

[7] *Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*, par René de Voyer, d'Argenson, Marseilles, 1900, pp. 32, 33.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[9] Fosseyeux, *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 15.

constantly before their eyes and by incomplete and unintelligent training. There was no novitiate, and the Prioress handed over a new arrival to an older nun with the result that rival groups and cabals were formed, as each nun was anxious to have her own little novice. From such a multiplicity of mothers sprang, as one may imagine, a multiplicity of spirit. There were two rival schools of thought amongst the Augustinian nuns : the active and the contemplative. The former complained that too much time was given to prayer and not enough to work, whilst the latter said that the former were not sufficiently interior. The administrators of the hospital intervened in the debate, and not in favour of the contemplatives. They declared that ' meditation is a painful exercise,' suitable only for ' rare and strong minds,' dangerous ' to feeble souls ' who ' for the most part wander around and go astray in it,' and not ' suitable to the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu, who have chosen for their part the practice of charity . . . ; to which they are obliged by vow to devote their time, and not to meditation.' They also found fault with the nuns for frequenting the sacraments, going to Holy Communion every day, being too fond of spiritual conferences and passing an infinite amount of time with their confessors instead of attending the sick. ' Some,' they say, ' do nothing but raise their eyes and hands to Heaven,' whilst ' others are sweating from their charitable labours.' ' Very little interest is taken in nursing the sick, and all that troubles them is to be in the convent up to ten o'clock at night engaged in meditations and spiritual conferences.'

The Governors would not have spoken in this manner if they had a better idea of the influence of the inner life on the active. Contemplation, restrained within certain limits, in no way interferes with external work but, on the contrary, is a help by impressing on the soul a more profound sentiment of one's obligations and a more intense love of the poor. But it certainly does seem as if, in this matter, some of the Augustinian nuns had gone beyond the bounds. If they had kept to what had been laid down in their rules, namely, half an hour's meditation every morning, the Governors would scarcely have complained that spiritual exercises were

encroaching on the time that should be given to nursing the sick. In the case of these nuns, two extreme tendencies were represented and this would not have been the case, at any rate to the same extent, if they had had a uniform system of spiritual training. A common novitiate, under the direction of an experienced novice-mistress, would have prevented other evils. Sisters who were quite well known to be without the qualities requisite for community life were professed, like the others, simply on account of their past services. Community life became in fact more and more relaxed. Each Sister had her own clothes, linen, personal property, either concealed somewhere by herself or entrusted to some friend in the city. They did not sleep in dormitories.

The Chapter as well as the Governors felt that a reform was needed. In 1634, the Governors drew up and imposed a new set of regulations. The Chapter protested, for the amount of time allotted to exercises of piety was really insufficient. The quarrel became envenomed, and the nuns followed its progress with interest and even passion. Two camps were formed ; the seniors, enemies of all innovation, and the juniors quite prepared to do away with all ancient traditions. The novices, their elders declared, 'are giving themselves such airs that no one can put up with them.' It was the duty of the Chapter to draw up some scheme of reform and, on January 2, 1635, the task was entrusted to one of its most distinguished members, Francis Ladvocat, Abbé d'Humblières, Chaplain to the King. Ladvocat was a man of action, and set to work immediately so that a novitiate was established, in 1636, under the direction of Mother Genevieve Bouquet ; community life was re-established, and all that concerned admission to religious profession and triennial elections to the various offices was settled by regulations.[10]

When the new statutes were published, in 1652, six years after the death of their author, they set the seal on a state of affairs that was already in existence, for Ladvocat, thanks to his office of Visitor which he held from 1643 to 1646, had been himself able to carry out the reform. This brief sketch will help to give us a summary idea of the state of the great

[10] Fosseyeux, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–26.

Parisian Hospital in 1634 when Vincent de Paul, yielding to the solicitations of Madame Goussault, established the Company of Ladies.

Madame Goussault was a frequent visitor to the Hôtel-Dieu and when she spoke to the sick of the duties of their religion was amazed to find that the majority were utterly ignorant of their faith and its obligations. Faced with this deplorable state of affairs, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament had mobilised its members and obtained the help of the religious communities. Madame Goussault believed that, in this work of charity, women too had a part to play and she looked around for one who could group, organise and encourage them. She thought at once of Vincent de Paul and went to him to tell him of her plans. He listened attentively and then asked for some time to think the matter over. He saw quite clearly the difficulties that would have to be overcome. In the first place, the Hôtel-Dieu, in temporal matters, was under the control of the Governors and, in spiritual, under that of the Chapter ; it had its own chaplains and its own hospital Sisters. It was the business of the constituted authorities to remedy, by suitable measures, all that was not in order and it seemed to him that intervention was simply 'putting one's sickle in another's harvest.'[11] He may, perhaps, have called to mind other attempts that had to be abandoned after a very brief experience. If we open the registers of the deliberations of the Hôtel-Dieu, we shall find under date of January 25, 1608 : 'That one of the Governors be requested to inform the honourable ladies who have offered to come to the Hôtel-Dieu to see the poor dine and sup, will be most welcome, whenever and as often as they care to come, and that if they desire, out of charity, to distribute meat, let them send it raw to the kitchen of the said Hôtel-Dieu to have it cooked so that they may see it distributed in their presence, together with preserves, if their charity intends to distribute some.'

Once the ladies had secured entrance into the hospital they started to meddle in matters that did not concern them, and the first to suffer from their interference were the nuns. Complaints poured in to the Secretary and a well-

[11] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. XXIX, p. 131 ff.

deserved word of warning was conveyed to the pious visitors. ' The ladies, married and single, who have undertaken out of devotion to see and observe how the sick are treated in this hospital ' we read in the minutes of the Council held on July 16, ' shall be requested to leave the nuns to look after their own affairs and be content with observing if the said nuns carry out their duties.' Abuses continued and, on April 11, 1612, the Council forbade the nuns to accept, on behalf of the sick, bread, wine and meat ; for, they declared, ' such gifts cause more disturbance than advantage and likewise much confusion.' Vincent de Paul may, perhaps, have remembered this unfortunate experiment when Madame Goussault asked him to organise a Company of ladies to instruct and exhort the patients of the Hôtel-Dieu. He replied that, as the spiritual welfare of the sick was the business of the Chapter, it was for that body, if it thought well, to take whatever measures it deemed necessary. Madame Goussault urged her point but all to no avail ; she was faced with an inflexible determination. The old proverb, ' What a woman wants, God wants,' was justified once more. Madame Goussault made a flank attack to reach her objective. She went to John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, told him of her plans and her powers of persuasion were such that he came round to share her way of thinking. ' Leave it to me,' he replied, ' I will see M. Vincent and, if necessary, command him to establish the Confraternity of which you speak.' She had succeeded for, faced with a formal request from the Archbishop, Saint Vincent could do nothing but submit.

It was quite an easy matter to collect a few charitable ladies, and the first meeting was held in Madame Goussault's town house in the Rue Roi-de-Sicile. Amongst those present were Madame de Villesabin, the widow of one of Marie de Medici's chief secretaries ; Madame Bailleul, the wife of the Lord of Vattetot-sur-Mer and of Soisy-sur-Seine ; Madame Dumecq ; Madame Sainctot, the widow of a former Treasurer of France, and Madame Pollalion, who was to establish the Daughters of Providence. Saint Vincent first explained the end in view and, when he had induced the ladies to take it up, went on to recommend them to have

recourse to God in prayer and Holy Communion so that they might obtain His protection and recruit other adherents. The assembly broke up after arrangements had been made to hold another meeting on the following Monday. In the interval, the ladies set to work to gain new members amongst their friends, of whom the most remarkable were Madame de Traversay, a sister of President Melisand's, and Madame Fouquet, the mother of the celebrated Minister of Finance.

There was a larger attendance at the second meeting ; Saint Vincent received the title of perpetual director and Madame Goussault, that of President, and an assistant and treasurer were elected. The director addressed them and was listened to with the greatest attention and devotion. He made no attempt to conceal from his audience the difficulties they were bound to meet with but he showed that they would all vanish if the ladies would only learn to keep their proper place, that is to say, refrain from trespassing on the rights of the authorities and from interfering with the duties of the nuns to whom they should rather show themselves submissive, patient and even respectful. He then went on to say what he was to repeat in another form later on : ' We propose . . . to contribute to the salvation and comfort of the poor, and that is a thing which cannot be done without the help and good will of these good nuns who are in charge. Hence it is only just to prevent them with honour, as if they were your mothers, and to treat them as spouses of Christ and the ladies of the house ; for it is a mark of the Spirit of God to act gently and peacefully, and the most certain means of success is to imitate this method of action.' The ladies left the meeting, fully determined to follow his wise advice. The next step was to obtain the Governors' consent which Saint Vincent undertook to do ; as soon as the Governors learned that he came from the Archbishop of Paris, they told him that every facility would be afforded to the ladies.

We have just recounted, relying on Abelly and Saint Vincent's own writings, how the Confraternity of the Hôtel-Dieu came into existence. Quite recently some historians, too much inclined to believe that the work of

Saint Vincent de Paul had been exaggerated by his first biographer, have preferred to attribute the paternity of this association to the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. They admit Abelly's account, but complete it with an allegation that the famous secret society, without appearing to be so, was actually behind Madame Goussault, and, through her, behind Saint Vincent himself. The men and women who up to the present have always been regarded as its founders were simply instruments, manipulated by a hidden hand. Raoul Allier was the first to defend this view, although he did not think it had been proved in every respect. Some of his disciples, going a step further, assert it without hesitation. The grounds on which this thesis rests seem, however, very fragile, and it is surprising that such a man as the author of *La cabale des dévots* ever attached any importance to it.[12]

[12] Here are Raoul Allier's arguments : (*La cabale des dévots*, Paris, 1902, oct. pp. 56–59). I° ' Many of the names of the Ladies of Charity recall those of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, for instance, Mesdames de Lamoignon, de Morangis, d'Argenson, or are borne by its most usual collaborators such as Mesdames d'Aiguillon, de Pollalion or Fouquet.' These lines contain a mixture of error and of confusion. Mesdames de Morangis and d'Argenson were never Ladies of Charity ; Mesdames de Lamoignon and d'Aiguillon did not join the Association until some time later, and as for Mlle de Pollalion and Madame Fouquet, it has never been shown that they collaborated in 1634 with the brethren of the Blessed Sacrament.

II° ' Precisely at the same date as the Company of the Blessed Sacrament was making efforts to secure spiritual assistance for the sick in the Hôtel-Dieu, Madame de Goussault was approaching Vincent de Paul with the result that the patients obtained a more material form of assistance.' The coincidence is not so striking as some may imagine seeing that the men organised their visits in 1632 and the women in 1634. Furthermore, it is easily explicable by the state of neglect in which the sick were left just at this time. Madame Goussault had eyes to see what the gentlemen of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament observed and the primary end of her association was of a purely spiritual order.

III°. ' It should be noted that the brethren were preoccupied with organising and guiding the charitable activities of women. In 1631, it was proposed to establish an association of ladies and to provide it with statutes similar to those of the Company.' The brethren had not at that time the slightest wish to create

To return to the Hôtel-Dieu. It was decided that four ladies should visit the sick in the hospital every day, dressed very simply. On entering, the first thought should be of Our Lord, the true Father of the poor, whose help they should invoke through the mediation of the most Blessed Virgin and of Saint Louis, the founder of the House. They should then go to the nuns and offer to serve the poor with them. What they brought to the sick, above all, was consolation, encouragement and exhortations to put themselves in the state of grace.

The chief points that might be used as material for instructing the patients were condensed into a little book which he had printed for the use of the Ladies. It seemed to him that to read to the patients was much more suitable than to preach, as it were, at them. The following extract contains his suggestions as to the best means of preparing the sick to make a general Confession. 'Is it long, my dear Sister, since you went to Confession? Do you think you would like to make a general Confession, if you were told how it should be done? I have been told myself that it was important for my salvation to make a good one before I die, both to repair the faults of my usual Confessions, which I may have made badly, and to conceive a greater sorrow for my sins, by thinking on the more grievous ones I have committed in all my past life, and the great mercy with which God has borne with me, for He did not condemn me or send me to the fire of hell when I had deserved it, but waited for me to be penitent so that He might forgive me my sins and, in the end, grant me Paradise if I were converted

feminine groups as the only proposal of such a nature made up till then, that is, 1631, was rejected. It is true that, in 1645, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament was in favour of establishing associations in the provinces similar to that of the Hôtel-Dieu, but can one conclude, even as a simple probability, from this tardy approbation that it had anything to say to the creation of the Ladies of Charity in 1634? Furthermore, it is not of the slightest importance whether or not a member of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament suggested to Madame Goussault to approach Saint Vincent; his action is in no way thereby diminished; he remains, as truly as ever, the real founder of the Company of Ladies of Charity.

to Him with all my heart, as I now really wish to be, with the help of His grace.' Now you have the same reasons as I for making such a general confession and for giving yourself to God to live well for the future. And if you wish to know what you should do in order to recall your sins to mind, and then to make a good confession of them, I myself was taught to examine myself in the way I am now about to tell you.'

When the examination of conscience was over, the visitor began again : ' I have also been taught how necessary it is to stir up in my heart true contrition for my sins and to make acts of contrition such as these. . . .' Then came the usual formula of an act of contrition and afterwards acts of faith, hope and charity, after she had first said : ' I have also been taught to make acts of faith, hope and charity in this way.'

If the patient consented to go to Confession, an ecclesiastic was notified and appeared. After this first step had been taken, the charitable visitor returned to prepare the patient for Holy Communion.

The ladies were not slow to realise that they would induce the sick to listen more attentively to their exhortation if they added some little gifts. Milk soups were accordingly distributed in the morning and, in the afternoon, at the time fixed for the collation, white bread, biscuits, preserves, jellies, grapes and cherries when in season, and lemons and cooked pears, were distributed in winter.

The whole Court soon got to hear of the Confraternity of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu, and a holy rivalry sprang up amongst ladies of the highest rank with the result that a large number of them were enrolled as servants of the sick poor. The Company which began sometime in the first three months of the year 1634,[13] counted, even on July 25, from a hundred to a hundred and twenty members,[14] nearly all of whom were bearers of great names.

[13] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 229.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

CHAPTER XIII

THE REFORM OF THE CLERGY

THE relief of the unfortunate did not take up the whole of Saint Vincent de Paul's time ; he also worked at the reform of the clergy. His priests, by means of missions given in country places, strengthened the fervent, stirred up the lukewarm and reconciled sinners. They kindled a fire that burned as long as they remained there ; but after their departure, who was to feed it ? If they did not leave a zealous pastor behind them, sooner or later nothing would remain of the good effects of the mission. To accomplish a really permanent and valuable work, Saint Vincent would need to add the establishment of seminaries to the preaching of missions. He recognised the fact and pondered over it from a very early period, but wise man that he was, he proceeded by stages ; to do something for candidates for ordination was an obvious preliminary step to the desired end, and that, as a matter of fact, is how he began.

Ever since the mission at Folleville especially, he earnestly longed for the day when a vast movement of reform would give the Church of France learned, energetic, pious, disinterested pastors, capable of realising the greatness of their vocation and the importance of their work. He had learned by experience that the best means to adopt was to leave the older clergy aside, for, considering their age and habits, any attempt at reform would be useless or superficial, and to devote quite particular attention to the selection and preparation of those who presented themselves as candidates for Holy Orders.

The evil was undoubtedly great. In certain respects, it would be preferable to throw a veil over the lamentable scandals given by a certain section of the clergy before the

religious reform of which Saint Vincent was one of the chief agents. But if the reader is left in ignorance of the state of the Church in France and elsewhere at this time, how can he possibly appreciate the greatness of the work accomplished and the merit of the men who undertook it? Bérulle, Bourdoise, Olier and Vincent de Paul in their own day, and after them their biographers and a large number of historians, were not afraid to tell the truth notwithstanding the painful impressions they knew they were bound to produce; why then should one condemn oneself to keep silent three centuries later and at a time when the clergy, long since regenerated, occupy an honourable position amongst all other classes of society?

Immediately after the Wars of Religion, which had caused universal ruin and wiped away all traces of organisation, how could the religious situation be satisfactory? Abelly writes:[1] 'Ecclesiastical discipline and order were completely overset everywhere.' The author of the first life of Bourdoise adds: 'Such churches as had escaped the fury of the impious, especially in the country, were now only covered with thatch, in ruins for the most part, and without books or vestments; several indeed, without tabernacles. The Son of God was lodged in copper ciboria covered with verdigris and half-rotten, and the Hosts at times were full of worms or devoured by mice.'[2]

The ecclesiastical state was a profession and the easiest of all professions; any one, without vocation or preparation, could take it up. Without vocation, because the hunger for benefices and the determination of a man's relatives were almost always substituted for a call from God; it was the rule in noble families, that if the eldest were in any way crippled or deformed, he should become a churchman and, if he were normal, should leave this career to his junior. Without preparation, for the decrees of the Council of Trent were not as yet applied. 'Several prelates,' Courtin writes in another place, 'raised the very dregs of the people to the priesthood; and whoever wished could be con-

[1] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. I, p. 3.

[2] *La vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu messire Adrien Bourdoise*, par Courtin, 1698, MS. 2453 de la Bibl. Mazarin, p. 23.

secrated and made a priest of the Most High without any examination into his capacity, morals or conduct.'[3]

With such a method of recruiting, the clergy, as one may easily imagine, could not take an honourable position in society. 'The Church is going to ruin, in many places,' Vincent de Paul said one day, 'on account of the evil life of her priests; it is they who are ruining and destroying her; . . . and the depravity of the ecclesiastical state is the chief cause of the ruin of God's Church'. He was speaking about what he himself had seen, and also re-echoed what others had related to him.[4] 'In this diocese', a Canon wrote to him, 'the clergy is without discipline, the people without fear and the priests without piety or charity; the pulpits are without preachers, science without honour, and vice without chastisement; virtue is persecuted and the authority of the Church either hated or despised; self-interest is the customary scales in the sanctuary; the most scandalous are the most powerful, and flesh and blood have here supplanted the Gospel and the spirit of Jesus Christ.'

There were some dioceses at least to which these words were applicable. After a Bishop and his Vicars-General had exerted their very utmost to reform his flock, he sorrowfully admitted that he had not succeeded on account of the 'great and inexplicable number of ignorant and vicious priests' whom neither words nor example could induce to abandon their bad habits. In his diocese, he writes,[5] nearly 7000 priests had forgotten the vow taken when they were ordained sub-deacons, and dishonoured their sacred character by their habits of intemperance. What a spectacle for the faithful! They certainly needed solid faith to resist such scandals. The Bishops of a whole province were forced to hold a meeting so as to seek a common and efficacious remedy for the vice of drunkenness, into which the majority of their priests had fallen.[6] Amongst the

[3] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. II, Sect. IV, p. 287.
[4] *Ibid.*, Sect. I, p. 213.
[5] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. II, Sect. I, p. 214.
[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 9. On the deplorable prevalence of drunkenness and immorality, see Courtin, *op. cit.*, p. 26–27.

conversions which Vincent de Paul had the happiness of making at Châtillon-les-Dombes were those of six elderly priests who spent their time in taverns, gaming-houses, and their own lodgings, where the company was not always of such a nature as to be above suspicion.[7] In one place, the priest left the Church, still wearing his surplice, and followed his parishioners to the taverns where they all drank and gossiped together; in another, scarcely was the service over than he stuck spurs to his mount and galloped off to come up with the hunt in a neighbouring forest.[8]

When Charles de Noailles, Bishop of Rodez, died, the ecclesiastics in his diocese threw aside their clerical attire. 'Some' wrote Alain de Solminihac, Bishop of Cahors,[9] 'hung their cassocks out of the tavern windows; and others drank to his health.' Many returned to their former disorderly way of living. 'The first thing the Vicars-General did was to annul all the regulations made by the prelate in favour of reform.'

Ignorance and vice went hand-in-hand. 'Good Monsieur Bourdoise,' said Saint Vincent, 'was the first person whom[10] God inspired to set up a seminary in which men should be taught how to administer the sacraments and carry out the rubrics; before him, men scarcely knew what a seminary meant; there was no special place in which these things were taught; a man after his theology, his philosophy, his minor studies, and a little Latin, went to a parish and administered the sacraments there just as he fancied.'

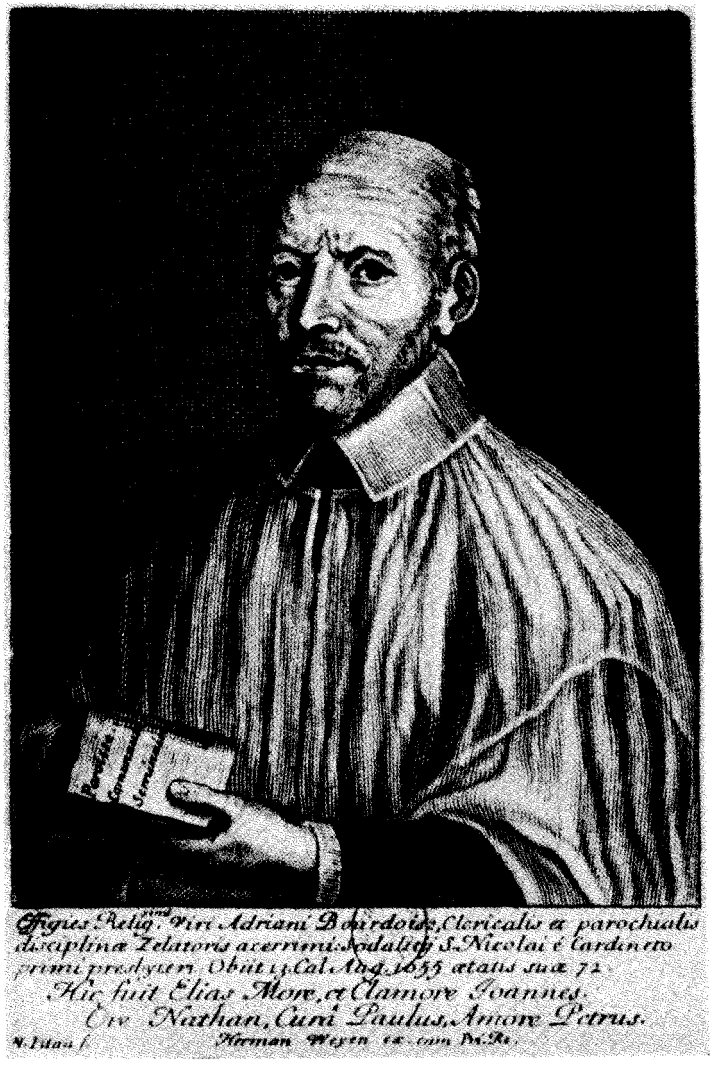
Courtin says exactly the same: 'At that time it was asking a good deal of a priest to require that he should know how to read and write and have a little knowledge of plain-song. . . . M. Bourdoise relates that, finding himself once in a group of ecclesiastics, there was not a man of them who could explain this verse of the *Magnificat*: *Dispersit superbos mente cordis sui*. . . . They were so ignorant of the mysteries of our religion that some were even found

[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 46 and 50.

[8] *Homélie des désordres des trois ordres*, par Camus, Paris, 1615, p. 34.

[9] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 294.

[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 289.



ADRIEN BOURDOISE

who did not even know Jesus Christ and could not tell how many natures there were in Him.'[11]

Parish priests heard confessions without knowing the formula for absolution. Madame de Gondi and Saint Vincent de Paul discovered this fact for themselves ; and the devout lady, in order to be sure of receiving absolution, used to carry around with her a written copy of the form, which the confessor contented himself with reading.[12] Some were ignorant of the fact that a priest should be authorised to hear confessions by a competent authority, and when the Daughters of Charity went to Belle-Isle-en-Mer to nurse the sick in the local hospital, they did not find a single priest on the island who knew from whom he received jurisdiction, and indeed all of them, with one solitary exception, were giving scandal to the people.[13]

What is to be said about the manner in which Mass was celebrated ? Just listen to Saint Vincent : ' Oh ! if you had seen, I will not say merely the ugliness, but the diversity of the ceremonies of the Mass forty years ago, they would have made you ashamed. It seems to me that there is nothing uglier in the world than the different ways in which Mass used to be celebrated ; some began the Mass with the *Pater Noster* ; others took hold of the chasuble, said the *Introibo* and then put on the chasuble. I was once in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and I remarked seven or eight priests who all said Mass differently : this one did it one way, that one-another ; there was such a diversity as to make one weep.'[14] Now let Courtin fill in the picture : ' At that time, the cassock or ecclesiastical dress was never even mentioned ; it was a great thing if priests appeared at the altar having modified their ordinary garb ; moreover it was a very common sight, and there were plenty of priests to be seen administering the very sacraments in church dressed in a doublet, and celebrating Mass with the vestments put on over their jerkins and sometimes over a footman's overcoat.'[15]

[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XI, p. 170.

[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 383.

[14] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 258.

[15] *Op. cit.*, p. 27. Courtin adds here : ' We know those who see the clergy of the present day will find it h that ard to

Such saddening examples bespattered, as it were, the dignity of the priesthood, which, as Abelly says :[16] ' was without honour ' and he adds that in some places, noble ecclesiastics blushed to be called priests ; shame would have prevented them from taking Holy Orders were it not for the revenues that accrued from a good benefice.[17]

If the moral and intellectual level of a large number of the clergy had fallen so low, this was due to a variety of causes : the great number of bishoprics and benefices that were left unfilled ; the abuse that was then known as ' the confidence,' a secret and unlawful agreement by which one person gave or had given to another, a benefice on condition that the nominal holder should leave the other its disposal or income ; the bad selection of bishops and other holders of benefices, which was most frequently made without any reference to the merits or vocation of individuals, and solely from family or other interests ; the neglect of the duty of residence on the part of many, and finally, the hindrances to episcopal authority on the part of the State.

' Three-fourths of the folds and flocks[18] are deprived of their lawful and true shepherds,' said Claude d'Angennes, Bishop of Mans, in 1596.

In the following year, the Cardinal Archbishop of Florence, who was then on a diplomatic mission in France, wrote to the Pope : ' Out of one hundred and forty bishoprics there are eighty-three without titulars. Several prelates, formerly inclined to schism, have returned. There are not many intelligent men amongst them . . . ; they are very negligent about ordinations ; and hence there are so many ignorant and mendicant priests, without any title, and so many persons who have taken orders before the prescribed age and without preparation, especially religious. . . . As they are priests, they hear confessions without approbation from the Ordinary. . . . The revenues of several vacant

believe these things, but persons who have actually seen them with their own eyes have related them to us, and we are not telling even the fifth part of what we have heard.'

[16] *Op. cit.*, Introduction, Vol. I, p. 3.

[17] Courtin says exactly the same (*op. cit.*, p. 27).

[18] Palma Cayet, *Chron. nov.*, Bk. VIII, p. 723.

bishoprics go to women, soldiers and princes; which is abominable.'[19]

Similar complaints were made in the course of the closing speech of the General Assembly of the Clergy of France, on June 1, 1596, on 'the disorder and irregularity' of ecclesiastical discipline. The orator sorrowfully remarked that forty archbishoprics or bishoprics were vacant, many others were held 'in confidence,' three or four hundred abbeys were in the same plight, and almost all of them without monks, the greater number of priories or parishes occupied or usurped by laymen, and often even by heretics and Protestant ministers.

The Abbey of Fontgombault was in the possession of Protestant gentlemen for more than a century; that of Saint Leonard de Chaumes, which the Archbishop of Aix granted to Saint Vincent, had previously been in the possession of Huguenots. Sully, Henry IV's Protestant Minister, held several. And as presentation to the majority of spiritual charges lay with the Abbot, one may easily guess the abuses that resulted from such a state of affairs. Infants still in their cradles had their share of abbeys, priories and other spiritual charges.

The civil power frequently interfered with the bishop's authority. In case he punished a rebellious priest, the latter was frequently upheld either by the Governor of the Province or by the Parlement. The contests between Cardinal de Sourdis and the Duc d'Épernon are only one instance out of many. Appeals to the Parlement by the clergy or Chapter against measures adopted by the ruler of a diocese were quite a matter of course.

It is high time to have done with such a painful subject, which might easily be amplified although with regret, if we are to have a clear idea of the need for reform and the difficulties encountered by the men who effected it.[20] Saint

[19] Vatican Archives, *Lettere di Francia*, Vol. XLV, p. 23. This quotation is taken from a précis of the document made by Henri de l'Epinois, and given in an article entitled *Les derniers jours de la Ligue*, *Revue des Questions historique*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 111.

[20] Apart from the works already mentioned, the following books on the state of the French clergy, at the end of the six-

Vincent, no doubt, did not inaugurate a movement destined to end in the regeneration and organisation of the clergy, but he was, in the hands of God, the instrument that most powerfully contributed to its success.

The formation of the clergy was much too important a matter not to attract the attention of the Fathers of the Council of Trent. The resolutions arrived at are embodied in the decree *Cum adolescentium aetas* in the 18th Chapter of the 23rd Session. ' The holy Council ordains,' it says, ' that all cathedral and metropolitan churches, and others superior to the latter, each according to the measure of its powers and the extent of the diocese, are bound to support, train in piety, and instruct in the ecclesiastical profession and discipline, a certain number of the children of their city and diocese or of their province, if in any locality, there be not a sufficient number. The bishop shall bring them up in a college situated near these churches, or in some other suitable

teenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, may be consulted : *l'Essai historique sur l'influence de la religion en France pendant le XVII*e *siècle*, par Picot, Paris, 1824, 2 vols. Vol. I, pp. 10–52 ; *La renaissance catholique et la dévotion feminine dans la première moitié du XVII*e *siècle*, par G. Fagniez, in the *Revue des Questions Historiques*, April 1, 1927, pp. 305–322 ; *Le cardinal de Richelieu et la Réforme des monastères benedictins*, par Paul Denis, Paris, 1913, p. 1, etc. ; *Prêtres, soldats et juges sous Richelieu*, par d'Avenel, Paris, pp. 1–90 ; *Le saint Abbé Bourdoise*, par Jean Darche, Paris, 1883, 2 vols. Vol. I, pp. LXXV, etc. ; *Le Père de Bérulle et l'Oratoire de Jésus*, par l'Abbé Houssaye, Paris, 1874, p. 3, etc. ; *La vie du Père Charles de Condren*, par P. Amelotte, Paris, 1643, Part II, Ch. VII, pp. 94–101 ; *Histoire du Cardinal de Sourdis*, par L. W. Ravenez, Bordeaux, 1867 ; *Avertissement à Messieurs les députés du clergé sur la décadance de l'Eglise gallicane*, 1614 ; *Traité des séminaires*, par A. Godeau, Aix, 1660 ; *Traité des superstitions qui regardent les sacrements*, par J. B. Thiers, Paris, 1703 ; *Vie de Mgr A. de Solminihac*, par le P. Léonard Chastenet, new edition, Saint Brieuc, 1817, Bk. II, Ch. VI, pp. 204, etc. ; *La vie de César de Bus*, par P. Dumas, 1713 ; Godeau's sermon preached in 1666 before a General Assembly of the Oratorians ; P. Le Jeune's two sermons : *De l'intempérance des clercs et des Devoirs des pasteurs dans l'Eglise*, *Vie du P. Romillon*, par l'Abbé Bourguignon, Marseilles, 1649 ; *L'Ordre des Trinitaires pour le rachat des captifs*, par Deslandres, Toulouse, 1903, 2 vols.

place.' He shall choose, by preference from amongst the poorer classes, children at least twelve years old, born in lawful wedlock who are able to read and write, of good natural disposition, and disposed to serve God during the whole course of their lives in ecclesiastical functions. The children of the wealthy are not to be excluded ' provided they be boarded and maintained there at their own expense, and manifest a desire and inclination for the service of God and His Church. . . . On first entering they shall be tonsured and wear ecclesiastical dress. They shall learn grammar, plain-song, ecclesiastical computation and all that concerns good letters, and shall apply themselves to the study of Holy Writ, works dealing with ecclesiastical subjects, the homilies of the saints, all that concerns the administration of the sacraments and everything that shall be judged fitting for their instruction so that they may be able to hear confessions ; finally, they shall be instructed in all the ceremonies and usages of the Church.' They shall assist at Mass daily, go to confession once a month and to Holy Communion as often as their confessor allows. On festival days they shall be employed in the cathedral or other churches. To provide the necessary funds, the bishop shall appropriate to the seminary all such foundations as are intended for the instruction and support of young clerics, wherever there are such ; he shall unite simple benefices, or place a tax on all ecclesiastical revenues, the amount of which shall be determined in a council composed of two Canons and two members of the city clergy.

Such, in substance, are the Council of Trent's instructions in regard to seminaries. This decree had a favourable reception in France[21] but, unfortunately, circumstances long deferred its execution.

The Remonstrances presented to Charles IX after the Assembly of the Clergy in 1573, recommend seminaries as a holy institution and essential for the welfare of the Church.

[21] *Histoire des Séminaires Français* (2 vols, 1912, Paris, Vol. I, p. 41 ff). Canon Degert has dealt with the origin of seminaries in France. Those who desire fuller information on the subject should consult this work, and also Augustin Theiner's, *Histoire des institutions d'éducation écclésiastique*, 2 vols. Paris, 1841, Vol. I, pp. 272–273, 288–294, 303–306, 311–357.

In reply to the requests formulated by the clergy of the States of Blois (1579), Henry III enjoined the bishops to establish seminaries in their dioceses. The same need is recognised some months later by the Assembly of the Clergy, and in the following years by the Provincial Councils of Rouen (1581), Bordeaux (1582), Reims (1583), Bourges (1584), Aix (1585), Toulouse (1590), and Avignon (1594).

In 1565, before these Councils had been held, the Provincial Council of Cambrai, anxious to provide clerics with the means of instruction and sanctification, had decided to follow without delay the intentions of the Council of Trent. This city started a seminary shortly afterwards but it gave little satisfaction and a new Council, held in 1586, enjoined the establishment, at Douai, of a provincial seminary to which the Archbishop should send at least twenty scholars and the suffragan bishops twelve, all to be chosen by competition.

The first conciliar seminary created in France was opened in Reims in 1567 under the direction of the Jesuits. Pont-a-Mousson followed ; then came Metz, Bordeaux, Sarlat, Bazas, Valence, Aix, Avignon, Toulouse, Carpentras, Rouen, Rodez, Agen, Auch, Luçon, Dieppe, Mâcon, Langres, Lyons, Limoges. The greater number of these had a very brief existence. Reims, Pont-a-Mousson, Rouen, Mâcon and Langres were the only ones that lasted more than twenty years and their life, though relatively long, was languishing and without much profit to these dioceses. ' At the end of twenty years,' writes Courtin of the Reims seminary, ' it had degenerated to such a degree that the ecclesiastics who were trained there merely served as lackeys for the Canons, bearing their trains when the latter proceeded to choir, hence their nickname of ' tail-bearers.' In 1625, a vain attempt was made to restore it ; it was in complete decay in 1641. In twenty years, the seminary of Rouen produced only six priests. The seminary of Limoges during this time did not produce one.

The chief cause of these failures was that both masters and scholars were badly selected ; intrigues rather than merit most frequently decided the appointment of the

masters, whilst the burgesses in cathedral towns, in order to avoid paying heavy pensions to the colleges, easily secured by means of recommendations, the entrance of their own children as scholars in the seminaries, although they intended them for civil life ; and so the children of the poor were elbowed out.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, which was a period of religious wars between Protestants and Catholics, circumstances were distinctly unfavourable to the erection and maintenance of seminaries. Pillage and arson of Church property were widespread through the country. People asked, was it a time to compel bishops to create and support such costly establishments as seminaries when there was an urgent call to provide for the general needs of dioceses in ruins. It was thought far better to adopt more economical means, and this in point of fact was what happened in almost every city in which, through the absence of a university, no theological education was given ; in such places, chairs of divinity were annexed to colleges already in existence and staffed by the secular or regular clergy.

This was only a half-measure for, whilst it assured instruction, it did nothing for training. It is not the study of the ecclesiastical sciences alone that constitute a seminary, but a community life, sheltered from the dangers of the world, the practice of Christian virtue and the acquisition of habits of piety under the direction and observation of enlightened priests who are capable of discriminating between men who are fitted for the ministry and those who are not.

In 1615, the disciplinary canons of the Council of Trent were officially accepted in France. In the year preceding, the Assembly of the Clergy had recognised the urgent need for providing seminaries. In 1624, the Provincial Council of Bordeaux did the same. Cardinal de Sourdis, who laid the acts of this Council before the Assembly of the Clergy in 1625, asked for its approbation and assistance and in this he was completely successful. The Assembly devoted much consideration to the establishment of seminaries and to the ways and means of securing this object. The principal difficulties came from the material side, but the Assembly did not think them insurmountable if only the bishops were willing to take

the trouble. The Assembly said, in substance ; ' Purchase suitable buildings, or combine the old and useless colleges ; procure the necessary funds either by a tax on benefices over two hundred livres in value, or by uniting secular or regular benefices with the seminaries.'

The Assembly of 1625 envisaged three kinds of seminaries : the first, for the education of the young ; the second, to prepare clerics for the reception of holy orders during a period of six months, and lastly, a third kind in which parish priests and other ecclesiastics might make an annual retreat.

Charles Godeffroy, a priest of the diocese of Coutances, laid a plan before the Assembly. He proposed to establish fifteen archiepiscopal colleges, each of which was to be in charge of six former parish priests who were to be provided with simple benefices. In these colleges, ecclesiastics, parish priests or others, would be instructed in the suitable discharge of their duties ; they would learn how to celebrate Holy Mass devoutly, to keep the altars fittingly adorned and the churches clean ; a love of their vocation and respect for sacred things was also to be inculcated. Moreover, ordinands could be admitted to make an eight days retreat, and these establishments would also make an excellent substitute for a prison for culpable priests. In Lent and autumn, when the parish priests went home to look after souls and collect their dues, their place would be taken by such young ecclesiastics as might be judged apt to serve the Church at some future day. The Assembly encouraged the author of this proposal and strongly urged him to make a beginning by establishing a Congregation of priests who would work, with the consent of the bishops, at preaching retreats. Godeffroy died shortly afterwards and it is a moot point whether he was fully qualified to realise his own proposals.[22] However this may be, it was a propitious moment for men of action, and these were not wanting, for God had raised up men, mighty in word and work, whose minds were chiefly preoccupied with the restoration of the ecclesiastical state. These men were no

[22] Godeffroy's memorandum was published in 1625, under the title : *Le Collège des saincts exercises, où est donné le moyen unique, très aisé et très efficace de porter, maintenir et eslever les pasteurs et le corps universel de l'Eglise en leur perfection.*

longer paralysed by the difficulties that had confronted their predecessors. The wars of religion were over ; the Church of France had risen out of its ruins, and at the head of at least some dioceses there were bishops filled with zeal and the spirit of initiative.

When Peter de Bérulle founded the Oratory he had placed before his disciples as their chief aim ' to realise in all their actions the perfection of the sacerdotal spirit, to remain subject to the bishops in the labours of the holy ministry, to devote themselves to the training of the clergy and the cultivation of knowledge, not so much for the sake of knowledge itself as for its usefulness in helping our neighbours.'[23] The Oratorians corresponded with the aim of their founder by accepting, in 1612, a seminary established in Paris by the Archbishop of Rouen, which was first transferred to Dieppe and then to Rouen ; in 1616, they took charge of the seminary at Langres ; in 1617, those of Mâcon and Luçon and, in 1620, they opened the seminary of Saint Magloire in Paris. They also taught theology to clerics in their colleges.

The reform of the clergy haunted Bourdoise ; it was with him a fixed idea, a passion. His method was unlike de Bérulle's and consisted in organising communities of priests in parishes so as to assure, under the authority of the parish priest, the carrying-out of parochial functions. In 1612, when still a simple cleric in the College at Reims, he and twelve other ecclesiastics formed an association which had a threefold object : to instruct themselves in the duties of their state, to become proficient in the Ceremonies of the Church and to supervise the suitable adornment of churches. His zeal was redoubled after he had been ordained priest, and his influence likewise spread. Under the vigorous stimulus of his fiery exhortations, many priests began to display the external signs of their profession. In 1618, his Community, consisting of seven members, received young clerics to be instructed, and two years later, it settled down in a house belonging to one of their number, quite close to the Church of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, in Paris. This seminary was approved as such by the Archbishop of Paris in 1631 and

[23] The Bull of Approbation. See Degert, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 133.

received royal recognition in 1632. Bourdoise created communities of priests living in parishes. These were established in Orléans, Chartres, Boinvilliers, Arles, Lyons and many other places, especially in the dioceses of Meaux, Senlis and Beauvais. They admitted clerics and priests who wished to devote themselves to teaching in primary schools or to receive practical instruction in the duties of their ministry. Though not called seminaries, they did in fact render, to some extent, the same sort of service and, as happened at Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, paved the way for the organisation of true seminaries.

Saint Vincent de Paul who felt, as deeply as Bourdoise, the necessity of working for the reformation of the clergy, adopted a different line. In his conversation with Augustine Potier, Bishop of Beauvais, this question constantly arose. 'There is no use thinking,' he said to the Bishop one day, 'that we can bring back to the path of duty priests who have grown old in the habits of vice ; that would be sure to meet with a check. It is far better to apply a remedy to the very source of the evil, and in order to achieve that, to do all in our power to instruct those who wish to take Holy Orders, in the duties of their state, inspire them with the ecclesiastical spirit and pitilessly refuse all who have not this spirit and who are ignorant of their duties.' That, however, was only a principle, and the point was to discover some means of carrying it out. During the month of July, 1628, the Bishop and Vincent de Paul were travelling together. The former seemed to have gone to sleep. After a long period of immobility, he opened his eyes.

'Well now,' said he, 'I can see a short and efficacious means of preparing clerics for Holy Orders. I will take them into my house for several days ; they shall give themselves up to devotional exercises and be instructed in their duties and functions.'

'That idea, my Lord, came from God,' said Vincent. 'I can see no better means of bringing your clergy step by step back to the right way.'

Pleased by this approbation, the prelate added : 'We should begin as soon as possible. Draw up a scheme,

prepare a list of subjects to be dealt with and, two or three weeks before the September ordinations, come back to Beauvais so as to make all arrangements for the retreat.'

Vincent de Paul obeyed, for these words coming from the mouth of a bishop were, in his eyes, a command emanating from God Himself. He arrived in Beauvais on September 12, began the examination of ordinands on the 14th and continued it on the 15th and 16th. Sunday the 17th was the first day of the retreat. The Bishop of Beauvais preached the opening sermon ; Vincent de Paul explained the ten commandments ; Louis Messier and Jerome Duchêsne, both doctors of the Sorbonne, gave the other instructions, and Bernard Duchêsne and a bachelor of divinity taught the ceremonies. The greatest attention was paid to the Saint who was asked by all the ordinands to hear their general confessions, and the same favour was demanded by Jerome Duchêsne.[24]

Overjoyed at the graces bestowed by God on this first retreat, the Bishop of Beauvais urged his colleagues in the episcopacy to introduce such an easy and efficacious practice in their own dioceses. John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, agreed. On February 21, 1631, he published a charge in which it was laid down that all clerics who wished to receive Holy Orders were bound ' to present themselves fifteen days previously to be interrogated and gratuitously instructed in their obligations and the functions of their orders.' No place was mentioned, because that point had not yet been decided. The Archbishop, as Bourdoise's first biographer states, wished to send the ordinands to Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, but Bourdoise objected on the grounds that the place was too small. Finally, it was agreed that they should go to the Collège des Bons-Enfants.

Saint Vincent was urged to direct the spiritual exercises himself or to appoint one of his priests for that purpose, but he objected and said that his Company had no other aim than that of preaching missions in the country. Jerome Duchêsne was selected, and spoke twice a day to the ordinands, and

[24] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXV, pp. 116–119 ; *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 65.

some other devout ecclesiastics who were attracted thither by pious curiosity. The Archbishop of Paris was present at the first discourse.[25]

The official deed by which this prelate united in the following year the Priory of Saint-Lazare to the Congregation of the Mission, imposed on Vincent de Paul and his successors the obligation of receiving gratuitously, every year at the prescribed times, the ordinands of the diocese who were to be prepared for Holy Orders by a fortnight's retreat.[26] In 1639, at the request of some Ladies of Charity,[27] this was extended to all the clerics of the Kingdom residing in the diocese[28] and, in 1647, to those called to minor orders. On the advice of the Bishop of Beauvais, bishops of dioceses adjoining Paris sent their clerics to Saint-Lazare to take part in these retreats.[29]

The obligations imposed on all ordinands, no matter what their proficiency in theology, to attend the conferences given during the exercises, provoked some murmurs, especially amongst the doctors of the Sorbonne. Saint Vincent, to appease them, frequently went to the Sorbonne for his preachers.[30]

Retreats for ordinands were obviously a very imperfect means of supplying the clergy with a solid moral and intellectual formation. What could be learned in ten days, and how were virtuous habits to be acquired in that period ? Moreover, the retreats were not aimed at distinguishing between true and false vocations to the priesthood ; and yet that was a point of the utmost importance. Their institution did not dispense the authorities from striving after the realisation of the plan drawn up by the Council of Trent and so frequently recommended by the Assemblies of the clergy of France and Provincial Councils.

Saint Vincent de Paul was all the more inclined to proceed with the establishment of seminaries since he perceived that it was the natural complement of his missionary labours. He would willingly have seconded Bourdoise when the latter

[25] Courtin, *op. cit.*, p. 474.
[26] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 252.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 27.
[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 233.
[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 541.
[30] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 255.

said : ' The missions that are given up and down a diocese are something, but the seminary is the most essential work of all. To give a mission is something like giving a poor starving man a meal, but to set up a seminary is to aim at feeding him all his life. To give a mission in a place and then leave it without such priests as would be willing to continue the good results effected by the mission would be to act like a prince who captured a town from the enemy and then went off to attack another, without leaving a garrison behind him in the first. . . . As no Superiors of religious Orders can fill their convents with good religious if they have not good novitiates, so no prelate can fill his churches with good priests to carry on the good work wrought by the missions (which otherwise is only transitory) unless he has an excellent seminary.'[31]

To establish seminaries then, was, for Saint Vincent, to assure the good results effected by the missions. His Company, instituted and approved for missionary work, was not moving away from its proper path by adding to it the training of the clergy.

About the year 1636, the Collège des Bons-Enfants threw open its doors to a number of children who felt they were called by God to be priests. They were trained in piety and were also taught Latin and the other branches of knowledge that then went to make up the *Litteræ Humaniores*. We know nothing about the beginnings of this seminary. Saint Vincent first refers to it on May 13, 1644, and then only to remark how little satisfied he was with it.[32] ' The ordinance of the Council of Trent,' he writes to Father Codoing, ' is to be respected as coming from the Holy Spirit. Experience, nevertheless, compels us to see that it has not been successful either in Italy or in France, in the manner in which it is carried out, as far as the age of seminarists is concerned ; some leave before the time, others have no inclination for the ecclesiastical state ; some again retire to religious communities, whilst others fly from those places to which they are bound by the obligations incurred by their upbringing, and prefer to seek their fortunes elsewhere.'

[31] Courtin, *op. cit.*, p. 983.
[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 459.

This quasi-general exodus of seminarists before the completion of their studies seems strange to us who live in an age when the clergy is for the most part composed of priests who entered seminaries when they were quite young. How comes it that a system which now produces such good results was then so unsuccessful? The reason is that there were two ways of becoming a priest: one was the discipline, the rule and the privations of a seminary, and the other was the free and easy life of the world. When seminarists had grown up to be young men, nature spoke more loudly than grace; they abandoned the first way and entered upon the second. If life in a 'grand seminary' were not imposed on all clerics to-day, should we not have similar difficulties to contend with? In his letter to Father Codoing, Saint Vincent goes on, still speaking of seminaries: 'There are four in the Kingdom; at Bordeaux, Reims, Rouen, and there used to be one at Agen. Not one of these dioceses has experienced any good result from its seminary and I fear that, Milan and Rome apart, things are very much the same in Italy. It is quite another thing to take young men from twenty to twenty-five or thirty years of age. We have twenty-two scholars in our seminary of the *Bons-Enfants*, and of that number we can only see three or four who are passable, and who give hopes that they will persevere, no matter what care may be taken; and hence I infer there is reason to fear, (not to say the most likely result will be), that this arrangement as it has been proposed will not succeed.'

Similar admissions that escaped from Saint Vincent's pen before 1644 on the fruitlessness of such seminaries, show quite clearly that from the very beginning he was not satisfied with the Collège des Bons-Enfants as a seminary.

He realised that, without destroying this organism, it would be a very good thing to create one of another type intended for young ecclesiastics who were already bound to the Church by sacred orders or who were on the point of receiving them. A man's judgement is riper and his perseverance more assured between the ages of twenty and thirty. Furthermore, it seemed to him it would be well to prepare for the exercises of sacerdotal functions men already

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priests, or who were nearer to becoming so than were children. There was a gap to be filled. It is probable that Saint Vincent had for a long time been considering retreats for ordinands as the first step towards the creation of 'Grand Seminaries.' But ever slow to decide and distrustful of his own impressions as he was, he waited until divine Providence should point out by the voice of constituted authority that the time had come to act. In this case, it was the voice of Cardinal Richelieu himself that spoke.

The all-powerful minister freely consulted the Saint on ecclesiastical affairs and especially on the measures to be taken if the clergy were to be rendered worthy of their vocation and raised to a level that would fit them for their task. On one occasion when they were conversing on this subject, Vincent de Paul remarked that it would be very desirable if diocesan seminaries were established, not for young children, for it would take some time before their results would be felt, but for sub-deacons, deacons or priests, or clerics on the point of taking Holy Orders. In such seminaries, he pointed out, they could be trained for one or two years in the practice of virtue, in mental prayer, divine worship, plain-song, ceremonies, the administration of the sacraments, catechetical instruction, preaching and other ecclesiastical functions ; they could be trained how to solve cases of conscience and taught the most important parts of theology. This, in his eyes, was the really essential work to be undertaken, now that spiritual retreats for ordinands and conferences dealing with spiritual matters had been started in several dioceses. How, he asked, could clerics acquire the qualities that are essential to the service and edification of the Church, without some such preparation ? How, otherwise, could they not but be vicious, ignorant and scandalous, like so many of their predecessors ?

Richelieu, fully convinced, urged Vincent himself to begin such a seminary and, to help him in doing so, handed over a thousand crowns.[33] So, from the beginning of the year 1642, the Collège des Bons-Enfants fulfilled a double function : it was at once a seminary for children, a little seminary,' and one for ecclesiastics, or ' a great seminary.'

[33] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXXI, p. 125 ff.

In the great seminary twelve ecclesiastics were boarded and lodged gratuitously for the space of two years. Others were admitted on payment of a pension and a promise to remain for at least one year.[34]

From the fact that children and ecclesiastics lived under the same roof, some writers have concluded that the seminary of the Bons-Enfants remained what it had been before—a 'seminary-college.' This is not the case, because, from 1642 onwards, we have not one but two establishments. The ecclesiastics lived quite apart from the scholars, under a different set of rules and different masters ; they received quite a distinct type of education. If in our own days a bishop had at his disposal a group of buildings large enough to house a 'great seminary' in one wing and a 'little seminary' in another, each preserving its own autonomy, he would probably be very much surprised if he were told that he did not possess a great seminary. The greater or lesser amount of space between little and great seminaries has nothing to do with what constitutes the essence of the latter. From the mere fact that in such an establishment there are some students being taught the humanities, it would be rash to conclude that the great seminary has ceased to exist.

We may be permitted to point out here a confusion of ideas that is not uncommon. The great innovation of the seventeenth century in France, as far as seminary life is concerned, was not precisely the separation into distinct groups, residing in different buildings, of younger and older seminarists, but the throwing open to ecclesiastics of the seminary doors through which previously only children had passed. The separation into little and great seminaries was only a result of this reform ; a happy result, doubtless, but still only a result. In Saint Vincent's case, the separation was effected in 1645, when the Collège des Bons-Enfants had become too small for the number of students. The scholars were then withdrawn and transferred to 'Little Saint-Lazare,' a building situated at the end of the extensive grounds, the name of which was changed to 'Saint Charles,' in honour of the great Bishop of Milan.

[34] *Règlement du séminaire des Bons-Enfants* (Recueil Thoisy, Vol. II, Bibl. Nat., MS. f° 28).

In M. Olier's case, there was no difficulty about isolating young men fitted to enter a great seminary from their juniors, because, as a matter of fact, he admitted none but the former. If, like Saint Vincent, he had found himself before 1642 at the head of a seminary of children which was sufficiently large to accommodate his first young men, he would not have acquired another establishment in which to place the latter.

We know from Saint Vincent[35] that the spiritual exercises of the great seminary of the Bons-Enfants began some days before February 9, but the seminarists were certainly present before the exercises began. We have no information as to when the first young men presented themselves for admission; it may have been in January, and this conjecture is fairly probable since Father Durand, a Priest of the Mission and a contemporary, states that the date was January 22, 1642.[36]

Clerical formation could not satisfy a man like Vincent de Paul; he had a wider vision than that. A priest who is called on to exercise his ministry is no less in need of help than a young cleric who is about to receive Holy Orders. Vincent saw that something remained to be done to strengthen the will and enlighten the intelligence of the priesthood.

As for the latter, some zealous bishops several years previously had established periodical reunions of priests, either by districts or archdeaconries, who met to solve cases of conscience or to study various points of moral theology. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, Cardinal de Sourdis had successfully started this practice in the diocese of Bordeaux. The energetic M. Bourdoise introduced the holding of ecclesiastical conferences at Saint Nicholas's in 1615, next in the dioceses of Chartres and Meaux; in 1620 in Beauvais and the surrounding dioceses and, before 1633, in several dioceses in Normandy and elsewhere.[37]

From the very first years of its existence, as may be seen

[35] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 225.

[36] MS. of the customs of the parish of Fontainebleau (Parochial Archives).

[37] *Le Saint Abbé Bourdoise*, par Darche, I vol., Paris, 1883–1884, Vol. I, pp. 213, 273, 372–373, 378, 488.

from the Bull by which it was instituted, the Congregation of the Mission adopted this particular work. With this in view the Mother-House entertained gratuitously the priests of the diocese of Paris, and when the missonaries were at work they held meetings of the local parish priests to explain the course of proceedure to be followed at these reunions.[38]

The custom of making annual retreats to strengthen the clergy spiritually was already in vogue, and Saint Vincent strove to extend the practice by giving free board and lodging to all devout persons who wished to pass eight or ten days in prayer and recollection at Saint-Lazare.

But he was not satisfied with that. Man's will is changeable and, in the course of a year, good resolutions may weaken or even vanish. He saw that something further was needed : he pondered over the matter and various different plans occurred to his mind. He prayed to the Holy Spirit for light, and presently a virtuous priest arrived who submitted a plan. He suggested that a selection should be made from amongst those ecclesiastics who had taken part in the retreat for ordinands and who were prepared to live a devout life. This chosen band should establish ' some form of union ' and meet together, from time to time, at Saint-Lazare to discourse amongst themselves on the virtues of their state and the functions of their ministry. As such reunions were then being held to deal with intellectual and scientific subjects, why not with morals and religion ? At these devout assemblies, new means for arriving at perfection would not fail to be discovered ; these would supply matter for discussion and, if they proved acceptable, might well be adopted.

Saint Vincent was quite pleased with this idea. He called to mind that the Fathers of the Desert were wont to strengthen themselves in this fashion against the attacks of their unseen enemies and that the practice had produced excellent results in religious communities. Its extension to the pastoral clergy would certainly prove of great advantage. Once more he recommended the affair to God, and when he had come to a decision, threw himself at the feet of the Archbishop of Paris to ask for his approbation.

Divine Providence came to his assistance as far as the

[38] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 261, 262.

selection of the members who were to form the nucleus of the new Association, was concerned. On May 21, the eve of Trinity Sunday, an ordination had taken place in Notre Dame. Stephen Puget, the suffragan bishop of Metz and afterwards Bishop of Marseilles, ordained as deacons Francis Perrochel, Abbé de Coulanges, and some other clerics whose names have not come down to us, and conferred priesthood on a group of deacons amongst whom were two remarkable for their piety, John Baptist Olier, Abbé de Pebrac, and Balthazar Brandon, Abbé de Bassancourt. As a recognition of the hospitality they had received in Saint-Lazare whilst making the retreat for ordination, several of those young priests asked Saint Vincent to set them to work in whatever way he thought best.

Noël Brulard de Sillery, utterly devoted to the Visitation Nuns, was building at his own expense a magnificent church for them, close to their first monastery. When Vincent met the workmen as he came and went on his frequent visits to the convent (for he was its Superior), he had no doubt often questioned them on their religion and had been perhaps surprised at the extent of their ignorance. At any rate, he thought a mission would be good for them, and to this task set the young ecclesiastics who had just asked him to test their goodwill.

It was early in June, 1633. On the 11th, the feast of Saint Barnabas, he interviewed each of them, mentioned the Association he proposed to form, and asked them to join. All agreed to do so. A few days later, they met at Saint-Lazare and Saint Vincent explained his plan, pointing out its advantages. The substance of his remarks have been preserved. ' Gentlemen,' he said, ' it is your duty to preserve and cultivate the holy dispositions given you by God on your ordination day. It behoves you to give yourselves to His divine majesty and to continue all through your lives what you have so well begun, aided by His grace. Be not of those of whom it can be said : *Iste homo coepit aedificare et non potuit consummare*, or to whom the words of the prophet Jeremiah may be applied : *Quomodo obscuratum est aurum, mutatus est color optimus* ; *dispersi sunt lapides sanctuarii in capite omnium platearum.* Those, indeed, deserve these reproofs

who, when chosen by Jesus Christ to be the ministers of His Church, fall away from the charity and perfection demanded by their state, or who, placed by their position close to His sanctuary and by their vocation made dispensers of His mysteries, allow themselves to grow dissipated in the highways of the world, and render themselves contemptible by their dissolute lives. The best means to preserve yourselves from such a fate is to band together. I do not ask you to leave the world and lead a community life in the same house ; it is quite enough for you to be united together by a special tie of charity and a certain conformity in your lives and actions. Whilst living in your own houses or amongst your own relatives you will still resemble the stars spoken of by the prophet : *Stellæ dederunt lumen in custodiis suis et vocatæ dixerunt* : *adsumus, et luxerunt illi cum jucunditate qui fecit illas* ; you will spread the light of good example in your families and will be ever ready to go and labour in those places and at those employments to which you may be called.'

The priest who had made the suggestion was not present at this meeting for he was giving a mission away from Paris.[39] Saint Vincent wrote to him on July 9 : ' Oh ! what an excellent reception that idea you did me the honour of mentioning to me met with from those ecclesiastics a few days ago. . . . We saw them, a fortnight ago, at a meeting where they resolved to carry out your proposal, with such unanimity as seemed to show it was divine. I began my discourse with the words you spoke to me, without mentioning your name, save when it became necessary to enrol you in their number and reserve a place for you in their ranks. They are to meet here again to-day. O, Sir, what reasons there are for hoping that this Company will effect much good ! You are its promotor and interested in its success for the glory of God. I beg you to pray for it.'[40]

The principle points of organisation were studied and decided on at this second meeting. The order to be followed

[39] Hence it was not M. Olier, as has been supposed. Olier spent the month of June in Paris, where he said his first Mass on the feast of Saint John the Baptist. It was probably one of the missionaries of the first monastery of the Visitation.

[40] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. III, Sect. I, p. 248.

at the assemblies was drawn up ; a committee was appointed and it was decided that meetings should be held either at Saint-Lazare or the Bons-Enfants on every Tuesday.

On the following Tuesday, July 19,[41] the first conference was held. The subject dealt with was the ecclesiastical spirit : why it behoved priests and clerics in Holy Orders to possess this spirit ; in what it consists, and the means of acquiring, preserving and perfecting it. It may be surmised that the resolution which the members of the Conference took about this time to make an annual retreat together was the result of that day's reflections on the ecclesiastical spirit.[42]

We have assisted at the birth of the Associations created by Saint Vincent, by which he, as it were, multiplied himself in the creation of good works. We shall now follow him, one by one, in their growth and expansion.

[41] Abelly wrote 'July 16,' but as July 16 fell on a Saturday, in all probability the 6 is 9 turned upside down. A typographical error.

[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 205.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CONFRATERNITIES OF CHARITY

WE have already met with several Confraternities of Charity since the first was established at Châtillon ; we have seen the good they did, the difficulties they encountered and how, by means of periodical visitations, any defects that had crept in were eliminated. We shall now revert to the subject to give a complete picture of the work.

In the beginning, there were three sorts of Confraternities : for men, for women, and for both men and women. After some preliminary experiments, Vincent de Paul, profiting from experience, confined his attention to Confraternities for women. The branches established for men had not produced the results expected, and the ' mixed ' Charities bore within themselves the seeds of regrettable divisions. ' The men and women together,'[1] he wrote in a letter, ' do not agree on points of administration ; the former wish to arrogate entirely to themselves all administration and the women will not tolerate it. The Charities of Joigny and Montmirail were, in the beginning, managed by both sexes ; the men were entrusted with the care of the able-bodied poor and the women with the sick, but, as there was a common purse, the men had to be removed ; and I can bear this testimony to the women, that nothing can be said against their administration, such care and fidelity have they shown.'

Especially after the foundation of his Congregation of the Mission, the Charities multiplied with astonishing rapidity, Saint Vincent told his sons : ' Establish the Confraternity wherever you give a mission ; where one is already established, visit it, reanimate the fervour of its members, induce

[1] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 11.

several to join and wherever you go, give it renewed life.' The Missionaries, faithful to their rules,[2] and the Bull by which their Institute was founded,[3] everywhere propagated the Association whose admirable fecundity was admired by all.

When Vincent de Paul died, Charities had been established all over France. There were fifteen parochial branches in Paris and, in the suburbs, branches at Villejuif, Vanves, Issy, Gentilly, Vincennes, Montreuil, Champigny, La Chapelle, Clichy, Asnières, Auteuil, Saint-Cloud, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Argenteuil and Sannois.[4] In the provinces it spread to cities such as Amiens, Arras, Beauvais, Étampes, Fontainebleau, Joigny, Muret, Neufchâtel-en-Bray, Rethel, Sedan, and a host of towns and villages. From France the movement penetrated into Italy and there was no difficulty experienced in establishing branches, especially in the country round Turin and Genoa.[5]

Cities did not present such a favourable ground for the Association as country districts. Saint Vincent, anxious to avoid difficulties, had, with great foresight, made it a rule that no Charity should extend its influence over several parishes at the same time ;[6] but it was not in his power to eliminate all obstacles, of which some depended on causes beyond his power, for instance, the rank of the Ladies, who were less prepared than peasant women to carry out the rôle of servants of the poor ; the heterogeneous surroundings ; the absence of control, due to the fact that the Missionaries, by their rules, worked only in country places and, finally, a spirit of exclusiveness which was much more developed in cities than in villages.

[2] *Regulae seu Constitutiones Communes Congregationis Missionis*, Ch. I, No. 2.

[3] Bull *Salvatoris Nostri*, January 12, 1633 : *In locis ubi catechismi et praedicationis munus exercuerint, confraternitatis quas vocant Charitatis, Ordinarii auctoritate, instituti procurent, ut pauperibus aegrotis subveniantur.*

[4] We only call attention here to the Charities referred to in various works ; no doubt, there were many others.

[5] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 71 ; Vol. VI, pp. 22, 174 ; Vol. VII, p. 257.

[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 225.

From the very beginning, Saint Vincent had remarked the tendency of every Parisian parish to go its own way. In 1630 or 1631, he wrote to Mlle Le Gras :[7] ' We have just established a Charity in Saint Benedict's, but I do not know how it comes to pass that every parish in Paris wishes to have some exceptional feature, and they do not want to have any communication with one another. Merely to say " this is the way things are done elsewhere," is sufficient to annoy them. On the other hand, they wish to make a sort of hodge-podge, taking something from Saint Saviour's, something from our parish of Saint Nicholas or something from Saint Eustache.' This tendency, noticed by Saint Vincent, kept on increasing.

In 1643, the first Charity in connection with an hospital began ; the first was that of the Hôtel-Dieu, the Quinze-Vingts had one of its own, and several provincial cities, such as Angers, followed the example. But we shall not dwell on this topic as we shall have more to say of it later on.

Saint Vincent had another and more splendid vision ; he thought of establishing a Confraternity at Court, under the presidency of Queen Anne of Austria, which would cover with a protective mantle all recent charitable institutions of women. He drew up statutes for the Association, but as no trace of its activity can be found either in his writings or in the memoirs of his time, we can only guess that the project encountered obstacles which prevented it from ever being realised. The set of regulations, however, enables us to see the Saint's ideas regarding this new foundation.[8]

In the first place : ' The Company of Ladies of Charity shall be established to honour that of Our Lord, His holy Mother, and the ladies who followed Him and took charge of those things that were necessary for His person, His companions and, at times, the crowds who followed Him, and also the poor, by protecting and assisting the Companies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu, the Foundling Hospital, the convicts, the little girls of whom Mesdemoiselles Poulallion and de Lestang take charge, the poor servant Daughters of

[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 100.

[8] The set of rules is published in *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 821.

Charity of the parishes, the girls in the Magdalen Asylum, and all other good works instituted by women during this century.' This was a great undertaking and hence Saint Vincent thought it would be well to divide up the work.

The Company 'shall be composed of the sacred person of the Queen and a small, definite and limited number of Ladies whom she may be pleased to select for that end; they shall be deputed, in groups of three, to take charge of each of the aforesaid Companies, and shall submit reports on the state of the work, and of the needs they may discover, by a majority of votes, which shall be collected and announced by Her Majesty; and they shall have charge of these departments for one year, at the end of which they shall change about; and the Queen shall have the perpetual direction of this Company.'

Saint Vincent was not accustomed to separate personal sanctification from works of charity, for he saw in such sanctification the necessary condition of zeal and devotedness. 'The said Ladies shall strive to acquire Christian perfection and the perfection appropriate to their condition; they shall make mental prayer for at least half an hour; they shall hear Holy Mass, read a chapter of the *Introduction to a devout life* or *A treatise on the Love of God*; they shall make a daily general examination of conscience and shall go to Confession and Holy Communion at least once a week.'

'They shall meet wherever the Queen commands, on the first Friday of the month and shall humbly and devoutly for the space of half an hour, converse on the thoughts and sentiments Our Lord may have given them, during mental prayer on the morning of the meeting, on the subject of the Christian virtues and those proper to their condition, which shall have been proposed to them.'

This was certainly an excellent way to prepare for deliberations that should be wise and above and apart from all personal considerations.

The Ladies 'shall then present reports in turn on the needs of each of the Companies that may have been assigned to them; and Her Majesty, having heard them, and asked the said Ladies to express their views on the matter, shall collect the opinions of each, and command that which

may seem to her best in the sight of God ; all which shall be written down in a minute-book and afterwards carried out by each of the Ladies in her own department ; they shall meet on the 15th of each month, in groups of three, to deal with and settle the affairs of the Companies committed to their charge, and shall rest content with reporting only important matters, at the meeting, which shall be held in presence of the Queen.'

There were three dangers to be feared : first, that some might take advantage of the meetings to ask favours from Queen Anne of Austria ; second, that time might be wasted in gossip or on matters foreign to the affairs of the Confraternity, and thirdly, that secrecy in regard to the deliberations might not be observed. Saint Vincent put the Ladies on their guard against these dangers : ' They shall make it a maxim not to deal, at these meetings, with private or public affairs, especially affairs of State, or make use of these occasions to further their own interests ; they shall honour the Queen and cherish a most special affection for her service; they shall love one another as sisters whom Our Lord had joined together by the bond of His love ; they shall visit and comfort each other in sickness and times of trial ; they shall go to Holy Communion for the intentions of the sick and for the repose of the souls of those who die ; and lastly, they shall honour the silence of Our Lord in all matters concerning the said Company, because the prince of this world makes a mockery of holy things divulged to the public.'

The causes for the abandonment of this project are unknown, but it is probable that Mazarin had something to say to it. The rapid spread of the Charities and Saint Vincent's inability to devote as much time to them as they deserved induced him to appoint a general director of the Confraternities. He went over in his mind which of his priests seemed best fitted for the work, and it seemed to him that Lambert aux Courteaux was the most suitable.[9] This was in 1641, but, as Father Lambert was at that time needed for the house of Richelieu, where he was Superior, Saint Vincent had to defer the appointment. Father Lambert was, in fact, never appointed, for he was set to

[9] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 146.

other tasks and died prematurely ; he may not even have known that Saint Vincent had ever thought of him for the position.

The Saint was more successful in another of his projects, which consisted in placing at the disposal of the Confraternities zealous women who had been trained to nurse the sick and educate children. Without the Daughters of Charity, the Parisian branches would have declined and rapidly become extinct. By the foundation of the new Institute a better organisation of the service of the poor became possible and, in country districts, little girls were supplied with schoolmistresses. The ' little schools ' became part of the work of the Charities and, in some Parisian sets of regulations, we find clauses determining the duties and salaries of the teachers.

Saint Vincent had placed the Confraternity under the protection of Jesus Christ, and His protection was visibly manifested. Our Lord presided over the meetings and the members could see a representation of Him in a picture hanging on the wall of their chapel, in which He is shown with outstretched arms, and nail-pierced hands and feet to remind them by this gesture and the marks of His wounds that He is the perfect model of charity. The first mention of a picture for the Confraternity is found in a letter written by Mlle Le Gras, apparently a few days before the arrival of the first two Daughters of Charity in the parish of Saint Paul, that is to say, in 1634. ' I am sending you two pictures,' she says, ' a Lord of Charity to be placed in your room for the poor, and the other in your own room.'[10]

' The Lord of Charity ' is obviously Jesus Christ, but it is very probable that the figure of Our Saviour did not stand alone, but was represented amongst poor persons who were being assisted in body and soul. When the Confraternities began to increase it became necessary to multiply the pictures and Saint Vincent employed an engraver, as may be seen from a letter addressed to Mlle Le Gras, on January 28, 1640 : ' Enclosed is a picture which has been printed for the Charities. You are the first to whom I have sent one.[11]

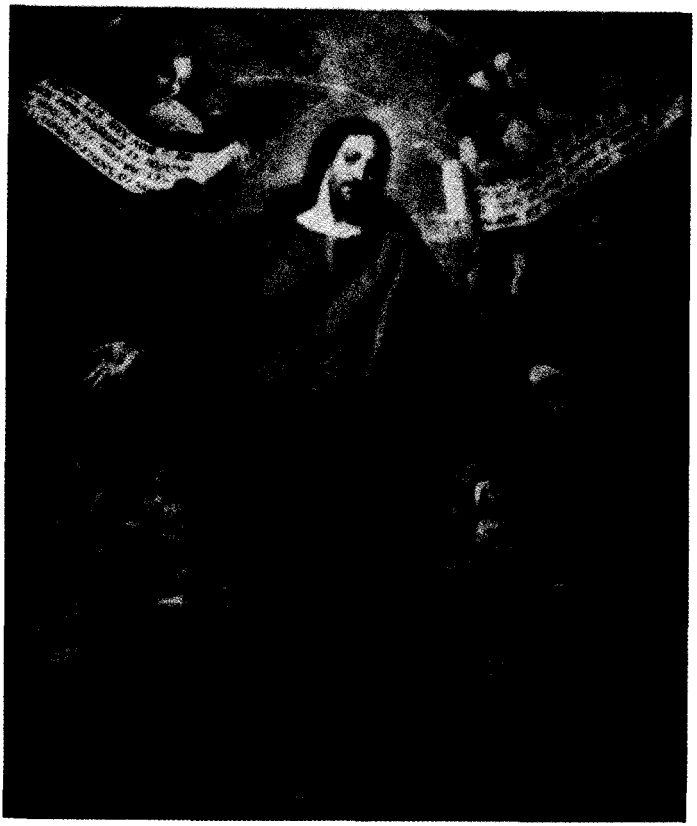
[10] *Lettres*, éd. aut., p. 5.
[11] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 10.

A painter has had it engraved at the cost of eighty crowns.' There are actually five pictures, all paintings, in existence representing the 'Lord of Charity'; one in the Community room of the Sisters in the hospital at Saint Germain-en-Laye, and the others in various churches in the Department of Aube;[12] at Boulages, Mailly, Chavanges and Lhuitre. The picture at Saint Germain-en-Laye is a large one: at the feet of Our Saviour is a scroll bearing the motto beloved of the Daughters of Charity: 'The charity of Jesus Christ urgeth

[12] A sixth picture is reported at Bouilly (Aube); a seventh and eighth in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity. (See *Louise de Marillac et le Sacré Cœur*, in Bulletin de Saint Vincent de Paul, June 15, 1900, pp. 171–172). One of these last pictures, at the base of which there is an inscription, 'This picture was painted by Mlle Le Gras, our most honoured Mother and Foundress,' simply represents the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The other, like the first, is a picture of the Saviour, but the Heart is smaller; above the head are the words: *Deus charitas est*; on the right, a priest, assisted by an altar-boy, gives Holy Communion to a sick Daughter of Charity; on the left, another Daughter of Charity, also wearing a cornette, stands upright holding a glass in her hand.

It needs a considerable amount of goodwill to see a Confraternity picture in the picture of the Sacred Heart attributed to Louise de Marillac. It seems to us that the eighth picture was not intended for a Confraternity but rather for a house of the Sisters of Charity, for there are only Sisters represented in it. The shape of the cornette indicates a date later than 1685.

The picture at Bouilly no longer exists, or, rather, the canvas was scraped by an artistic parish priest who painted a picture of the Blessed Virgin in place of the 'Lord of Charity.' Abbé Prevost supplies the following description: (*Saint Vincent de Paul et ses institutions en Champagne méridionale*, Bar-sur-Seine, 1928, oct., p. 237): 'In the middle, Our Lord, with outstetched arms; on the right, at the bottom, a sick woman sitting up in bed, a nun holds up her head; a noblewoman holding a vase in her left hand offers with her right a spoonful of food or drink; three other women are grouped around the bed; one, who seems to be a nun, holds a rather large two-handled round-shaped vessel. Above this group, another woman offers a saucer of drink to a sick man lying on the ground. Opposite, on the left, a sick man in bed receives Holy Viaticum from a priest dressed in a white, long-sleeved surplice and stole, accompanied by a cleric carrying a taper. At the foot of the bed a man and three women are kneeling.'



THE LORD OF CHARITY

us.' Lower down is the text from Saint John : ' God is charity and whosoever abideth in charity abideth in God and God in him.' Under the outstretched right hand of Our Lord is a priest, assisted by an altar-boy holding a lighted taper, who is giving Holy Communion to a sick woman, whilst four Sisters of Charity are praying at the foot of the bed, kneeling, and with hands joined. Under the left arm, five women are grouped round a sick woman lying in bed, and one of them is giving her something to eat. Lower down, a Sister presents a saucer to the mouth of another patient lying on a pallet. On the top of the picture are two angels, bearing scrolls ; the scroll on the left bears the words : ' Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world ' ; that on the right : ' For I was hungry and you gave me to eat ; thirsty and you gave me to drink ; sick and you visited me.'

The other pictures, especially those at Mailly and Boulages, are in the main based on the same model. The latter picture, signed *Duvert* and dated 1666,[13] has this special feature—a heart is painted on Our Saviour's breast. It is quite possible that the heart was shown in the original picture but, if compared with that of Saint Germain-en-Laye, one may suppose that it was subsequently added. There are also special features in the pictures at Lhuitre, painted about 1650,[14] and at Chavanges, dated 1642 ; on top, the Eternal Father and the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove, rise above Our Saviour's head from which rays of light proceed ; the mantle falls naturally around the body and does not form, either on top of the right or left shoulder, that ungainly bulge to be observed in so many contemporary pictures of Our Saviour ; to His right, the sick person at the bottom is a man. At Lhuitre, the priest who gives Holy Communion is remarkably like Saint Vincent himself.

Urged on by Him Who is Charity itself, the members of the Confraternities laboured with such zeal amongst the poor as to arouse not merely edification but admiration. A Jesuit wrote in 1643 : ' If Charity may pride itself, as

[13] *Prévost, op. cit.*, p. 232.

[14] This has been reproduced in Abbé Prévost's book between pages 232 and 233.

William of Paris says, on being the Queen of the virtues, she should be provided with a retinue suitable to her state, and the names of her royal city, her ladies and maids of honour should be made known. As for myself, I think her royal city is none other than Paris where she reigns with such pomp and magnificence that one will scarcely find another city in Europe where she is so much honoured and esteemed. Her ladies and maids of honour are those noble and virtuous ladies and girls of Paris who, in divers parishes of that city, have formed a Company called the Company of Charity which makes it its business to visit, console and assist in mind and body the modest poor, either healthy or sick, who are scattered throughout the parish.'[15]

Such a useful association merited the approval of the Holy See and this was given indirectly through the Bull *Salvatoris Nostri* which orders the Missionaries to establish Confraternities of Charity wherever they give a mission.[16] Saint Vincent would have also desired an approbation of the rules of the society and some indulgences,[17] but his attempts came to naught. He was many years dead when Innocent XII, in 1693, granted a plenary indulgence to the Confraternities of Charity.

The creation of parochial Charities for the poor sick marks the origin of a movement that was bound to spread. From the middle of the seventeenth century, Charities for the modest poor and then for families in need were established in several parishes in Paris, including those of Saint Paul, Saint Eustache, Saint Severin, Saint Etienne-du-Mont and Saint Sulpice.[18] There were, besides these parish branches, confraternities for prisoners.

Devout men and women grew more and more accustomed

[15] Amable Bonnefons, *Le Chrestien Charitable*, Paris, 1643, p. 180. We do not know if these lines are to be found in the first edition, published in 1637. Bonnefons then proceeds to give the rules composed by Saint Vincent for the Charities.

[16] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 49.

[17] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 253.

[18] The printed rules of these Confraternities may be found in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2565, and the Bibl. Nat. R. 26,016–26,018 ; R. 27,201 ; 27,208. Emmanuel Brunet has given long extracts from them in his book : *La charité paroissiale*

to form groups for the more efficacious relief and assistance of various classes of the unfortunate. At the present day, there is a magnificent extension of Charities, known under various names; we cannot mention them all, for they are too numerous, but we must not omit one, perhaps the greatest, the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul.

*à Paris au XVII*e *siècle* (Caen, 1906, oct.). This work deserves to be read, but the reader should be on his guard, for its good qualities are spoiled by the author's manifest desire to belittle Saint Vincent. He would do well to give us a new edition after reading attentively the fourteen volumes of the collection *Saint Vincent de Paul.*

CHAPTER XV

THE LADIES OF CHARITY OF THE HÔTEL-DIEU

OF all the Confraternities of Charity that of the Hôtel-Dieu was, without question, the most important both from the social position of its members, the extent of its field of action and the amount of aid received and distributed. It began in a small way and, at first, was merely intended to assist the patients of this great hospital. Afterwards, the Ladies undertook the care of the Foundlings of Paris, and subsequently despatched alms to whole provinces ruined by Civil wars. Their generosity was also extended to prisoners, galley-slaves, and slaves in captivity; they allocated sums of money to missionaries for the propagation of the Faith in infidel and heretical countries: to China, Tonkin, Madagascar and the Hebrides.

At the head of the Company were a director appointed for life, a superior, an assistant and a treasurer. The post of director has always been associated with the office of Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission.

Every year, on Sunday in Holy Week, the election of officers was held at a plenary assembly and decided by a majority of votes. The Ladies had to chose between two names submitted by a Council of office-holders held eight or ten days previously. They advanced in single file to a Priest of the Mission who presided and mentioned in a low tone of voice the name of the person whom they had chosen. Married women were ineligible. The person elected held office for three years and even longer if, after her term of office, she gave an account of her stewardship and presented a balance-sheet.

The Superioress supervised the observance of the rules, made enquiries about candidates and supplied information to her companions on matters that especially concerned them ; such as the grave illness or death of a member, the date of a funeral or a meeting. ' She shall be the life and soul of the Company,' says the Rule,[1] ' and shall guide it in accordance with the ideas of the Priest of the Mission and her two assistants.'

The title of Superioress shocked Madame Goussault's sense of proportion ;[2] she asked to be called ' servant ' and her request was granted but the custom was discontinued after her death. All the Superioresses of the seventeenth century, save the second, died whilst holding office. Madame President Goussault was the first (1634–1639) ; then came Madame de Souscarrière (1639–1643), Madame de Lamoignon (1643-1651), the Duchesse d'Aiguillon (1652–1675), Madame President Nicolay (1675–1683) and the Duchesse de Ventadour (1685–1701).

The Council of the Superioress consisted of the assistant and treasurer, who acted for her in her absence. The work connected with the Foundling Hospital increased the treasurer's task to such a degree that she handed over all other business to her companion. Henceforward, they were no longer distinguished by the names of treasurer and assistant but by those of first and second assistant. Every year, both of them presented a statement of their accounts to the Company. Mademoiselle Viole was assistant for forty-two years ; first assistant from 1636 or thereabouts to 1669, and again from 1673 to 1678 ; second assistant from 1669 to 1673. When the Foundling Hospital was united to the General Hospital in 1670, the second assistant was relieved of most of her work and anxiety, and all she had then to do was to collect alms for the children. Hence she came to the aid of the first assistant by taking over all business in connection with the Hôtel-Dieu. The office of second assistant was suppressed in 1680, but revived

[1] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 825.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 69.

in 1692, under the title of treasurer of the poor in the provinces.[3]

From 1636 onwards, there was also a group composed exclusively of widows or married ladies called the 'Forty' which formed part of the Association. It was their particular duty to prepare the sick to make general confessions. The 'Forty' were elected by the office-holders, on Saturday in Quarter-tense, for a period of three months; at first, it had been for six months, but experience showed that such a term of office was too long.[4] On the morning of election day they all assisted at Mass in Notre-Dame and received Holy Communion at the hands of Saint Vincent, with the intention of begging God to grant good priests to His Church. The office-holders then met to elect the 'Forty.' Those in office were eligible for re-election, in case they wished to go forward. At the conclusion of the election, those who had given up office and the newly-elected rejoined the office-holders in a house near the Hôtel-Dieu of which the Ladies had the disposal. What was called the 'little meeting' or 'the meeting of the Forty' was held there. The Director called their attention to any matters of importance, the Ladies exchanged views and the new members were instructed in the discharge of their duties.

Each of the Ladies who composed the 'group of Forty' was bound to devote some hours to the sick on one day in each week.[5] Their visits began at two o'clock in the afternoon, and lasted until four, in winter, and five, in summer. They prepared themselves for their task by going to Holy Communion during morning Mass, and by a short visit to the Hospital Chapel to adore Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and beg Him to dispose those whom they were about to interview to listen favourably to their exhorta-

[3] *Recueil de diverses prières appartenantes à la conduite et direction des Dames de la Charité de Paris*, MS. (Arch. de la Mission).

[4] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX, p. 203; *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 766, 769, 826.

[5] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 766, 826. It seems that for a certain period two visits were paid to the sick. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 817.)

tions. The Ladies always went in pairs, and were accompanied by one or two of the Augustinian Nuns who pointed out those who were gravely ill and those who were in special need of help.[6] After the visit to the wards, they returned to the Chapel.[7]

When the Company had thus organised the preparation of the female patients for a general confession of their sins, it set about finding confessors. One or two chaplains stood, as a rule, at the gate of the Hôtel-Dieu to hear the confessions of patients on their entrance to the hospital and there were others in the wards at the disposition of the dying. Nothing more could be asked of them. The office of confessor was not eagerly sought after.[8] Such ecclesiastics as were approached replied that the work was too onerous, and that they had no intention of risking their health by inhaling all day long an atmosphere infected by the presence of the sick and dying.

Two priests at length yielded to the urgent entreaties of Saint Vincent or the Ladies. One of them spoke several languages, but of what use were only two priests ? On March 29, 1642, the number had risen to six. On taking up duty, they made a retreat at Saint-Lazare and also an annual one in the same place to maintain their fervour. The confessors instructed the men and administered the Sacraments. They were dispensed from attending divine service so as to devote all their time to the care of the sick. Every morning they went to say Mass at Notre-Dame, and they were boarded and lodged in the Hôtel-Dieu. The Ladies paid each chaplain an annual sum of forty crowns,[9] not to mention the honoraria they received for their Masses.

[6] The *Constitutions des Augustines de l'Hôtel-Dieu* (1652 ed. Ch. X, p. 82) states : ' When the ladies come to give a collation to the patients, the Sisters shall receive them religiously, politely and affably, and shall point out the sick and those in greatest need, that they may receive special assistance ; they shall then retire and carry out their ordinary duties.'

[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 762, etc.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 772, 773 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX, pp. 139–140.

[9] Abelly, *op. cit.*, p. 139 ; A Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

Notwithstanding these advantages, whenever a confessor died or resigned, it was necessary to search long and patiently to find a successor. The Chapter, or rather its two delegates, the Ladies and Saint Vincent, had to go to a great deal of trouble before they succeeded. On May 20, 1655, the Saint had a long conversation with an ecclesiastic to induce him to accept office, and we may see, by reading his exhortation, of which a résumé has been preserved, the nature of the objections he had to meet[10] in order to overcome the priest's resistance.

Like their companions of the 'Forty,' the ladies in charge of the extra supply of food, also prepared, though perhaps more indirectly, for the confessors' action on souls. Four or five of them arrived daily at the Hôtel-Dieu, at two o'clock in the afternoon, paused for a few moments in the Chapel, and then went to a room in which the Augustinian Sisters had placed a supply of aprons for the visitors. After putting these on, they arranged amongst themselves how the food was to be distributed : one of them took the bread ; another, a dish filled with apples or cooked pears ; a third, a large plate of jelly ; a fourth, preserves ; and then they all, fork in hand, visited the patients, both men and women, and let them select. If the sick were too feeble to convey the food to their mouths, the ladies assisted them to eat and, whilst waiting on them, uttered a few words of consolation and encouragement so that the soul too might share in this act of charity.[11]

The Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu formed an association primarily with the intention of affording spiritual help ; the collation was rather looked on as a means of gaining souls to God. Some of them failed to realise its importance and, on the pretext that it constituted a heavy charge on the exchequer, wished to have it suppressed.[12] It is quite true that the pecuniary sacrifices were considerable ; for instance, 5,000 livres were expended for the year 1657 alone.[13] And

[10] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 163, etc.

[11] Abelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 135, 136 ; Amable Bonnefons, *Le Chrestien charitable*, p. 256.

[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 773.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 803.

even then the administration, and not the ladies, defrayed the expenses of supplying bread and milk-soups. But, granting the material inconvenience, the moral advantages were considerable, and Saint Vincent, for that reason, was in favour of the extra meal. He suppressed the cooked pears for convalescents who, instead of eating them, sometimes threw them away ;[14] biscuits and citron fruits were no longer given, for motives of economy, and the collation was restricted to those who needed it most.[15] Saint Vincent was satisfied with that, and he noted with great pleasure that, between 1638 and 1640, the collation had been given uninterruptedly from 1634, except for three weeks, when persons stricken with plague were in the hospital.[16]

When the extra meal had once been set going, other reforms became necessary : a place was needed in which to store utensils and provisions, and help was required for cleaning, preparing and dividing the portions allotted to the sick.

From the very first meeting, the Ladies had thought of asking for four Daughters of Charity ;[17] later on, reflecting, perhaps, on what Saint Vincent himself had said, they came to the conclusion that uninstructed, country girls were unfitted to ' represent ' them in their absence.[18] Girls from the city were suggested, and the ladies were inclined to accept the proposal, but there is no evidence that it ever came to anything, because the Daughters of Charity were actually helping the Ladies before July 31, 1634.[19]

[14] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 772 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX, p. 136.

[15] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 773.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 771.

[17] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 230.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 8. On December 30, 1636, Saint Vincent wrote to Mlle Le Gras (*ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 371) : ' May God bless you, Mademoiselle, for your having gone and set your daughters to work in the Hôtel-Dieu, and for all that has resulted from it. But, in the name of God, take care of yourself ; you see the need there is of your poor, little help.' Abelly understands from this passage (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX, p. 135) that this was the

The Sisters so employed belonged to the house of Saint-Nicholas to which they returned every evening to sleep. When the Mother-House was transferred to La Chapelle, in 1636, they had not the same facilities for coming and going, so a house, in which they subsequently resided, close to the Hôtel-Dieu, was provided for them.[20]

Mademoiselle Le Gras also helped her Daughters and worked so hard as to render Saint Vincent uneasy ; he never ceased from advising her to take things more quietly. ' *Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle,*' he wrote to her,[21] ' how uneasy I have felt at seeing you remain so long from taking the air, and working as constantly as you do at the Hôtel-Dieu ! ' And, on another occasion, ' As for the Hôtel-Dieu, it is not expedient for you to be there always, but it is quite right to come and go there occasionally. Do not be afraid to undertake too much of what you can carry out without going and coming ; only be afraid of the idea of doing more than you are now actually doing, and that God gives you the means to do ; and offer yourself to His divine Majesty always to do only just what you are now doing. The contrary idea makes me tremble with fear, because it seems to me to be a crime in the case of children of divine Providence.'[22]

Saint Vincent was likewise concerned about the health of the Ladies. It was a question of the very existence of his work. When one of the Ladies of Charity, Madame Ligin, died, evil tongues spread the rumour that she had contracted the fatal disease in the Hôtel-Dieu, and Saint Vincent was momentarily disturbed, but the Ladies, fortunately, paid no attention to such rumours[23] If he was most unwilling to expose them to danger, he was equally reluctant to leave the sick poor without help. What was he to do ? He looked around for some ' good, devout girls ' to visit the poor, but

first occasion on which the Daughters of Charity assisted at the collation in the Hôtel-Dieu, but the Sisters' collaboration with the Ladies of Charity is, however, referred to in previous documents. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 235, 300, 304, 325, 331 ; Vol. IX, p. 8.)

[20] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 491.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 325. [22] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 304.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 365.

we do not know whether he found them ; he may, perhaps, have asked the assistance of the Daughters of Charity.[24]

The Ladies, in the midst of their labours, enjoyed great consolations. According to Abelly, in the very first year, seven hundred and sixty Protestants or Turks abjured their errors.[25] A rich citizen's wife of Paris, who had every facility for being nursed at home, had herself conveyed to the Hôtel-Dieu so that she might be visited daily by the Ladies of Charity, and her case was not exceptional.[26]

No one was more delighted than Saint Vincent at the sight of this wave of charity which swept so many women of the highest rank into this haven of suffering. On September 20, 1650, he wrote to his confrère,[27] Father Cornaire : ' You cannot imagine how many persons of high rank and of both sexes are now visiting, instructing and exhorting the sick in the Hôtel-Dieu, behaving there in the most admirable manner and also with perseverance ! Certainly, those who have not seen it can hardly believe it, and all who do see it are edified ; for, as a matter of fact, such a life is the life of saints who serve Our Lord in His members and in the best possible way.'

They were undoubtedly leading the lives of saints, but it was Vincent de Paul who sustained this noble series of deeds and endeavours on behalf of the poor and unfortunate. If the sacred fire of charity continued to burn unceasingly and with an intensity that never diminished in the hearts of these Ladies it was because they saw him every week when he communicated to them, by his moving language, that love for the poor which filled his own heart.

The meetings were held either in the house of the Superioress, or at Saint-Lazare or at the Mother-House of

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 459.

[25] The number seems to have been exaggerated ; Saint Vincent remarked, between 1638 and 1640 : ' Since your two priests have been there, two hundred heretics have been patients, all of whom were converted, except six who died in their error, and about twenty-five who left the hospital cured, but still heretics.'

[26] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX, p. 140.

[27] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 85.

the Sisters, under the presidency of Saint Vincent or of a Priest of the Congregation whom he delegated. The Ladies spoke quite frankly of what they had done, of the difficulties they had encountered, the results they had obtained, the needs they had observed and the remedies that had occurred to them ; they carried on their discussions with the utmost courtesy and the resolutions, adopted by a majority of votes were set down in a register.

It seemed to some that Saint Vincent was not sufficiently firm in maintaining his own point of view when a contrary opinion was advanced. One of the Ladies told him so, and he replied : ' God forbid, Madame, that my poor opinions should prevail over those of others ! I am quite content that God, in His goodness, is doing His work without me, who am quite worthless.'[28]

The rules contain excellent advice on the method of conducting a meeting : to express one's views courteously ; never to interrupt ; to wait until one subject is exhausted before starting another ; to put aside all considerations of places and persons and to think only of the greatest good that can be done, and to be inspired solely by the pure love of God ; to honour the silence of Our Lord[29] in regard to matters discussed.

Saint Vincent was accustomed to write out on loose sheets of paper, of note-book size, the plan of his addresses to the Ladies. All these autographs are lost, with the exception of thirteen, all of which, save one, have been published.[30] Abelly has also preserved the text of a discourse delivered on July 11, 1657.[31]

The address usually dealt with the works of the Company. Saint Vincent proposed whatever new line of action had occurred to him, explained the best method of doing one's duty, and pointed out any faults to be corrected. Faults, unfortunately, are to be met with everywhere.[32] Some of the Ladies failed to pay their visit on the prescribed day ;

[28] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XIII, sect. I, p. 205.
[29] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 827, 828.
[30] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 761–802.
[31] *Op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. X, pp. 358, etc.
[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 786, 797.

others served out the collation in a hurry, whilst others again, moved by excessive generosity,[33] gave without discrimination to all the sick poor. There were also some who did not attend the meetings as often as they should,[34] some who annoyed the confessors, the Augustinian Nuns and the Daughters of Charity by their untimely reproofs and high-handed conduct,[35] and some who grew weary of giving and of begging for the poor or who even neglected to pay the monthly subscription of five sols.[36] Saint Vincent, to help the Ladies examine their consciences, publicly questioned them as to their fidelity to the practices of the Company.[37]

No superfluous or unfruitful considerations will be found in these addresses : everything he said rested on solid motives, supported by supernatural reasons, such as the example of Jesus Christ, His teachings, the divine Word of Holy Writ, and the rewards promised, both in this life and the next, to those who consecrated themselves to works of charity. Saint Vincent forgot nothing that could attach the Ladies to their noble vocation. ' For the last eight hundred years or so,' he told them,[38] ' women have had no public employment in the Church ; formerly, there were some called deaconesses whose duty it was to allot women their places in Church and to instruct them in the ceremonies then in vogue. But, about Charlemagne's time, by a secret dispensation of divine Providence, this custom ceased and your sex was deprived of all such employment and, ever since then, it has had none ; and now observe how that same Providence turns to some of you to-day to supply all that the sick poor in the Hôtel-Dieu stand in need of.'

And in another place : ' Does it not seem something new and strange to you how God's Providence has turned to some ladies of Paris to assist two provinces in ruins ? History does not relate that anything like this happened to the ladies of Spain, or of Italy or any other country ; that was reserved for you, Ladies.'[39]

The Ladies of Charity, then, were privileged persons

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 773.
[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 769, 770–771.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 773, 787.
[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 788, 791.
[37] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 565.
[38] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 810.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 806.

whose works God blessed and extended beyond all their hopes: 'Just consider the collation and the religious instruction of the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu, the board, lodging and education of the Foundlings, the contributions to Missions in the East, in the North and in the South. These, Ladies, are the regular occupations of your Company. What! Ladies doing all that! Yes, God has given you the grace to undertake and carry them on for the last twenty years.'[40]

If Saint Vincent could have looked into the future, he would have seen the Ladies taking their share in other works, especially in that known as *The Clergy Fund* which was established in the Seminary of Saint Nicholas to enable it to meet its expenses. Madame President de Nesmond, Madame President de Herse, Mademoiselle de Lamoignon, Madame Traversay and Madame de Miramion were its most zealous supporters. A treasurer took charge of the sums collected and gave an account of the state of the funds at the meetings, which were held every three months in the Seminary.[41]

The Ladies were also privileged inasmuch as God granted them a most special protection. Saint Vincent was fully persuaded that a special Providence watched over these servants of the poor and advanced as a proof the immunity they seemed to enjoy from accidents and contagious diseases.[42] A providential occurrence strengthened his conviction. After having received a note convening a meeting in a room at the Mother-House of the Sisters, the Ladies were sent word that, owing to an unexpected occurrence, the meeting would not be held. Now, at the very hour the meeting was to have been held, a beam in the room gave way and the ceiling fell in.[43]

Incidents of this nature when recounted by Saint Vincent served to attach the Ladies more closely to their Company. He rightly believed that if the spirit of piety were to decline the bonds that held them together would be relaxed. Hence

[40] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 818.

[41] *La vie de Madame de Miramion*, par l'abbé de Choisy, Paris, 1706, p. 118.

[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 185; Vol. IX, p. 247.

[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 248.

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he demanded of them at least half an hour's mental prayer every day in the year, assistance at Holy Mass, the reading of a chapter of some spiritual book and a nightly examination of conscience.[44]

If God draws nigh unto the poor, the world moves away from them. To draw nigh unto God and to shun this world were the two great means of perseverance. But perseverance was not everything; it was essential to maintain their numbers, for death was causing gaps in the ranks. Each of the Ladies was invited to seek out amongst her relations or elsewhere, for a devout person who did not 'gamble, frequent the theatre or other dangerous pastimes,' 'who did not seek for notice by wishing to play the "devout,"' and who was really worthy to replace her.[45] Once a candidate had been admitted by the office-holders, and accepted by the ordinary assembly, all she had to do was wait;[46] the death of a patron automatically opened the doors of the Company.

Despite this precaution, the number of members oscillated considerably: some months after the foundation of the Association, it reached 120;[47] shortly afterwards, it was over 200;[48] in 1656, it had fallen below 50[49] and on July 11, 1657, it had reached 150.[50]

The Company of the Blessed Sacrament requested its provincial branches to establish in their cities similar associations to those of the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris and, in order to assist them, forwarded copies of the rules which the Ladies had printed for that purpose.[51] Marseilles, Caen, Alençon, to mention only the names given in Voyer d'Argenson's *Annals*,[52] followed the example of the capital.

The regulations circulated by this famous secret society from the year 1645 onwards differ but little from those which

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 827.
[45] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 813.
[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 769, 819, 828.
[47] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 253.
[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 807.
[49] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 52.
[50] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 807.

[51] There is a copy in the Arsenal Library, MS. 2565, bearing the title: *Mémoire de ce qui est observé par la compagnie des dames de la Charité de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Paris pour en former d'autres semblables ès autres villes du royaume.*

[52] See pp. 20, 96, 113. The two Companies worked together on several occasions. (See *Annales*, pp. 223, 232, 235.)

the Ladies of Charity received from Saint Vincent in 1660 ; they resemble each other so closely because both reproduce rules that had been actually lived[53] In 1656, the Ladies had no written code of rules, for Saint Vincent, faithful to his custom, was determined to submit his regulations to the test of experience for as long as he possibly could before crystallising them into fixed formulas. In 1660, illness warned him that it was time to put the finishing touches to his work and it was most likely in order to complete it that, shortly before his death, seeing that it was impossible for him to descend to the parlour on account of his infirmities, he, for the first time, authorised the admission of ladies within the house. They went up to his room from the Church of Saint-Lazare accompanied by a few Missionaries and, at the close of the meeting, returned under the escort of the same guides. At Saint Vincent's express request, an official note was drawn up on this derogation from a rule hitherto constantly observed, and care was taken to point out that, as the gravity of the circumstances had necessitated this exception, the rule had lost nothing of its former rigour.[54]

The Ladies, no doubt, spoke to their holy director about his health ; but their prayers, good advice and the special, strengthening regimen of diet they succeeded in having imposed on him,[55] did not prevent Death from removing their venerated master.

The works of Saint Vincent were too solidly established to disappear with himself. That of the Ladies of Charity continued to develop under the guidance of the Superiors General of the Mission[56] and, on August 8, 1712, it received a laudatory brief from Pope Clement XI. Its long career would have been continued beyond the eighteenth century if the great Revolution had not interrupted its course. In 1840, it came to life again in another form, with the approbation of the Archbishop of Paris, owing to the combined efforts of Viscountess de Le Vavasseur and Father Etienne, Superior

[53] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 52.

[54] Letter of Edmund Joly, July 20, 1652 (Arch. de la Mission).

[55] Brother Robineau's MS., p. 117.

[56] Bibl. Mazarin A. 10,694, 49th document.

General of the Congregation of the Mission. Since then, it has gone on increasing and has numerous branches in all parts of the world. God alone knows the number of the poor who have been assisted by its members. Side by side with all the other enterprises engaged in combating human misery it holds a post of honour which, let us hope, it may always maintain.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LADIES OF CHARITY OF THE HÔTEL-DIEU (*continued*)

WE should have a very incomplete idea of the Confraternity of the Hôtel-Dieu if we knew nothing of the Ladies who composed it. Some of them have been already mentioned : Madame Goussault; the amiable but too deferential Madame de Villesabin, who was nicknamed by her friends, because of her mannerisms, ' the most humble servant of the human race ' ; Madame de Bailleul ; Madame du Mecq ; Madame Séguier ; Madame Fouquet ; Madame de Traversay ; Madame de Souscarrière ; Madame de Lamoignon ; the Duchesse d'Aiguillon ; Madame Nicolay ; the Duchessse d'Ventadour ; Mlle Viole ; and Madame de Sainctot who was closely connected with the men of letters of her day, especially with Voiture who dedicated to her his *Roland furieux*, and with Blaise Pascal's father, who entrusted his daughter Jacqueline to her care.

The Company of the Ladies of Charity numbers four foundresses in its ranks : Mademoiselle Le Gras, Mademoiselle de Pollalion, Madame de Villeneuve and Madame de Miramion. Thanks to these devout women, four new groups of young girls or widows, each in its own way devoted to the service of the poor, sprang up in the Church of France : the Daughters of Charity, the Daughters of Providence, the Daughters of the Cross and the Daughters of the Holy Family. The latter, after their amalgamation with the Daughters of Saint Genevieve, whose name they adopted, were also called ' Miramionites.'

Princesses of the highest rank were members of the Company : Louise-Marie de Gonzague, later Queen of Poland, the mother of ' the great Condé,' and the Duchess of Nemours. Every grade of aristocracy was represented in its ranks :

Duchesses, Madame de Sully, afterwards Duchess of Verneuil and Madame de Lude; Baronesses : Mesdames de Renty and de Mirepoix ; Countesses : Mesdames de Brienne and de Bragelonne ; Marchionesses : Mesdames de Laval, du Vigean, de Pienne and de Palaiseau. Madame de Schomberg, wife of the Marshal, was also a member and so too were the wives of Presidents de Nesmond, Tubeuf, de Brou, Amelot, de Maupeou, du Sault. Amongst other ladies of rank, we may mention : Mesdames Chevalier, Joly, Ponbuisson, Fortia, Lamy, Mussot, Le Roux, de Romilly, de Beaufort, de Ligin, de Verthamon, Trulin, Loujat, Pelletier ; Mlle de Richelieu, subsequently Duchesse d'Aiguillon, Madame and Mlle de Lamoignon, Mlle du Fresne and little Frances de Pontcarré,[1] who, as an exceptional favour, was admitted when she was thirteen or fourteen years old.

This list is long, perhaps too long, and yet it is far from complete.[2] Some of the Ladies have had biographers ; others would have deserved the same honour but the silence of history has enveloped their lives as in a funeral pall. Let us pause for a while on some of them.

We shall begin with Madame Goussault for, as it was she who, by her pious and praiseworthy determination, induced Saint Vincent to lay the foundation of the Company of Ladies, of which she was the first superioress, she deserves pride of place. Her father, Nicholas Fayet, Lord of Souvigny, and Anthony Goussault, her husband, who died in 1631, after a happy married life that had lasted eighteen years, were both Presidents of the Court of Exchequer. She had four sons : Anthony, William, James and Michael ; and one daughter, Mary Martha.

[1] A circular letter from John Bonnet, Superior General, to the Ladies of Charity, August 20, 1723.

[2] This list is based upon the letters of Saint Vincent de Paul and of Mlle Le Gras, and on *A Collection of various documents*, which gives (Ch. VII) the ' Catalogue of ladies admitted to the Company,' up till 1705, the date of the manuscript. We have given only the names of ladies admitted in Saint Vincent's lifetime ; but as the date of admission is not indicated in the *Collection* some names, perhaps, might have to be removed and others added to the above list.

Anthony became a master in the Court of Exchequer and married Margaret Grangier de Souscarrière, who may have been the daughter of that Madame de Souscarrière who was elected president of the Ladies of Charity on the death of Madame Goussault. William was on the point of being nominated King's Councillor when he was overtaken by death. James entered the Church, became a Doctor of the Sorbonne and was Councillor of the Church in the Paris Parlement. The only thing we know about Michael is that he married Elisabeth Compaing. Mary Martha wedded Nicholas Lotin, later Master of Requests and President of the Great Council.

Madame Goussault's brothers-in-law were Nicholas Pelletier, Master of the Court of Exchequer, and René d'Alméras. Some of the Pelletier boys became Councillors and Masters of Requests, whilst one of the d'Alméras became a Captain of the Guards, another a Vice-Admiral, and the third succeeded Saint Vincent as Superior General of Saint-Lazare.[3] Madame Goussault was a wealthy woman who kept up a great household, with its steward, lackeys and a train of male and female servants. The reception accorded her at Angers, the house of her paternal grandfather, when she paid a visit to that city, enables us to see the high esteem in which her family was held there. 'On my arrival here,' she says in one of her letters,[4] 'two gentlemen came out to meet me. . . . I came straight here, where I found a magnificent supper prepared, and such a crowd of people to meet me that I was in fact treated as a great personage. Next day, I had only sufficient leisure to hear Mass. The magistrates and all the principal men of the city called on me, and again on the following day, I had the greatest difficulty in getting away secretly to visit the Hôtel-Dieu.' This letter gives a delightful picture of Madame Goussault's tender devotion and boundless charity. She spent the whole time of the long journey from Paris to Angers in spiritual reading, vocal and mental prayer, and in singing hymns; when-

[3] The details supplied here on the Goussault family are taken from a letter of James Goussault, kindly communicated to us by M. l'Abbé Uzureau.

[4] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 191, etc.

ever the carriage halted, she visited the church to hear Mass or to adore the Blessed Sacrament and, if there were a Hôtel-Dieu, to pay it a visit; she also taught catechism to any children she might meet or gather around her.

At Angers, she visited the prison twice, and distributed religious pictures and rosary-beads; she also secured the release of several prisoners. She gathered young girls about her to teach them their catechism, and then went off with them to instruct farmers' children. At times, more than a hundred people were listening to her, and were delighted at all that she told them. She received many tributes of admiration, such as the remark of one lady who said to her: 'It is easily seen that you really love the poor, and are in the height of your joy when amongst them. You look twice as lovely when you are talking to them.' Another said: 'If you were here for a year, you would convert the whole town,' whilst an ecclesiastic naïvely declared: 'I would think myself happy if I could end my days beside you, without wage or reward, just to hear the words that fall from your lips.' Madame Goussault was quite pleased with it all, whilst rejoicing at the same time at all the good that was being done around her. According to her own account, her influence was due to three causes; she never gave herself the airs of a reformer, she knew how to combine gaiety and devotion, and she always attended the parish church. She was urged to have her portrait painted by a gifted artist and refused: she then repented for having failed in kindness 'out of false humility.' There was nothing austere about her virtue. During this journey, she used to play a game called 'Don't say "yes" or "no,"' was not afraid to spend an hour at backgammon, and laughed heartily at the amusing remarks she sometimes heard. 'It is easy to serve God at this price,' she says in her letter which, dated April 16, 1633, was addressed to Saint Vincent. For a year, at least, Madame de Goussault had formed one of the groups of devout women who, like Mlle Le Gras and Mlle Le Pollalion, and sometimes in company with them, were accustomed to visit the Confraternities of Charity.[5]

[5] Madame Goussault's name appears for the first time in a letter dated June 2, 1632 (cf. *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 158).

In the early days of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, they had no more devoted friend and protectress. She helped to seek out and train postulants,[6] suggested new establishments[7] and sought out a new home for the Sisters when the Mother-House had become too small.[8] It was Saint Vincent's wish that her desires should be carried out, and he even imposed them on Mlle Le Gras herself. 'I may say,' he wrote to her one day, 'that it is Madame Goussault's wish that that good girl from Montdidier should belong to the Charity.[9] So please regard her as such.'

Nothing could equal his esteem for her, and the most laudatory terms fall naturally from his pen every time he mentions her. It was she whom he entrusted with the task of re-establishing peace in an abbey of Benedictine nuns at Estival,[10] and he urged his Daughters to have a great devotion to this 'great servant of God'[11] and this 'great saint.'[12] He related how she used to remain silent whilst dressing every morning and, in order to avoid irrelevant questions, listened to a spiritual book being read to her.[13] She used to stay with Mlle Le Gras every year to make her annual retreat and, during this time, had frequent interviews with Saint Vincent for spiritual direction.[14]

Her zeal was intense, but her physical strength would not allow her to devote herself to a life of charity in accordance with her inclinations. Towards the latter end of 1637 and the beginning of 1638,[15] she fell ill and her sickness caused her friends some uneasiness. However, she recovered only to have a relapse in 1639.[16] She was dangerously ill in the month of July and it became only too evident that she

[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 172, 328, 469, 495.
[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. I., p. 479.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 235, 315, 318, 320.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 215.
[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 347. There was an abbey of Benedictine Nuns in Estival en Charny (Sarthe).
[11] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 533.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 533; Vol. X, p. 115.
[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 219.
[14] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 381, 383, 455.
[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 398, 400, 408, 417, 435, 461, 468.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 561.

was about to die. On the morning of September 20, Saint Vincent, who had been informed that her end was near, stood by her bedside.[17] ' O Sir,' she said to him, ' during the whole night I saw the Daughters of Charity standing before God ; Oh ! how they will multiply, and what great good they will do ! Oh ! how happy they shall be ! If you only knew how highly I esteem them ! ' She died that same evening.

These few lines are a poor tribute to such a noble character. The time has now past to write her biography because, unfortunately, her contemporaries did not leave us the materials, and we must resign ourselves to an almost total ignorance of a life which we feel was filled with noble and even heroic deeds.

It would be unjust not to reserve a place, and a very prominent place at that in the gallery of Ladies, for Mlle Le Gras. She was, as Saint Vincent himself tells us,[18] ' one of the most respected ' members of the Company. Without the aid given to the various enterprises of the Association, such as the Hôtel-Dieu, the Foundlings and the galley-slaves, by the Sisters who worked under her direction, all the good intentions of the Ladies would have come to naught. It is obvious that money is needed for every organisation, but a brain to conceive and an arm to execute is also required. The brain was Saint Vincent's and the arm was the Daughters of Charity, prepared, aided and guided by their Superioress.

None of the Ladies showed as much zeal for the works of the Company as Mademoiselle Le Gras ; none suffered as keenly from the difficulties that occasionally hindered its progress, and none did more to remove indifference, reanimate courage and stimulate energy. She was present at every meeting and took an active part in all the works. Saint Vincent delivered the addresses, but it was she who frequently suggested the ideas. If she noticed any failing that should be referred to, or had any reform to suggest, she sent word to Saint-Lazare before the meeting was held. One

[17] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, pp. 212, 607.
[18] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 581.

of her letters[19] might have been entitled : ' Certain observations to be made to the Ladies of Charity[20] who visit the sick in the Hôtel-Dieu,'[21] and in another document she sets out the reasons why the Ladies should carry on their good works, and allow themselves to be guided by him whom God had placed at their head.[22]

She did not always approve of the attitude taken up by the Ladies or the decisions at which they arrived.[23] She reproached them for not trusting the Sisters, for imposing too much work on them,[24] for not supplying them with sufficient means to carry on the works,[25] and for making arrangements incompatible with community life. Saint Vincent listened to her complaints, consoled her, and told her to expect further annoyances. ' You will have plenty of other disagreements with the office-holders of the Company,'[26] he wrote to her one day. These were, of course, just little clouds which quickly passed away and concord was the rule and misunderstanding the exception. The Ladies were perfectly well aware they could never get on without Mlle Le Gras. Once when Saint Vincent allowed her to undertake a journey at a time when the state of her health required careful attention, the Ladies were up in arms. ' The Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu,'[27] he wrote to her, ' are making fierce war on me for having allowed you to go, especially Madame de Nesmond. If you return in good health, as I trust you will by God's goodness, peace will soon be restored.'

Mlle Le Gras never had, perhaps, a closer and more devoted friend amongst the Ladies of Charity than her cousin, Mlle du Fay, in whom were united the most admirable qualities of mind and heart ; she was, moreover, as wealthy as she was generous, but her health was very delicate.

[19] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 510.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[21] *Thoughts* of Louise de Marillac, p. 141.
[22] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 228.
[23] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 211.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 509, 512, 523.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 218.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 13.

Vincent de Paul said one day to his Missionaries: 'We have seen how dear Mademoiselle du Fay, M. de Vincy's sister, because of a physical deformity—one of her legs was two or three times larger than the other—united herself to God to such a degree that I do not know whether I have ever seen a soul so united to God as hers was. She used to refer to her leg as " this blessed leg " because it had kept her out of society and even marriage, in which she might, perhaps, have been lost.'[28] Saint Vincent knew her intimately, because he was her spiritual guide. Whenever he had to leave Paris, he let her know beforehand, and when circumstances forced him to go without seeing her, he always sent a line of excuse to console her. 'I did not let you know I was going. Will you please forgive me? Will you not let me know, pray, how your dear heart has taken this? Has it not accused mine of discourtesy? Well now, I trust they will be in complete harmony in the Heart that contains them both, and that is the Heart of Our Lord.'[29] In the absence of her director, what most deeply troubled Mlle du Fay was that she was left alone and helpless in face of her spiritual trials and difficulties. Saint Vincent recommended confidence in God: 'Always be gay, Mademoiselle, I beseech you and, to that end, honour Our Lord's holy tranquillity of soul, and be fully confident that He will guide your holy heart by the holy love of His own.'[30]

If the manuscripts had not given the names of the recipients of Saint Vincent's letters, we should be frequently embarrassed to separate those addressed to Mlle du Fay from those written to Mlle Le Gras, on account of the similarity of tone. When he was in need of money, clothes, objects of piety or anything else for his poor, and even of instruments of penance, he had recourse to Mlle du Fay whose hand was ever open to give.[31] She had, besides, her own poor to look after: those in her own part of the city, those on her estates and more especially the poor of the parish in which her Confraternity of Charity had been established. Mlle du Fay belonged to the Company of Ladies of Charity

[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 131.
[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 27.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31, 32, 39.

from the year it began[32] and was also one of its first office-holders.[33] Her frail health and premature death forbade the revelation of the full extent of her powers. The silence that surrounds her name from the year 1634 leads us to believe that she died a year or two after her admission to the Company.

After Mlle du Fay, the best friend of Mlle Le Gras seems to have been Mlle de Pollalion, whom Saint Vincent, following the customary pronunciation of his day, always calls ' Mlle Poulallion.'[34] Marie Lumague was born in Paris on November 29, 1599, and married, on August 25, 1617, Francis Pollalion. She was the mother of a tenderly loved daughter, Maid of Honour to the Duchess of Orleans, and governess to that Princess's children. On the death of her husband, she quitted the Court to devote herself to the education of her little daughter and to works of charity. She was particularly interested in fallen women or those in danger of becoming so and, at her request, forty girls who were disposed to amend their lives were admitted into the hospital known as ' La Pitié.' She helped them in their need, endeavoured by her conversation to strengthen their good dispositions, and procured for them situations which would place them out of danger. Nothing could check the ardour of her zeal : neither brothels, into which she was not afraid to make her way, nor the fear of abuse and blows ; and she even did not hesitate to adopt a disguise in order to obtain entrance more easily into such establishments.

Her biographer tells us that ' she never attempted anything without consulting M. Vincent,'[35] her spiritual guide.

[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, pp. 34, 73. [33] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

[34] The following works have been consulted on Madame Pollalion : *Life of the Venerable servant of God, Mary Lumague, widow of M. Pollalion*, by Collin, Paris, 1744 ; *Funeral oration on Madame Lumague, widow of M. Pollalion*, by F. Dominick Le Brun, Paris, 1658 ; *The light hidden under a bushel now displayed, or, the spirit of the late L. M. Lumague* (by Victor Faideau), Paris, 1659 ; *History of the Congregation of Christian Union of Fontenay-le-Comte*, by Abbé Teillet, Fontenay le Comte, 1898 ; *A History of the Religious and Military Orders*, by Helyot, Paris, 1792, 8 vols., octavo. Vol. VIII, pp. 142, etc.

[35] Collin, *op. cit.*, p. 55 ; Abelly also states (*op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XX, p. 307) that Mlle Pollalion was ' under the special direction of M. Vincent.'

He used to send her out to the country to teach catechism to the children or to visit the Charities and she was sometimes accompanied on her apostolic journeys by Madame Goussault and Mlle Le Gras. The holy priest used occasionally to consult her about the Company of the Daughters of Charity.[36] 'It would be well,' he wrote one day to Mlle Le Gras, 'if you got into touch with Madame Goussault and Mademoiselle Poulallion so as to have their opinions on Germaine. It is only two days ago since I thought of this method of acting which seems to be both friendly and courteous. I may, perhaps, have pained them a little by inducing you to take the last resolution about what you were about to do, without mentioning it to them.' On another occasion, when inviting Mlle Le Gras to spend a week at Grigny, he adds to reassure her : 'Mademoiselle Poulallion will be able . . . to see your Daughters occasionally.'[37] When the Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu was established, she willingly joined and was appointed treasurer, an office which she held for only three or four years, as most of her time was taken up in looking after the community which she had founded.

Mlle de Pollalion had, as a matter of fact, a work of her own and on it expended the best of her ability. As she was deeply moved at the sight of young girls in danger of losing their innocence owing to the neglect or poverty of their families, it occurred to her to provide asylums for them in which they would be sheltered from danger. She consulted Saint Vincent who encouraged her but, at the same time, told her to reflect on the means she had at her command for the execution of her design : in other words, he suggested to her to begin in a quiet way. Strengthened by this approbation, relying on Providence and on the charity of her son-in-law who was extremely wealthy, Mlle de Pollalion thought that she could raise the number of her helpers to thirty-three. The two first to present themselves came from Lyons. The mistresses and their adopted daughters installed themselves provisionally at Fontenay-aux-Roses, near Paris, in 1630, in the foundress's home. Hearing that a larger and more commodious building was to let at Charonne

[36] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 165.
[37] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 325.

they hired and moved into it. Later on, the Ladies of Charity generously provided them with money for its purchase. The work prospered, and the two mistresses were soon joined by a third, then a fourth and, in a short time, the number mounted up to thirty, which was not too many for the ever-increasing number of girls. Ladies of high rank presented themselves as schoolmistresses, and Renée de Grammont, fearing lest she might be refused on account of the nobility of her family, adopted a ruse. When a postulant calling herself Renée Desbordes appeared, dressed as a servant maid, no one even dreamed that she was related to the Dowager Duchess of Lorraine. Another girl who deserves to be mentioned was Catharine Maréchal who was remarkable for her holiness as well as for her exalted rank. The Nuncio, who knew her and admired her virtues, used to visit her occasionally to be edified by her conversation.

The Ladies of Charity might well regard this work as one of their own. The Daughters of Providence had been established by one of their members and were maintained only by their assistance. The years of the civil wars of the Fronde proved critical ones for the Ladies, deprived in great part of their revenues or far away from Paris, lessened their grants and this, of course, caused distress. Nevertheless, the work went on but in a more modest way and at the cost of many privations. When all failed, the Sisters relied on Divine Providence, honoured by them as their heavenly patron, and Providence sometimes gave them unexpected and agreeable surprises.

Saint Vincent also watched over them. He obtained Letters-Patent for them in July, 1643, archiepiscopal approval on April 25, 1652, and the patronage of Queen Anne of Austria. The Letters-Patent authorised them to set up an establishment in Paris, and they occupied provisionally a house in the Rue d'Enfer which had been built for monks of Saint Bernard. In 1651, the Queen offered them the old Hospital de la Santé in which patients from the Hôtel-Dieu used to spend a period of convalescence under the care of the Augustinian nuns. The convalescents were transferred to a place near Champ de l'Alouette, the walls were knocked down and a new building erected to receive the

MADEMOISELLE POLLALION

new arrivals. On June 11, 1652, in presence of Anne of Austria and the Ladies of the Court, formal possession was taken with great solemnity.

As the Society had so far no written Constitutions, Saint Vincent drew them up and M. du Saussay, the Vicar General, approved them on June 2, 1656.

Mlle de Pollalion was a living model for her associates, and never asked them to do anything difficult or painful without taking her own share in the task. 'Sir,' she wrote to Saint Vincent towards the end of the year 1656,[38] 'fearing as we do lest thieves may break into our church by night, because there is only glass in our windows and the cloister walls are very low, we have come to the conclusion that, in order to guard the Blessed Sacrament, which is our Treasure, two of our healthiest Sisters shall watch in turn every night, and this should also be done during the day, and we have chosen some of the most devout, who will watch only once a week, or, to put it more clearly, who will sleep for only five hours on the night they watch; and although I am not one of the robust Sisters, I request your permission, Sir, to watch in my turn. I assure you that it will not do me the slightest harm; for to command others and not to act oneself would give them an occasion for growing lax. And as you know, Sir, that even if I had a thousand lives, I should be bound to spend them in making reparations for all the Communions I have made so carelessly.'

Mlle de Pollalion was quite right in saying that she was not one of the 'robust' Sisters, because even then her shattered health gave rise to much anxiety and it is most likely that Saint Vincent turned a deaf ear to her request. As soon as he saw that the Community had increased and was composed of fervent souls, he thought the time had come to introduce a reform which he had been turning over in his mind for some time. He interviewed each of the best Sisters in private, and suggested that they should place themselves unreservedly in the hands of their Superiors so that they might be prepared to go wherever obedience might call them, even beyond the seas, if that were necessary, to serve God and their neighbour. In the beginning of the year

[38] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV., p. 519.

1647, in presence of Saint Vincent, the Venerable M. Olier and other ecclesiastics, who were moved even to tears, the seven who had been chosen bound themselves to form a united body prepared to walk in the way that had been marked out for them. The disturbances produced by the Fronde deferred the carrying-out of this plan, but when peace was restored, the seven Sisters, to whom an eighth had been added, renewed their engagement taken in 1647, after making an eight days retreat.[39]

The Society spread rapidly: the Archbishop declared himself its protector and it was established in Île-Notre-Dame, in the Faubourgs Saint-Germain and de Villeneuve, and in the hospice of the parish of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois. Following the Archbishop's example, Bishops throughout the provinces brought the Daughters of Providence to their dioceses either to educate young girls or to convert heretics.

In 1632, Father Hyacinth, a celebrated Capuchin preacher established in Paris an association, of which Saint Vincent was one of the first members, called 'The Congregation of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross for the propagation of the faith,'[40] intended to labour for the conversion of heretics and to assist converts to persevere.[41] The statutes anticipated the acquisition or the renting of a house in which new converts might find a refuge from the persecutions of their friends or relations, as well as the

[39] Helyot, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, p. 145.

[40] Our knowledge of this association is derived from MS. fr. 2786 of the Bibl. Nat. which gives an account of the first development of this work, and also from a book entitled: *Origin, institution, rules and statutes of the Congregation of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross for the propagation of the Faith established in this city of Paris on September 14 of the year one thousand six hundred and thirty-two.* (Paris, Sebastian Cramoisy, 1635, oct.) M. Faillon tells (*op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 458–462) how M. Olier prevented the Jansenists from exercising their influence in this society and how it was finally suppressed by Mazarin.

[41] The author of MS. 2786, after stating that the Archbishop of Arles joined the Society, adds: 'This prelate was followed by many other persons of great virtue, learning and merit and especially by M. Vincent, General of the Priests of the Mission; M. Croiset, incumbent; M. Lamy, auditor of the Court of Accounts, and M. Centeuil, advocate in Parlement.'

necessities of life and favourable surroundings for the acquisition of Christian virtues. The *New Catholics*, as they were called, took up residence in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, afterwards Rue Saint-Avoie, Rue Neuve Saint-Eustache and finally Rue Saint-Anne. Sister Garnier, a Daughter of Providence, was appointed Superioress by Saint Vincent. Another nun, Sister Desbordes, went to Sedan to establish a similar home. The *New Catholics* of Sedan had also a house in that city but as it was in danger of collapsing those in charge begged Sister Desbordes to come to their help, and she sent them six Sisters under the charge of Sister Anne Charmoise.

The Propagation of the Faith was of immense service in the battle against heresy and Judaism and, as we have seen, Vincent de Paul was closely associated with this work.

Everything was going on well until, on September 4, 1657, Mlle de Pollalion was carried off by the illness from which she suffered. Her death was almost fatal to the work of the Sisters of Providence and were it not for Saint Vincent's vigilant and confident firmness it would not have survived its foundress. He called a meeting at the Duchesse d'Aiguillon's town-house and invited M. Duplessis, M. Drouard, Madame Séguier, Madame de Brienne and Mlle Viole to attend. He submitted two questions to the meeting: Should the House of Providence be closed and an end put to the work that was being carried on? If, as it seemed, it would be shameful cowardice to abandon this work of God, then what steps should be taken to ensure its continuance? He spoke so eloquently on the need of continuing Mlle de Pollalion's work that all present agreed, and it was decided that a meeting of the foundresses should be summoned without delay to enquire into ways and means of providing essential resources and, in the meantime, the nuns, inmates and young girls should be invited to withdraw to their own homes or elsewhere, if they could, and that the number of the community should be reduced to forty until circumstances might permit of the work being resumed and extended. The process of elimination began immediately and, on October 18, there were only eighty persons present

in the house, and even that number was soon reduced by half.

The fate of the Daughters of Providence was in the hands of the Ladies and Saint Vincent appeared on the nuns' behalf. He approached every one of the Ladies, even those who did not forgive him for his attitude towards Jansenism. His letter to Madame de Liancourt has been preserved and runs as follows :[42] 'You may have heard, Madame, of the death of that dear servant of God and of how, a few days afterwards, a meeting was held at the Duchesse d'Aiguillon's . . . to see if it were expedient to carry on and regulate this work and, supposing it should be, what means should be adopted to that end. Now, it was decided, after reading the rules which had been approved, that an attempt should be made to carry on this good work and to govern it according to the scope of the said rules, and that a meeting should be called of the chief benefactresses of this work, of which the Queen comes first, then yourself, Madame, the Chancellor's wife, Madame de Sénecey, Mesdames d'Aiguillon and de Brienne, to deal with the matter and to inaugurate a harmonious system of government which will be perpetuated, with the help of God, Who chose you, Madame, and the late Marchioness de Maignelay, to be the first helpers. It is clear that He wishes you, for time and eternity, to be one of the principal instruments of whom He has made use for the preservation of the purity and holiness of many virgins, who will adore and glorify His divine goodness in time and eternity and who, perhaps, might have otherwise offended and cursed Him. . . . Now as the said Ladies have deemed it fitting that I should do myself the honour of acquainting you with this whole affair, I do so, Madame, with all the joy your kindness can imagine. I do so, Madame, for three ends : first, to enquire if you will be pleased to let me know if you are willing to honour the good work by a continuance of your protection ; and then, if that be so, if you are willing, Madame, to come to this city some day next week ; and, in case you cannot, will you send a blank proxy-paper, entitling the person whose name you may wish to have filled in, to

[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 534.

declare that you intend to continue the help you have hitherto given this house (since it was first instituted), as a benefactress of the said house, or, at least, to write conformably to that effect.'

Although Vincent de Paul had not been Superior of the Daughters of Providence since September 7, 1657, he did not wish to leave his successor, M. Feydeau, the task of meeting the grave difficulties caused by the death of Mlle de Pollalion. He took a very active part in this task, assisted by the Ladies of Charity and the Superiors of the work were chosen from their ranks; first, Mlle Le Pilleur, then Mlle Viole, Madame de Miramion, Madame President de Nesmond, the Marchioness de Nangis and Madame President Le Pelletier.

Circumstances prevented Saint Vincent and Mlle de Pollalion from setting the work for *New Catholics* on an independent footing but, in 1661, a zealous priest, M. Vachet, again took up their project and succeeded in carrying it out. A mother-house was the greatest want and this was met by a legacy, for one of the Sisters, Anne de Crozes, inherited from her family a property situated at Charonne. She placed it at the disposal of M. Vachet, and some Sisters of Providence, under the direction of Sister Renée Desbordes, set up house there. In this way the Seminary of Christian Union took its rise. Transferred, in 1685, to the Hôtel de Saint-Chaumont, near the Gate of Saint-Denis, it remained there until the end of the eighteenth century. This Society of Christian Union, like that of The Daughters of Providence, may be reckoned amongst the works of Saint Vincent, for if death did not allow him time to develop it, it was he at any rate who had first conceived it.

In this sketch of the most remarkable Ladies of Charity, we cannot pass over in silence the name of Madame de Villeneuve, *née* Marie Lhuillier, daughter of Francis Lhuillier, Lord of Interville, and his wife, Anne Brachet, Lady of the Manor of Frouville. She married Claude Marcel, Lord of Villeneuve-le-Roi, and her sister Helen Angela Lhuillier was one of the pillars of the Visitation Order in Paris. Marie Lhuillier was sister-in-law of Stephen d'Aligre,

Chancellor of France and also of Michel de Tambonneau, President of the Chamber of Accounts.[43]

She was forced into a marriage by her parents, on January 22, 1603, with a man forty-five years old who loved gambling, luxury, pleasure and display. He was not a suitable husband for a young girl of sixteen who was devout, serious-minded and in whom worldly pleasures inspired only weariness and disgust. She bore her cross patiently and the birth of two daughters softened the bitterness of the union. Madame de Villeneuve, however, was not one of those women who mope in isolation weeping silently over their hard fate. She sought for consolation in intercourse with God, the practice of charity, prolonged sojourns at the Convent of the Visitation in close proximity to her sister Helen Angela whom she had led to God, and in frequenting the society of persons renowned for their holiness. She met Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Chantal, Saint Vincent de Paul and Père Suffren who became her director. In Paris she had several interviews with the Bishop of Geneva, to whom she opened out her soul ; after he had gone, she continued to place her doubts and difficulties before him and made him the confidant of all her interior trials. The printed correspondence of this great prelate contains a few letters addressed to Madame de Villeneuve, and we may be certain that all he wrote to her have not been preserved. The tone of these letters is marked by the tenderness which he displayed towards the choicest of those souls whom he directed, as for instance : ' Really, my dearest daughter, when, in writing to me, you sometimes say : " Your dearest daughter is devoted to you " and speak of me in this way, I confess it gives me much pleasure. Firmly believe it and say out boldly, I beg you, that you certainly are my dearest daughter, and have no doubt about it.' He occasionally addresses both the Sisters together : ' Be like spiritual honey-bees,' he tells them, ' that carry about with them only honey and wax in all they do,' and, in another place, he says, ' They both exhale the same sweetness and fragrance.'

[43] *Madame de Villeneuve, née Marie L'Huillier d'Interville*, par A. de Salinis, Paris, 1918.

Neither did Saint Chantal separate the sisters in her letters to Saint Francis de Sales : ' Little sister de Villeneuve,' she wrote to him on one occasion, ' is better. *Mon Dieu !* what splendid girls those two Sisters are ! No one could be as perfectly fitted for us as she is.' If Helen Angela was a nun in fact, Madame de Villeneuve was one in affection : for fifteen years she lived in the Convent in the Rue Saint-Antoine, loaded it with gifts and played a large part in the foundation of the second Monastery of the Visitation. The poor, also, had a share and a great share of her alms, especially the poor of the parishes of Saint Jacques de la Boucherie and Saint Paul, in which she dwelt successively. During the period of public distress caused by the Fronde, she established a soup-kitchen in her quarter of the city which attracted multitudes of the hunger-stricken ; and she was also accustomed to beg in churches for the relief of the destitute.

Saint Vincent had no difficulty in persuading her to join the Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu and, if she did not hold any important post, this was due to the fact that her time was fully occupied by the community of the Daughters of the Cross, of which she was the Superioress and mainstay.

Let us go back a little in order to trace the story of this Society. In 1624, a school for little girls was opened at Roye, in Picardy, under the direction of the local clergy and with the assistance of four amateur schoolmistresses. The children were taught to read, write, sew and pray to God. Even Sunday was not a free day for the teachers, whose time was taken up with the supervision of the school-children. The house was, moreover, a meeting-place for girls or women of the city or the surrounding villages who desired religious instruction, and large numbers were present at the chief catechism class held on Tuesdays. The teachers followed the same rule of life, and wore the same kind of dress. The violent attacks from which their work suffered earned for them from the people the title of ' Daughters of the Cross,'[44] which they retained.

[44] The Daughters of the Cross should not be confounded with either the Sisters of Saint Andrew or the Dominican Nuns of the Rue de Charonne, who were also called Daughters of the Cross.

Two of their founders and protectors, Peter Guérin and Claude Bucquet, both parish priests of Roye, were charged with Illuminism, confined in the local prison at Amiens, transferred to the Bastille and submitted to the judgement of several theologians. Saint Vincent questioned them on all the points in dispute and, finding nothing blameworthy in their doctrine and conduct, gave them a certificate of orthodoxy[45] which enabled them to return home and resume possession of their parishes.

In the course of these proceedings, the work at Roye was frequently referred to and when, after the two ecclesiastics had been set free, they asked Vincent de Paul whether they should abandon it, his reply was : ' certainly not.' ' It is an excellent institution,' he told them, ' put as much energy into keeping it going as its enemies do in combating it. If, as I trust, this tree takes root, its branches will bring forth good fruit, and it will take root if you see that the Sisters preserve the spirit that now animates them, of poverty, simplicity, mortification, piety, obedience and charity. These girls certainly deserve the name of Daughters of the Cross for they have been grafted on to the Cross of Our Saviour by sharing in His ignominies, trials and persecutions.'

One of the teachers, Mary Samier, went to Paris to render what help she could to the incriminated priests during the trial. Madame de Villeneuve, who had afforded Mary a refuge in her own home,[46] heard her speak about the school at Roye, and was so charmed by what she had heard that she thought of setting up a similar one in Paris. She would have employed Mary Samier for the purpose if the latter, attracted towards the religious life, had not asked to be admitted into

[45] Historians continue to regard Guérin as the head of a sect of Illuminists known as the Guérinites (See Bergier, *Dictionnaire de théologie*, Vol. III, art. Illuminés). His defence has been undertaken by Abbé Corblet, *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, Vol. II, 3rd series, in an article entitled *Origines royennes de l'Institut des Filles de la Croix*, p. 317, etc., and by Abbé Henri Bremond (*Les Illuminés de Picardie* in *La Vie Intellectuelle*, Oct. 10, 1930, Vol. IX, pp. 8–21).

[46] See *Madame de Villeneuve* by A. de Salinis. Most of the details here given about the Society of the Daughters of the Cross have been taken from the second part of that work.

the first monastery of the Visitation. However, she acquired Charlotte de Lancy who came to Paris to place herself at the disposal of Madame de Villeneuve who, acting on Saint Vincent's advice, set about perfecting what was already in existence. She had thought of establishing a real community, modelled on the primitive Visitation, with almost the same constitutions and bound by simple vows.

Her plan was still under consideration in July, 1639, when the inhabitants of Roye, terrified at the approach of the Spanish army, poured into Paris. Amongst the refugees were five Daughters of the Cross and some of their boarders, to whom Commander de Sillery offered the hospitality of his country-house at Panfou, near Brie-Comte-Robert, about six or seven leagues distant from Paris. They remained there for some time before moving on to Brie.

It does not come within our province to relate the various tribulations through which Madame de Villeneuve's work had to pass: the opposition of Guérin and a certain number of the Sisters; the division of the Society into two parts, one in Paris and the other in Roye and Brie; the obstacles that hindered its receiving archiepiscopal approval and the quashing of its Letters-Patent by Parlement. Neither have we to recount the series of events that led the Sisters to emigrate to the village of Vaugirard, nor of their subsequent return to Paris, after the purchase of the Hôtel de Tournelles, situated in the Rue Saint-Antoine opposite the Visitation Convent. But what does concern us here is the part played by Saint Vincent in the foundation and consolidation of the new Society. He played, in fact, a very prominent part, as may be seen from the following letter written to him by Madame de Villeneuve in 1642: 'Have you made up your mind before God to allow His work to perish on account of the unworthiness of her whom He employs in it? If God has thus inspired you and if He had commissioned you to do so, I desire to unite myself with you. From the time His goodness granted me the grace to begin it, I proposed to Your Reverence to abandon it, in case you should so command me; you did not think that fitting, and merely ordered me to make certain arrangements, whilst engaged in this blessed work, and those by God's grace I followed out

to the very letter, and they were entirely successful in the preliminary stages.

'And now that we are on the threshold of its perfection and completion, would you deny us the favour of crowning the work by your advice, since you have begun it? No—I do not think you would have the courage. You have always helped me, in the nick of time, in my bodily and spiritual infirmities. God has let you see the super-abundance of my sufferings, as well as my will to endure them and perhaps this will now also prove true. Come then to see me, my dearest Father, if such is the case. Is it really possible that our good God has allowed me to deceive myself, and that up till now I have not laboured for His glory as He commanded me? No!—I cannot believe that, unless you absolutely tell me so, after having recommended the matter to God, in Whose name I beseech Your Reverence to come as soon as possible to assure me of His holy designs and to help me to fulfil them, excluding all that is not for Him.'[47]

Eight months later, crushed beneath the weight of the difficulties with which she was laden, she wrote to him again. After excusing herself, on account of the 'crisis' through which the house was passing, for taking the liberty of troubling a man who was overwhelmed with business, she added: 'It is quite certain . . . that help must be given against the attacks of Satan and his ministers who have sworn its ruin. I know not what God means to do with me, poor reed shaken by the winds of persecution, though hitherto not one of them has been able to overthrow or even disturb me.' She is surprised that the devil has thrown into the fight 'a squadron of warriors to vanquish one poor, little soldier,' and feels comforted by the thought that 'no one can injure those whom God protects, and who no more rely on secondary causes than they do on the devil.' 'Your Reverence,' she says in conclusion, 'has taught me that lesson for about four years, and I have practised it in such a fashion that I am now quite certain of it.'[48]

The severe trial through which the Institute passed in 1642 bore no comparison with that which it had to encounter

[47] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 522.
[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 525.

after Madame de Villeneuve's death, on January 15, 1650. The general impression then was that the best thing to do would be to dissolve or unite it to some other Society such as the Daughters of Providence. There was not a single member of the community who seemed capable of acting as Superior, or of extricating it from the sad plight into which it had been plunged by heavy debts. Saint Vincent, however, never lost confidence. Yet again, he turned to the Ladies of Charity for help, and they gave him the necessary assistance. Madame de Traversay rendered signal service by consenting to become the protectress and guardian of the work. Abelly, on his side, accepted the office of Superior and did so all the more readily as the Saint promised to take an active part in the administration of the unfortunate Institute. These measures produced the hoped-for result: debts were lessened; more abundant assistance was given to the poor from property held by the community; and the Sisters were enabled to make a fresh attempt at their works. The latter were not merely scholastic, for the Mother-House was always full of women of every age, and especially of poor women, who came to be instructed in the truths of religion, to prepare for a general confession, or even to spend a few days on retreat. One can therefore understand why Saint Vincent left no stone unturned to preserve a Society so useful to the Church and to souls.

The Daughters of the Cross never forgot the debt of gratitude they owed him.[49] 'As,' writes Abelly, 'after God, it was M. Vincent who stretched out a hand to support them and to preserve their Congregation from a fall from which, perhaps, it might never have arisen; and as, moreover, it was he who, by his wise advice, greatly contributed to put them in the excellent state in which they now are, they are bound to regard him, if not as their founder and institutor, at least as their preserver and restorer and to thank God for all the temporal and spiritual assistance which they have received by his charitable efforts.'

The French Revolution did not succeed in putting an end to the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross, for France was not the only field of their energies; they also

[49] *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXXVIII, p. 179.

laboured in Canada, and, despite the upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their vitality is to-day as vigorous as ever, so that in the modern Daughters of the Cross ever at work in the service of the poor, we shall find true children of Madame de Villeneuve.

Madame de Miramion also had all the qualities of a foundress. She was born in Paris, on November 26, 1629,[50] the daughter of James Bonneau, Esquire, Lord of Rubelle, and Councillor and Secretary to the King. She was married at an early age to John James de Beauharnais, Lord of Miramion, who died on November 2, 1645. Four months later, on March 7, 1646, a daughter was born to her who was christened Mary. At sixteen she was both mother and widow. There would have been no difficulty whatever about finding another husband for her, and she had several proposals in marriage for her youth, beauty, wealth and qualities of mind and heart attracted many suitors. She rejected all advances ; God and the poor sufficed for her, but, in order to strengthen her resolution still more, she made a vow of chastity, on February 2, 1649, after a retreat in the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity.

She spent the whole of the year 1651 in solitude and silence and, after this long period of recollection and union with God, decided on her vocation, resolving to devote herself entirely to the relief of the poor and suffering. She had not as yet become a member of the Company of Ladies of Charity, but shortly afterwards she was allowed to attend their meetings. As she was so young she was not called on to occupy any of the more important posts, and hence her name does not occur even once in the correspondence of Saint Vincent and of Mlle Le Gras. Nevertheless, she showed herself one of its most active members by her zeal and assiduity in attending the meetings, especially those connected with the Foundling Hospital. She devoted her

[50] The details we have given about Madame de Miramion have been almost entirely borrowed from Abbé de Choisy's *Vie de Madame Miramion*, Paris, 1900. Her life has also been written by Count de Bonneau-Avenant (*Madame de Beauharnais de Miramion*, Paris, 1868).

mornings to the poor of her parish, Saint Nicholas-in-the-Fields, and her afternoons either to prisons or the Hôtel-Dieu. She sold all her jewels, including a magnificent pearl necklace that fetched 24,000 livres, and devoted the proceeds to the poor. After the death of Mlle de Lamoignon, Louis XIV handed over to her the task of distributing his private alms.

Sick priests, in the Hôtel-Dieu, were mingled indiscriminately with the ordinary patients, and treated in the same way. She arranged with President de Lamoignon that a special ward should be reserved for them and, by her personal gifts and the money she collected, founded twelve beds and paid for the services of a valet.

The famine of the year 1694 produced disastrous effects on public health ; 6000 patients were piled together in the wards of the Hôtel-Dieu ; every bed was filled, and filled to overflowing for twelve persons were sometimes put in the same bed. One may imagine the results of such contempt for the ordinary rules of hygiene. Madame de Miramion requested the First President, M. de Harlay, to open Saint Louis's hospital, and herself took over its administration so that she was thus able to relieve the congestion in the Hôtel-Dieu, and to lower the rate of mortality.

One of her greatest preoccupations was the supply of clergy, and Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet had no better friend and supporter. The building was the property of a family named Compaing and she obtained 36,000 francs from the Prince de Conti to purchase the seminary. According to the terms of the Letters-Patent, no legacy or foundation was authorised that did not reserve the usufruct to the founder, but thanks to her efforts this stipulation was removed. The list of her benefactions to the seminary would be a long one : the establishment of three burses in perpetuity for the education of three seminarists ; an equal number for the support of three priests who bound themselves to preach missions in the most neglected parishes in the diocese ; the foundation of a low Mass in perpetuity to be celebrated in the college chapel ; gifts of chalices and vestments, secular dress for priests who were leaving the seminary to proceed to Ireland ;

supplies of surplices and altar linen ; repairs, buildings, etc. etc.

Her zeal extended to heretical and infidel countries. We have just seen what Ireland owes her. The entire expense of the consecration of M. de la Mothe-Lambert was defrayed out of her private purse and the Bishop himself, two prelates and twenty ecclesiastics who were to accompany him to the East were her guests for eighteen months. The recently established Company of Foreign Mission was also deeply indebted to her.

Apart from all this, she started charitable works on her own initiative. First of all an orphanage for twenty fatherless and motherless little girls who lived in a rented house near Saint Nicholas-in-the-Fields that was called the House of the Holy Infancy. After the marriage of her daughter, this orphanage was closed. Another house which she rented in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine sheltered seven or eight young girls whom the magistrates intended to send to prison for loose living. Madame de Miramion had greater confidence in the power of moral persuasion by devotional exercises and good advice than in physical force. This Refuge, transferred shortly afterwards to the Rue Copeau, close to the hospital of La Pitié, was subsequently placed under the control of the administrators of the General Hospital and called Saint Pelagia's. To these foundations she added others, such as a work-room for young girls of the parish of Saint Nicholas, and a House of Retreats to which fifty ladies retired twice a year, for a period of seven days, devoted to spiritual exercises, and twenty of the middle class or even those who were actually poor—the latter were admitted without payment—for five days, four times a year. The Holy Family must not be forgotten, for its members were engaged in teaching little girls and helping the poor. Saint Vincent had drawn up the rules, but he died before the work was actually begun. Madam de Miramion, at the request of her director, Hippolyte Féret, parish priest of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet and Superior of the Daughters of Saint Genevieve, established thirty years previously by Mlle de Blosset and now on the point of extinction, consented to the amalgamation of the two communities which were

engaged in much the same work. In addition to all these heavy burdens, she added, in 1678, the government of the Daughters of Providence, on the death of their Superioress, Mlle Viole.

It was all the more astonishing to see her engaged in such a multitude of works as she lived a most rigorous life. Her bed consisted of two small planks fastened together by rope ; bread and water was the only food she took on Fridays, and once a week she wore round her waist a heavy iron chain two inches broad.

Edmund Jolly, the second successor of Saint Vincent de Paul, was, after Féret, the confidant and spiritual guide of her whom Madame de Sevigné called a *Mother of the Church.* He was by her bedside when she died on March 24, 1696 and, to use the famous letter-writer's phrase, her death was ' a public calamity.'

Madame de Miramion was closely connected with the de Lamoignons, of whom the mother and sister of the First President, William de Lamoignon, were members of the Confraternity of the Hôtel-Dieu and famous for their charity. Mary des Landes married Christian de Lamoignon, *President à mortier*[51] in the Paris Parlement, and earned from the people the glorious title of *Mother of the poor.*[52] Saint Francis de Sales, who had once been her director, said of her : ' She is one of the holiest women I know.' Her mansion was a happy hunting-ground for the poor who knew that they could always find there food, clothing and remedies. The mistress of the house dispensed them herself with a smile on her lips, never showing the faintest sign of impatience at the complaints of those who were dissatisfied with what they had obtained. Christian de Lamoignon, who was somewhat dismayed at her generosity, used to say occasionally : ' You will reduce us to beggary,' but, all the same, he let her have her way for he was quite well aware that virtue is preferable to riches.

[51] *President à mortier:* a *mortier* was the cap worn by the President of a Court of Justice. (T.)

[52] What is here said of Madame de Lamoignon has been borrowed in great part from Mlle Louise Masson's *Vie de Mademoiselle de Lamoignon*, 1893.

Madame de Lamoignon was not one of the first members of the Company of Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu. She was probably admitted after her husband's death in 1636 or a little later. Her admirable qualities of mind and heart led to her election as President on the retirement of Madame de Souscarrière, and she held the post for ten years, from about 1643 to 1652.[53] Abelly writes : ' When present at a meeting of the Ladies, which was usually held in her house, she set all hearts on fire by her ardour, which was all aflame with the love of God and her neighbour, and her words and examples set the most holy enterprises in motion.'

She might well have adopted as her device the words of Saint Paul : ' The charity of Christ urgeth us.' She recited the Divine Office every day and never omitted it. In the year 1645 or 1646, after receiving Holy Communion one morning, she had a stroke of apoplexy and, when she was undressed, it was discovered that she wore a hair-shirt and an iron girdle studded with spikes that lacerated the flesh. From that day onwards her life was one of constant pain until her death on December 30, 1651, aged seventy-five. In order to keep her body near them in the Church of Saint Leu, her poor pensioners forcibly prevented its removal to the Recollect convent of Saint Denis, which she had chosen as the place of her burial.

The inhabitants of the devastated provinces also bewailed their great benefactress,[54] and a letter from Rethel styled her ' the mother of the afflicted.' A funeral service was held in that city for the repose of her soul.

Mlle Le Gras was deeply affected by her friend's death, and in a letter to one of her daughters, says : ' I recommend the soul of dear Madame President de Lamoignon to your prayers ; God has to-night taken her away from us and from this world, that she may enjoy the glory merited for us by the Son of God in order to recompense her three principal virtues :—holy simplicity, perfect humility, and great charity and generosity.'[55]

[53] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 228.
[54] *Recueil de Relations*, Feb. 1652.
[55] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 563.

MADAME DE MIRAMION

Madame de Lamoignon's poor found a new mother in her daughter Madeleine who, trained in the bosom of her own family, had learned to love the wretched and afflicted. Saint Francis de Sales, who heard her first Confession; P. Suffren who prepared her for her first Communion, and Saint Vincent de Paul,[56] who initiated her into works of charity, were her guides and masters. She rose at dawn so as to have time for devotional exercises before engaging on her work for the poor. She seemed to be attracted most to the poorest hovels; she served out soup to the sick, dressed their sores, cooked their meals, washed and dressed their children, and did not forget to remind them of God, the great Benefactor of the needy and wretched. Her ardent nature inclined her to work unceasingly, and when her parents saw her arrive home, exhausted by fatigue, they used to scold her gently. Her promises to be more reasonable were often renewed and soon forgotten. 'She goes so fast in doing good,' said Saint Vincent, 'that no one can keep up with her.'

She had her own way of doing things. Whatever was offered her for the poor was gladly accepted, so that the house became a sort of bazaar: one room resembled a grocer's shop in which corn, wine, oil and all sorts of food and drink were piled up; another contained clothes, furniture and other useful objects; a third was filled with inlaid cabinets, pictures, jewels, laces, tapestries, embroideries, trimmings, etc. The poor were brought into the two first to receive whatever they needed, whilst dealers crowded the third, and the poor-box was filled with the money they expended. In this way, directly or indirectly, everything went to the poor. 'My sister organises cheap sales,' was the laughing remark of William de Lamoignon to such of his visitors as remarked the crowds caused by this form of combined business and charity. Madeleine de Lamoignon was, in fact, one of the most active, influential and generous of the Ladies of Charity, and the most regular

[56] The life of Madeleine de Lamoignon was written by P. d'Orleans (*Vie de Mademoiselle de Lamoignon*, MS. Bibl. Nat. ff. 23,985) and by Mlle Louise Masson (*Madeleine de Lamoignon*, Lyons, 1896).

attendant at their meetings. She assisted her invalid mother in carrying out her duties as President, and her name recurs over and over again in the letters of Saint Vincent and of Mlle Le Gras.

However unattractive the function of begging may be, it did not dismay her because it was for her poor. For four consecutive years she managed to collect five hundred *pistoles* a week, and she visited the most highly placed personages in pursuit of her object. Louis XIV never sent her away empty-handed. 'You are, perhaps, the only woman to whom I refuse so little,' he remarked to her, 'and I suppose you know the reason; you are the only woman who never asks anything for yourself.' Anne-Mary Martinozzi presented her with a magnificent jewelled ornament and Madeleine de Lamoignon hurried off to Louis XIV to sell it. He offered her 50,000 crowns, and it was a happy day for his warm-hearted visitor, or rather for her poor. Louis XIV sent her considerable sums of money to be distributed in alms, four times a year, and had such a high opinion of her virtue that he wrote personally to her on several occasions asking for her prayers.

Mlle de Lamoignon was always sure of a warm welcome from the Queen-Mother and the Prince and Princess de Conti, from whom she received large sums. Madame de Bullion gave her up to 80,000 crowns for the General Hospital. She was deeply hurt at any want of charity and hence she disliked Boileau's satires, and told the poet so.

'Will you allow me at least to write a satire against the Grand Turk, that dreadful miscreant and mortal enemy of our holy religion?' he said to her.

'No, Sir, no: he is a crowned head and sovereigns should be respected.'

'Very well then; what about the devil? You will surely allow me to speak ill of the devil, who does so much evil himself!'

'The devil, Sir, is punished enough without our adding to it; let it be our business not to speak evil of anyone whatever, so that we may not go and meet him.'

She died on April 14, 1687, aged seventy-eight. Racine wrote her epitaph, and Boileau the verses placed beneath her portrait.

At the meetings of the Ladies of Charity, Mlle de Lamoignon often met Mary de Maupeou, widow of Francis Fouquet, Councillor to the Paris Parlement, and mother of the famous Minister of Finance, two Bishops and five Visitation Nuns. Saint Vincent had the highest opinion of this noble lady and said to her that 'if, by any accident, the Gospels were lost, their spirit and maxims might be discovered in her life and sentiments.' And he added: 'She makes piety so attractive that she excites everyone to love it.'[57] When she heard that the Minister of Finance had fallen from favour, she raised her eyes to Heaven and uttered this touching prayer from her heart: 'I give Thee thanks, O my God, I have always prayed for my son's salvation, and that is the way to obtain it.' She made a collection of the most practical and useful remedies for the sick which was published after her death and frequently reprinted. The title was: '*A Collection of selected, tried and proven Receipts for a great variety of many common complaints, both internal and external, inveterate and hard to be cured.*'[58] To this she added another of a different nature, for it was intended to preserve the health of the soul: '*A Collection of devout thoughts drawn from the moral reflections contained in the New Testament.*'[59] Madame Fouquet also acted as Superioress of the Daughters of the Propagation of the Faith. Towards the end of her life, she withdrew to one of the houses attached to Val-de-Grace, in which she occupied a small and peaceful apartment where she died, over ninety years old, lamented by all the unfortunate.

In addition to the mother of the Minister of Finance, Saint Vincent also induced the wife of Chancellor Peter Séguier to join the Ladies of Charity. Her maiden name was

[57] *Année Sainte de la Visitation Saint-Marie*, Annecy, 1867–1871, 12 oct. vols. Vol. I, p. 627.

[58] Villefranche, 1675, 2 vols. bound in one.

[59] Paris, 1711.

Madeleine Fabri and she was born on November 22, 1597,[60] her father being John Fabri, Lord of Champauze and Treasurer Extraordinary of the Army. Her charity inspired Bouchateau to write the following two quatrains :

'Vous êtes plus souvent parmi les malheureux
Et chez ceux que le chaume et la paille recouvre
Que parmi les appas pompeux
Qu'en vain vous étale le Louvre.

'Rien n'égale ici-bas votre rare bonté ;
Vous faites de vos biens un entier sacrifice ;
Et votre époux etant l'âme de la justice,
Vous l'êtes de la charité.'[61]

Madame Séguier died in Paris on February 6, 1683, after a life devoted to good works. Tallemant de Réaux, who cannot speak of people without blackening their good name, says that she was avaricious, but this pious servant of the poor is impervious to the calumnies of her defamers.[62]

Another member of the Company of Ladies of Charity was the wife of an under-Secretary of State, Louise de Béon, daughter of Louise de Luxembourg and Bernard de Béon, Governor of Saintonge, Angoulême and the district of Aunis. She was remarkable for her piety from her tenderest years, and hence when her fiancé, Henry August de Loménie,

[60] The annotators of both Abelly's *Life* and of Mlle Le Gras' *Letters* have been mistaken, as was Collet (*La Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Nancy, 1748, 2 vols. quarto, vol. I, p. 234) in thinking that by these words 'Madame la chancelière' Saint Vincent and Mlle Le Gras were referring to Elisabeth d'Aligre, wife of Chancellor d'Aligre. The *Collection of various documents* contradicts Collet on this point (Ch. VII).

[61] 'You are more frequently to be found amongst the poor and wretched, and those whose dwellings are covered with thatch and straw than amongst the stately attractions which the Louvre spreads before you in vain. Nothing on earth equals your rare goodness, you make a holocaust of all your possessions ; and as your spouse is the soul of justice so are you the soul of charity.' *Le Chancelier Pierre Séguier*, par Kerviller, Paris, 1874, p. 79.

[62] *Historiettes* of Tallemant des Réaux, Paris, 1834–1835, 6 vols. Vol. III, p. 60.

Count of Brienne and of Montbron, Lord of Ville-aux-Clercs, asked her what she would like for a present, he found that his first gift to her was to be the works of Father Louis of Granada.

Madame de Brienne established a house of the Daughters of Charity at Brienne. She was completely devoted to Saint Vincent and to his works and rendered him every service which her high position enabled her to perform. ' Her mind equalled the nobility of her birth,'[63] said Father Senault, ' but her virtue surpassed them both. No woman ever spoke with so much grace and ease and no woman was ever more generous or embraced more ardently every opportunity of serving all sorts and conditions of men. She was highly esteemed by the late Queen-Mother, Anne of Austria, who confided to her most of her secrets ; she took part in all the Queen's innocent amusements and accompanied her to all the monasteries which she honoured by her presence. But she only made use of her influence with that great princess to induce her to perform acts of piety, and to lead her to hospitals and prisons so that, beholding the sick and prisoners, her heart might be softened and thus induced to relieve them in their wretchedness and misery. She was, in a few words, the supervisor of all good works and the advocate of all ecclesiastics and religious.'

She died before her husband, on September 2, 1665.

Madame de Herse was, like Madame de Brienne, very powerful at Court.[64] Her maiden name was Charlotte de Ligny and she was a cousin of M. Olier's and ' the beloved daughter ' of Saint Francis de Sales. Her husband was Michel Vialart, Lord of Forest de Herse, Councillor to the King in his Court of Parlement, President of the Court of Requests and Ambassador to Switzerland. He died at Soleure on October 26, 1634. His son, Felix Vialart, who became Bishop of Châlons, was blessed in his infancy by Saint Francis de Sales who was a friend of the family.

[63] *Funeral oration on Henry Augustus de Loménie, Count of Brienne*, Paris, 1667, p. 25.

[64] What is here said of Madame de Herse is chiefly taken from *La Vie de Messire Felix Vialart de Herse*, Utrecht, 1738.

Her charity towards the poor brought her into touch with Saint Vincent in whom she placed boundless confidence and to whom she was utterly devoted. She presented him with two farms near Etampes,[65] established a house of Daughters of Charity at Chars,[66] richly endowed the house of the Priests of the Mission in Rome,[67] and spent money lavishly on behalf of Ordinands.[68] She was one of the earliest members of the Ladies of Charity, and always in the first rank by her activity and generosity both in regard to the Foundling Hospital and the assistance she gave to the devastated provinces. During the civil wars which caused so much distress in the capital she was chosen, together with some other ladies, by the Queen to dispense the royal alms. She was accompanied by soldiers, to protect her if necessary, as she went from house to house accomplishing her mission of charity. Her modest offerings were always accompanied by a few words of comfort and assurance, and occasionally by a little lesson in religious knowledge. One day, as she was about to enter the Queen's apartments, she was stopped by a guard on the pretext that she was dressed too plainly. 'What are you thinking about, my friend,' said the Duchess d'Aiguillon, who was with her, to the soldier, 'this lady is far more highly thought of by the Queen just as she is than we with all our foolish fripperies.'

This great benefactress of the poor died in 1662.

Another name that crops up frequently in Saint Vincent de Paul's correspondence is that of Madame de Traversay, *née* Anne Petau, widow of Régnauld, Lord of Traversay and Councillor to the Paris Parlement. After her husband's death, she resided with her brother, President Méliand, in the Rue Saint-Martin. She took an active part in all that the Company did in the Hôtel-Dieu, replaced Madame de Villeneuve as Superioress of the Daughters of the Cross, and founded, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, the monastery of the

[65] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXXIX, p. 181 ; *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 305.
[66] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 639 ; Vol. XIII, p. 735.
[67] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 236, 241.
[68] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. II, sect. II, p. 217.

Conception. Saint Vincent could also rely on the devoted assistance of Madeline Deffita, or rather Mlle Viole, the sister of a famous Parisian lawyer, and widow of James Viole, Councillor to the Châtelet.

In 1635, writing to Mlle Le Gras, he says : ' Oh ! how edified and consoled I have been by that dear lady.'[69] Mlle Viole was very soon chosen to fill the post of treasurer, and acquitted herself so well in the office that she was re-elected every three years until her death. In 1669, instead of acting as treasurer of the Hôtel-Dieu, she took over the same duties for the Foundling Hospital because, as a manuscript tells us, ' of the ready access she had to the Procurator General,'[70] who just then was proposing to remove the Ladies from the management of the Foundling Hospital and to hand it over to the administrators of the General Hospital. This plan was carried out in 1671, but she still undertook to collect alms for the Foundlings, and was also appointed treasurer of all the Company's good works, except the Hôtel-Dieu. She became treasurer ot the Hôtel-Dieu again in 1673, and was re-elected in 1676. She fell grieviously ill in the following year and lingered until April 4, 1678, when she died. Her death was a severe blow to the Ladies of Charity and also to the Daughters of Providence, of whom she had been Superioress for many years.

Mlle Viole was already treasurer of the Company when Cardinal Richelieu's beloved niece, Marie de Wignerod de Pontcourlay, Marchioness of Combalet and Duchess of Aiguillon, was appointed President. For many years they both worked together in the most perfect harmony in the practice of Christian charity.[71] The early years of the Duchess d'Aiguillon were not happy. Born in 1604, in the Castle of Glenay, near Bressuire, she was forced to marry, on November 26, 1620, in Anne of Austria's private apartments, a nephew of the Duke of Luynes, the Marquis of Combalet who was killed at the battle of Saint Denis on September 3,

[69] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 320.
[70] *Recueil de diverses pièces*, Ch. III.
[71] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 284.

1622. His death was a relief inasmuch as it left her free to follow her inclination for the life of the cloister. She decided to be a Carmelite nun, which annoyed Richelieu very much for he wished her to remain at Court. In 1624, after one year of the religious life, she was ordered by Rome to leave the convent, and from a novice was transformed into a Lady-of-Waiting to Queen Marie de Médicis.

As long as Richelieu lived, the Duchess d'Aiguillon was all-powerful at Court and even after his death her friendship with Queen Anne of Austria maintained her prestige. Her magnificent castle at Rueil was frequently occupied by the Royal Family and, on the day when Louis XIV was solemnly proclaimed King before the Parlement, the Queen placed the Duchess beside her in the State carriage that bore them to the ceremony, and made her sit near her at the ' Bed of Justice ' held by the King.

Great by her rank, her influence and wealth, the Duchess d'Aiguillon was still greater by her devotion and charity. Saint Vincent was deeply indebted both to her influence and wealth in the accomplishment of all his undertakings. Whenever any difficulty arose from the civil authorities, or whenever there was a favour to be asked, it was to the Duchess he turned immediately. She established a house of the Mission at Le Rose (Lot-et-Garonne), lavishly endowed a hospital for convicts at Marseilles,[72] and also a house of the Mission in that city, procured the necessary funds for the acquisition of a house in Rome,[73] and purchased the consulates of Tunis and Algiers.[74] The parish of Saint-Sulpice, M. Olier's Community, the Society for Foreign Missions, the Carmelite Convent of Paris, the Daughters of the Blessed Sacrament, of Mercy, of the Cross, and of Providence, the nuns of the Precious Blood of Our Lord, the Missions to Canada, the Clergy Fund, the devastated provinces, especially Lorraine, the Foundling and the General Hospi-

[72] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, pp. 271, 273, etc. ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXVIII, pp. 129–130.

[73] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 298–301 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XLVI, p. 221.

[74] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 404 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. I, sect. VII, and I, p. 96.

tals, all received much from her hands. She used to visit the House of Refuge established by Madame de Miramion, and waited on the penitents. To a gentleman who expressed surprise she answered : ' There is nothing surprising about a great sinner serving others.'[75] Her biographer was fully entitled to say : ' There is not a single work of piety or of charity in which she would not have desired to play a part.'[76]

She gave two hundred crowns a year for the extra meal at the Hôtel-Dieu and, by her will, assured its continuation after her death.[77] The Ladies of Charity placed her at their head in 1652, after Madame de Lamoignon, and kept her there until she died, that is to say, for twenty-three years, despite her repeated requests to be relieved of the office. Under her direction, all the works of the Company prospered.

Few men or women have ever better realised the greatness of Saint Vincent de Paul. She watched zealously over his health, and procured the horses and carriage he used in his old age.[78] When she heard that, during a very hot summer, he was about to leave for Sevran[79] with the intention of preaching a mission, she manifested her deep displeasure in a letter to some of those in authority at Saint-Lazare because they had showed so little realisation of the need of preserving the health of a man who was so valuable to the Church.[80] Saint Vincent, however, lived seven years after this mission was over. When he died, she was present at his obsequies and, later on, presented a silver-gilt shrine in the shape of a heart surmounted by a flame, in which the Priests of the Mission placed the heart of their father.[81]

The zeal of the Duchess was not diminished by the death of him whom she had so deeply venerated and generously helped. She withdrew more and more from Court so that

[75] *Funeral discourse on Madame the Duchess d'Aiguillon*, by M. de Brisacier, 3rd ed. Paris, 1675, p. 44.

[76] *The Duchess d'Aiguillon*, by Count Bonneau-Avenant, Paris, 1882, p. 129.

[77] *Funeral discourse*, etc., p. 23.

[78] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XXXIX, p. 186.

[79] Seine-et-Oise.

[80] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 587, note.

[81] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XII, p. 258.

she might be brought into still closer contact with the poor.[82] A contemporary states : ' This woman, who, such a short time ago, was reared by her uncle in such luxury that he would not suffer her to place a foot upon the ground lest it should touch the mud, may now be seen going through the streets of Paris, no longer in a gilded coach, drawn by four swift horses, but on foot, seeking out the most wretched houses and the most closely concealed miseries. It was the sick, indeed, whom she preferred to all others. When she learned that anyone was about to die, she hastened thither and, without being dismayed at the sight of mortal agony, consoled the dying, spoke to them of God, arrested the blasphemy upon their lips, brought hope to their souls, and aided them to merit, by a good death, a better life.'

This better life was granted to herself on April 17, 1675. Her body was taken to the Carmelite Convent, clad in the Carmelite habit she had so ardently desired to wear in her life-time. The Papal Nuncio gave the absolution, and Fléchier preached the funeral sermon.

Amongst the Ladies of Charity there were also members of the Royal Family. First comes Charlotte Marguérite de Montmorency, Princess of Condé, daughter of Constable Henri de Montmorency, widow of Henry II of Bourbon, Prince of Condé, and mother of the ' great Condé,' the Duke of Enghien, of Armand of Bourbon, Prince of Conti, and of the celebrated political intriguer, the Duchess of Longueville, who showed so much skill in fanning the flames of revolt during the troubled years of the Fronde.[83]

Few lives were as troubled as that of Charlotte de Montmorency. As soon as she reached a marriageable age, her hand was sought by the most powerful families at Court ; the Marchioness of Sourdis coveted it for her son whilst Sully proposed his own. Her father preferred that of Baron de Bassompierre and the betrothal would have taken place were it not that Henri Quatre, captivated by the grace and charm

[82] Quoted by Count Bonneau-Avenant, *op. cit.*, p. 446.

[83] Her life has been written by Count de Noailles (*La Mère du grand Condé, Charlotte-Marguérite de Montmorency, princesse de Condé*, 1594–1650, Paris, 1924).

of the young girl, insisted on the claims of Prince of Condé, hoping to keep her whom he loved near him. But Condé was not as complaisant as his royal friend had imagined and was scarcely married before he hastened to put the frontier between his monarch and his wife. This solution of the difficulty did not appeal to the Princess, and it was followed by a quarrel. The Prince went to Italy, leaving his wife behind in the Spanish Netherlands, and he even requested Parlement to have his marriage declared null. Henry's assassination by Ravaillac's knife put an end to the danger that had made him an exile and he returned to Paris but continued to live apart from his wife, who also returned to the capital shortly after her husband.

As first prince of the blood, Condé considered that he was entitled to have more power during the regency than Marie de Médicis had left him and showed his dissatisfaction by systematically opposing all the proceedings of the Queen who, driven beyond all patience, had him confined in the Bastille and afterwards removed to Vincennes. It was a providential disgrace as it served to bring about a reunion with his wife who, after repeated requests, was allowed to remain with her husband with whom she shared a prison for two years and a half. The years that followed their deliverance from prison were marked by great trials for the Princess who was plunged into grief for her brother's condemnation to death at Richelieu's orders and his execution at Toulouse ; by the prolonged illness and death of her husband, by the flightiness and intrigues of the Duchess de Longueville, the deformity of the Prince de Conti and his enforced sojourn first at Chantilly and then in Berry. Her mother's heart was gladdened indeed by the news of her son's great victory at Rocroy, but her brief glimpses of happiness were soon dispelled by fresh causes for sorrow.

She sought consolation from God in prayer, and from the poor in the performance of works of charity. Her piety manifested itself in visiting places of pilgrimages and monasteries. Her first appearance at a meeting of the Ladies of Charity is referred to in a letter dated January 12, 1640,[84] and she proved to be a generous benefactress. Towards the

[84] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 6.

end of the year 1649, when the Foundling Hospital seemed to be on the verge of collapse for want of resources, Mlle Le Gras, deploring in one of her letters the thoughtlessness of the Ladies of Charity, added these words, which testify to Madame de Condé's sympathetic heart: 'I think that if somebody went and told Madame the Princess of its extreme necessity, she would give something.'[85] Saint Vincent, on more than one occasion, in his conferences put her forward as an example to his Daughters: 'It is said,' he once remarked, 'that Madame the Princess, whilst visiting the sick one day, climbed eighty-four steps and, on her return, her dress was so bedraggled with mud that her servants were astonished at its condition.'[86] This charitable Princess ended her days on December 2, 1650, at Châtillon-sur-Loing, to which she had been relegated by the King's command.

The Company of the Ladies of Charity had also the honour of reckoning amongst its members the Duchess of Nemours. Marie d'Orléans was born in Paris on March 5, 1625, her father being Henry II, Duke of Longueville, and her mother Louise of Bourbon-Soissons. During the troubled days of the Fronde, when her father sided with the Princes and her mother-in-law, the Duchess of Longueville, was the idol of the Frondeurs, she kept aloof from all intrigues. 'She was a woman of great merit and intelligence,' according to Madame de Motteville, 'and her virtues and the tranquillity of her life sheltered her from the storms at Court.'[87] Separated from her father, who had just been thrown into prison, and at odds with her mother-in-law who resented her advice, she withdrew first to Dieppe and then to Coulommiers where, giving free reign to her naturally kind heart, she devoted herself to a life of good works.

After having refused the hand of the Duke of Mantua, she accepted that of Henry of Savoy, Duke of Nemours who, though never in Holy Orders, had been Archbishop of Reims. The marriage took place on May 22, 1657, and

[85] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 512.
[86] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 398.
[87] *Memoirs of Madame de Motteville*, ed. Michaud and Poujoulat's edition, 2nd series, Paris, Vol. X, p. 336.

shortly after the ceremony the Duke fell sick. The disease of which this proved to be the first attack brought him to the grave on January 2, 1659. Before renouncing the Archbishopric of Reims, he had frequently presided over meetings of the Ladies of Charity and it was he,[88] perhaps, who first suggested to the Duchess to join the Company. She was present at the meeting held on July 11, 1657, at which Saint Vincent delivered the exquisite discourse the text of which has been preserved by Abelly.[89] She was a remarkably distinguished and very witty woman, the possessor of an immense fortune and lived in her town house in Paris, the Hôtel de Soissons, in the most magnificent style. Her vast domains excited the cupidity of the powerful who deprived her of some of her possessions : Frederick the First of Prussia seized on the principality of Neufchâtel, in Switzerland, of which she was the sovereign.

There is a story told that one day when she was speaking, with considerable annoyance, to her confessor, of the injuries she had suffered, the priest, to whom she was unknown, gave her a little discourse on the forgiveness of injuries.

' No,' she replied, ' I will never forgive my three enemies.'

' Who are they ? ' he enquired.

' The King of France, the King of Prussia and the Duke of Savoy,' was her answer.

The priest, and who can blame him, thought that she was mad.

The Duchess of Nemours published her memoirs, which are remarkable for her shrewd and witty observations as well as for her interesting pictures of contemporary manners and characters.[90] She died in Paris on June 16, 1707.

Another Lady of Charity was of even still higher rank than the Duchess of Nemours and this was Louise Marie de Gonzague, daughter of Charles de Gonzague, Duke of Nevers

[88] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, pp. 197, 398.

[89] Bk. II, Ch. X, p. 358 ff.

[90] The *Memoirs* were published at Cologne in 1709 in one duodecimo volume. Michaud and Poujoulat reprinted them in *La Nouvelle Collection des Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de France*, Vol. IX, p. 609, etc.

and Mantua,[91] and of his wife, Catherine of Lorraine. Her radiant beauty, lovable character, penetrating mind and quick and charming wit brought a host of admirers around her in the Court of France, to which she was taken when still quite young. The Hôtel de Nevers, where she resided with her sisters, Anne and Benedicta, was famous in its heyday and formed a centre for courtiers, artists and writers to meet and discuss literature, art and science. Even gallantry was not excluded. In those days society managed to keep on good terms with devotion and charity; Louise-Marie de Gonzague was also borne along towards the poor in the stream of charity to which so many of the Ladies at Court had committed themselves. She attended meetings of the Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu, and was filled with delight when she heard Saint Vincent speak.

'Now, Madame,' said Madame de Lamoignon to her one day, 'may we not, like the disciples at Emmaus, say that our hearts have felt the fire of God's love whilst M. Vincent was addressing us? As for myself, though I may not be very easily moved by things that concern God, yet I confess that what this holy man has just said to us has filled my heart to overflowing with sweetness.'

'There is nothing surprising in that,' said Louise Marie, 'for he is the angel of the Lord who bears on his lips the burning fires of divine Love which have been enkindled in his heart.'

'That is most true,' a third lady chimed in, 'and it only remains for us to share in the ardour of that Love.'[92]

The force of circumstances, however, soon removed the Princess far from Saint Vincent. Ladislas IV, King of

[91] Although it is not stated in Abelly's *Life* or in Saint Vincent's correspondence or that of Mlle Le Gras, and although her name is not given in the list (incomplete in other respects) of Ladies of Charity contained in the *Recueil de diverses pièces*, Collet admits that Louise Marie was a member of the Association before her elevation to the throne of Poland. (*Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 235, note; Vol. II, p. 112).

[92] Abelly, who gives an account of this conversation (*op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. IV, p. 30) does not mention the names of the ladies who took part in it. Collet supplies the omission (*op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 112).

Poland, after the death of his wife, Cecilia Renée of Austria, despite his forty-nine years and infirmities that caused him to look even older, made up his mind to marry again. He was influenced by Mazarin to turn to France for a wife: Mlle de Montpensier was considered too young; Mlle d'Epernon, too haughty, and Mlle de Guise, too wise and good. As the name of Mlle de Nevers raised no serious objection, the contract was signed at Fontainebleau on September 26, 1645, after eighteen months' negotiations, and the marriage was celebrated by proxy, on November 5, in the chapel of the Palais-Royal. The new Queen was adorned with diamonds specially brought by Ambassadors of the King of Poland, and with jewels from the French crown and from Queen Henrietta Maria of England. 'Marie de Gonzague,' writes Viscount de Noailles, 'dazzling in her robe of cloth of silver, aroused the admiration of all when she entered the chapel with Louis XIV on her right and the Queen Regent on her left. The Bishop of Warmia said Mass and as the sacred vessels and vestments bequeathed by the Cardinal Duke to the King were regarded as the most beautiful that could be procured they were used on this occasion. On November 27, Louis XIV and his mother proceeded to the Hôtel de Nevers for the Queen of Poland and accompanied her as far as the village of La Chapelle, on the road to Saint-Denis. Here they bade each other good-bye. . . . The wife of Marshal de Guébriant and John Vincent de Tulle de Villefranche, Bishop of Orange, were selected to accompany her to her destination.'[93] Wherever she passed the people turned out and gave her a triumphal reception.[94] Three years later, the King died and, in 1649, his brother and successor, John Casimir, asked the young widow to be his wife.

She brought the Priests of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and the Visitation Nuns to Poland, and, during the whole course of her reign, showed herself to be a tender

[93] *La mère du grand Condé*, par le Vicomte de Noailles, Paris, 1924, p. 314.

[94] *Histoire et Relation du voyage de la reine de Pologne Marie de Gonzague, de son mariage avec le roi Vladislas, IV*, etc., par Jean Le Laboureur, Paris, 1649.

mother to the poor and to children. 'We are all well aware,'[95] wrote Saint Vincent to her one day, 'that history tells us of a princess who wove the linen for her winding-sheet, but I certainly do not remember to have read anywhere that the devotion of any woman led her to use the work of her own hands in the service of the poor, as Your Majesty has done, and I really do believe, Madame, that Our Lord has made the Angels and spirits of the blessed gaze on it with admiration, and that the Church will one day regard it in that light.'

Although the Kingdom of Poland was itself in a sad plight, the Queen sent alms to France when she learned of the state of extreme destitution to which, even in Paris itself, the people rendered homeless by the armies of the King and of the Princes, were reduced.[96]

The Queen's sympathy for Port-Royal, and especially for Mother Angela Arnauld, whom she frequently consulted,[97] never for a moment interfered with that which her heart had always felt for Vincent de Paul. The Saint, for his part, rendered her every assistance he possibly could. He even went so far as to ask Mlle Le Gras to take charge of a little dog that was to be sent to the Queen which was a source of great delight to the Sisters and which supplied the Saint with an object lesson and an example, as he himself tells us.[98] 'Mademoiselle Le Gras,' he wrote to one of his priests in Poland, 'brought the little dog, that is to be sent to the Queen of Poland, to our parlour. It loves one of the Sisters so much that it will not even look at any of the others, or, indeed, at anything whatever; as soon as she leaves the room, it does nothing but whine and will not rest. This little creature has filled me with shame when I see its exclusive affection for her who supplies it with food, and when I see myself so little attached to my sovereign benefactor, and so little detached from all other things. You may assure Her Majesty that the Daughters will take great care of it.'

[95] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 93.
[96] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 445.
[97] *Lettres de la Révérende Mère Marie-Angélique Arnauld*, Utrecht, 1742–1744, 3 vols.
[98] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 360.

MARIE D'ORLÉANS, DUCHESS OF NEMOURS

Saint Vincent soon noticed that the little dog was growing accustomed to his appearance and wrote, in great delight a few days afterwards : 'You might tell Mademoiselle de Villers that the little favourite is deigning to begin to look at me.'[99]

When the Queen of Poland learned of the death of her beloved saint, she was deeply moved. 'I have been profoundly grieved,' she states in a letter, 'at the loss we have had of dear, good Monsieur Vincent, and I will always have the highest esteem for his memory.'[100] She asked to be sent some souvenirs and received his crucifix, and part of his rosary-beads which she piously preserved.

As Queen of Poland, Louise Marie de Gonzague experienced very little happiness for she saw that unfortunate country ravaged by Russian and Swedish armies, one section of the nobility in open revolt against the King, the capital invaded by the enemy, whilst she herself was forced to take refuge in Silesia. Another trial, which was the culminating point of all her woes, was the death in 1652 of her son, whose birth the nation only a few days previously had saluted with enthusiasm, because they saw in him the future King of of Poland. Left without an heir, she would gladly have seen the throne pass, after her husband's death, to a French prince and, with that in view, negotiated the marriage of her daughter, Anne of Bavaria, with the Duke of Enghien. The Diet prevented this plan from being carried out, and the Princess died, from apoplexy, on May 9, 1667.

The nobility of virtue is more to be prized than that of blood. Louise Marie de Gonzague, indeed, possessed both, but the village girls employed in the Confraternities of Charity were content with that of virtue ; some of them, however, possessed it to a degree that raised them far above even Queens and we shall now return to these humble servants of the poor.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 377.
[100] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 87.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

As we have already said, it was from a desire to help the Ladies of Charity of Paris in their work among the poor, and also to train good schoolmistresses for country districts, that the Company of the Daughters of Charity took its rise, and, in the beginning, it consisted of only three or four members.

After many years of hesitations and experiments, Mlle Le Gras finally achieved the repose of mind that comes from the certainty that one is advancing on the road marked out by divine Providence. On March 25, 1634, the Feast of the Annunciation, she renewed her vow of widowhood and promised God to offer up Holy Communion once a month in thanksgiving for the grace she had obtained.[1] The letters of the Founder and of the first Superioress enable us to follow step by step the slow but continuous development of the new Institute. One after another, the Parisian Confraternities of Charity asked for Sisters. First came Saint Saviour, Saint Nicholas and Saint Paul, and then, in succession, Saint Sulpice, Saint Lawrence, Saint Leu, Saint Jacques de la Boucherie, Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois, Saint Etienne, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Roch, Saint Gervais, Saint Severin, Saint Jacques du Haut Pas, Saint André, Saint Martin and Saint Jean-en-Grève.

On July 31, 1634, that is to say after eight months, the little community still consisted of only a dozen Sisters: Mary and Nicole at Saint Saviour's; Barbara and Michael at Saint Nicholas'; Joan at Saint Benedict's; Margaret and two companions at Saint Paul's and Jacqueline and two or three others at the Hôtel-Dieu.[2] Madeleine and 'a fine

[1] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
[2] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, pp. 1 and 8.

big girl '[3]—Saint Vincent gives no further description—formed part of either of the two last groups.[4] The Mary referred to was Mary Joly whom we have already met and whom we shall meet again, for both Saint Vincent and Mlle Le Gras honoured her with their confidence.[5] The Ladies of Saint Saviour's and of the Hôtel-Dieu were helped by her, and when Sisters were asked for at Sedan it was she who was sent to act as Superioress. Her recall to Paris, after thirteen years' work in Sedan, was a severe blow which she bore courageously, and she spent her declining years looking after the poor of the parish of Saint Jacques du Haut Pas.[6] She died on April 3, 1675. Mary's companion, Nicole, had neither health nor ability. This Sister's age and infirmities, added to a natural indolence, rendered her almost useless to the Confraternity of Saint Paul's with the result that the Ladies asked for her removal, but finally consented to keep her. Mary did the work of two, so that the poor of the parish might not suffer too much from her companion's deficiencies.[7]

Saint Vincent's finest conquest was Barbara Angiboust, who joined the Community on July 1, 1634, at the age of twenty-nine.[8] In her were united and harmoniously combined all the qualities that could be desired in a Daughter of Charity : a virtue capable of heroic deeds, tender compassion for the poor, and a perfectly balanced judgement. She was in turn Superioress of the houses at Saint Germain-en-Laye, Richelieu, Saint-Denis, Fontainebleau, Brienne, Bernay, and was then sent to take charge of the hospital at Châteaudun where she died, still full of vigour, on December 27, 1658. Saint Vincent had also a very high opinion of Joan Lepeintre whom he described as ' a really good girl, judicious and gracious.'[9] He sent her to Saint Germain-en-Laye to take charge of the school there,[10] and then appointed

[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 238. [4] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 235.
[5] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp, 300, 328, 387, 390, 610 ; Vol. II, p. 19.
[6] On August 5, 1672, on taking the title of Sister Servant, she signed the act of acceptance of the *Common and Special Rules.*
[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 232–235, 366, 397.
[8] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, pp. 637 ff. [9] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 432.
[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 166.

her to act as first Assistant to Mlle Le Gras. Later on, she was Superioress of the houses at Nantes, Châteaudun, Saint-Fargeau and at the Salpêtrière Hospital. Her excellent qualities were spoiled by some grave faults, especially by a certain spirit of independence mingled with a touch of obstinacy. A seventeenth-century manuscript says : ' Even in the lifetime of Mademoiselle Le Gras, she became a hypochondriac and could not be induced to do anything except what she liked, or to alter her mind once she had made it up.'[11] She may not, perhaps, have been responsible for the latter failing, as her last years were spent in the Asylum of the Holy Name of Jesus, to which she had to be sent on account of failing mental powers. Margaret was hard-working but, willing as she was, could not cope with all the work of a large parish, full of sick people, and too much neglected by the Ladies of the Confraternity.[12] Jacqueline had a hard task in front of her when she set out to correct her natural failings, and was not over-successful, for Saint Vincent, after bearing with her patiently, thought of sending her away. At a council held on June 28, 1646, whilst tracing not too flattering a portrait of Jacqueline, he adds ' she has rendered many services to the poor.'[13] We know nothing about Magdalen except that when Saint Vincent was consulted about admitting her by Mlle Le Gras, he said : ' I think some work will need to be done there . . . her passions are strong. But then, when persons have the strength to overcome them, they work wonders so, pray, admit her.'[14]

Most of the postulants were poor, unlettered peasant girls. They sometimes arrived in groups ; three came on one occasion from Argenteuil,[15] sent by an ecclesiastic, and three more from Colombes,[16] introduced by Joan Lepeintre. Before entering Mlle Le Gras' home, they first of all served in a parish confraternity, or with a Lady of Charity, and this preliminary stage enabled a first selection to be made. A

[11] *Collection of documents relating to the Daughters of Charity*, MS. p. 24. (Archives of the Mother-House of the Sisters.)
[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 834–835.
[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 592–596.
[14] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 238.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 232.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

widow who was found to be ' rough, very melancholy and unmannerly was dismissed.'[17] Vincent de Paul disliked the melancholy type of character and, writing to Mlle Le Gras, about a girl from Argenteuil who was subject to this failing, says : ' I think you were quite right to raise a difficulty about admitting her, for the melancholy type of mind is very odd.'[18] A widow of Colombes who had two children applied for admission.[19] ' How can that be done in the circumstances,' he enquires. A nun who had left her convent was not regarded unfavourably, because she has, he says, ' a fairly good intellect and a good will ' and also because, on taking up the religious life, she had already ' given her heart to Charity.'[20]

Amongst postulants admitted in the course of the first five years the most noteworthy were Henrietta Gesseaume, who proved to be one of the most intelligent and devoted Sisters but of somewhat too independent a character ; Isabella or Elizabeth Martin, one of Mlle Le Gras' best helpers and almost as good as Barbara Angiboust, but subject unfortunately to frequent attacks of illness which carried her off prematurely : Mary Denis, who refused to serve the Duchess d'Aiguillon so as not to be separated from the poor ; Madame Turgis, née Elizabeth Le Goutteux, who did not shrink from sacrificing her rank in society and a life of ease to lead the life of the Daughters of Charity ; Genevieve Poisson, one of the main columns of the rising Institute and for many years Superioress of the Foundling Hospital ; Madame Pelletier, who proved to be too fond of the world to persevere in a life of poverty and humility ; Cecilia Agnes Angiboust, less accomplished than her sister, Barbara, but yet highly endowed with great qualities of mind and heart.

Saint Vincent was not accustomed to call his Daughters by their family name, of which he may, perhaps, have been ignorant, and when several had the same Christian name he used to add either the name of the parish, for instance, ' Mary of Saint Lawrence's ' or some note attaching to their personal appearance as ' little Barbara,' ' big Barbara,' ' little

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 315.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 278.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Joan,' 'big Joan,' or 'tall Joan.'[21] 'Big Barbara,' as a matter of fact, was Barbara Angiboust, and 'little Joan,' Joan Lepeintre. 'Tall Joan' had not any patience to spare, or meekness either, and as she did not confine the expressing of her bad temper to words alone, had to be dismissed.[22] There were, of course, other dismissals, as was inevitable, for no Community keeps all those who join it, and in the very best Communities some sifting is absolutely essential, for bad example is always contagious. Moreover, the first Daughters of Charity were not bound by any vow or even promise; they entered quite freely and were just as free to leave but, in fact, only those left whose hearts were with the world.

Death, too, made gaps in the ranks and these caused much more sorrow for the best were not immune from his assaults. Mlle Le Gras confided her grief to Saint Vincent and received in reply a few lines of consolation which helped her to support the trial. The first letter of such a nature is still extant: 'So here, then, at last, is the first Victim which Our Lord has been pleased to select from amongst your Daughters of Charity! May He be blessed for this for ever! I trust, Mademoiselle, that she is most happy for she died in the practice of a virtue with which she could not be lost, for she died practising divine Love, since she died in the practice of Charity. I hope Our Lord will now be your consolation and that of our dearest Sisters.'[23]

Saint Vincent was helpless, of course, in the face of death, but he did all in his power to prevent or rather to lessen the number of defections by a sound training and unceasing vigilance. Beginners were the object of his most particular care, and he urged Mlle Le Gras, their Superioress and directress, to inspire in them above all else a love of 'solid virtue,'[24] that is to say, virtues that render souls capable of self-denial and mortification. 'It would be well,' he wrote to her once,[25] 'if you told them in what solid virtues consist, especially the interior and exterior mortification of our judgement, our will, our remembrances of what we have

[21] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, pp. 330, 408, 422, 494, 571, 572.
[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 458, 569, 572, 573.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 248.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 219, 278.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

seen, heard, and said, and of our other senses ; of the affections we have for novelties, for useless and even for good things, out of love for Our Lord Who acted in this way ; and they should be greatly strengthened in all such virtues, and especially in those of obedience and indifference. . . . It would be well if you told them that they must be helped to acquire this virtue of mortification and exercised in it, and I too will tell them, so that they may be disposed to do so.' It was absolutely essential to be thoroughly trained in the practice of ' solid virtues ' if the privations inherent in the life of a Daughter of Charity were to be endured. They were, by their vocation, servants of the poor and it is not becoming for servants to be better off than their masters. Saint Vincent gave them poverty as their portion.

And, first, in regard to food : ' O my daughters,' he told them on January 25, 1643,[26] ' how essential is temperance for Daughters of Charity ! You will know that you really are such, if you carefully continue to observe the temperance of village girls and, especially, of those Sisters who, in the beginning, were called to serve the poor, for they lived in the simplest fashion. . . . Would it not be a shame if Daughters of Charity, servants of the sick poor, loved to make good cheer, whilst their masters suffer as they do ! . . . If you desire to be true, good Daughters of Charity, you must be temperate, you must not be looking for highly seasoned dishes, neither those of you who are widows of great rank nor those who are just simple village girls. There is no distinction, my Daughters, no difference whatever when one is a real Daughter of Charity. Now, do you know, my dear Sisters, on what the Blessed Virgin lived when she was on earth and on what Our Lord lived ? Bread. He went into the Pharisee's house, says Holy Writ, to eat bread ;[27] and the same is said in several other places. It is said in only one place that He ate meat, and that was when He ate the paschal lamb with His disciples ; and, another time, broiled fish.'[28] Wine was forbidden, even to the most delicate. In

[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 84.

[27] Saint Vincent takes the word ' bread ' too literally ; in Holy Writ it is ' food ' in the wide sense of the word.

[28] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 367 ; Vol. X, p. 360.

1657, when Madame de Ventadour asked that roast meat should be served to the Sisters on Easter Sunday, Mlle Le Gras did not venture to take it on herself to accept the offer ; she referred the matter to Saint Vincent,[29] but we do not know what was his reply. The poverty he desired his Daughters to practise extended to all things without exception. 'At home,' he said to them one day,[30] 'you have poverty in all things ; you are clothed with the coarsest material ; no head-dress is as simple as yours ; frugality is a noticeable feature of your way of life . . . and everything else is of the poorest.'

The Sisters wore a grey, serge dress, a collar and a toque of white linen that closely fitted the head and concealed the hair. It was the usual costume of girls living in the environs of the capital, and as nearly all the first postulants came from the suburbs of Paris, Saint Vincent allowed them to wear their ordinary dress which, for motives of uniformity, was adopted by those who came from other parts of the country.[31] Changes or innovations made from personal whim were severely repressed, and motives of health alone authorised exceptions, which were kept within bounds determined by Superiors.[32] Despite Saint Vincent's desire to prevent singularities, he could not make up his mind to allow Mlle Le Gras to dress like her Daughters, and it was a source of pain to her that she could not give them an example in this respect. As she could not endure it any longer she resolved, in 1639, to make an attempt ; on Whit Sunday, she went to the parish church dressed as simply as her Daughters, her head covered with a white linen coif such as was worn by poor women in a delicate state of health. Notwithstanding this precaution, which Saint Vincent had thought necessary, she fell ill, and was a long time convalescing.[33] This was a severe lesson, but she quickly forgot it and, towards the end of the year, just before setting out on a

[29] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 263.
[30] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 314.
[31] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 174, 208, 510 ; Vol. XIII, p. 554.
[32] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 180, 183, 260.
[33] *Louise de Marillac, Sa vie, ses vertus, son esprit*, 4 vols. duodec. Vol. I, p. 228.

CHANGES IN THE HEAD-DRESS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

1. Before 1685.
2. After 1685.
3. After 1760.
4. After 1804.
5. To-day.

long journey to Angers to establish a hospital there, she again laid aside her veil and gloves in order to harden herself to bear the cold. A fresh attack of illness convinced her that any further effort in this direction would be simply tempting Providence.[34]

Taught by her own experience of the pains and aches that might ensue from leaving the head and face exposed to the rigours of the climate, she obtained Saint Vincent's permission for Sisters who had just had their hair cut to wear, in case of necessity, the sort of white linen coif on which she herself had experimented.[35] This simply opened the door to exceptions and, in the course of time, the number of faces that were suffering from the effects of the weather became so numerous that Father Jolly, the third Superior General, had to impose, for the sake of uniformity, the wearing of the 'Cornette' on all Sisters. In 1685, a Circular Letter rendered this obligatory, but the Cornette then worn bore little resemblance to that in use to-day; the ends drooped down as far as the shoulders; it was only in 1750 that the wings began to unfold and expand and, a little later, starch was begun to be used to prevent them from drooping.

In the Mother-House, or even in Paris, under the eyes of Superiors, the Sisters would not have dared to follow their own whims in the matter of dress, but it was easier in the provinces to have 'little methods of smartening oneself.' Some wore veils; others procured capes; some carried kerchiefs on their heads, and occasionally locks of hair escaped from beneath the head-dress. Saint Vincent, however, was on the watch.[36] 'If this be not taken in hand,'[37] he said, 'you will see them with a dress cut now in one style and now in another, with finer linen, a neater head-dress and then they will begin to let their hair appear.' Such faults, however, were committed by only a very few; the Sisters, as a rule, were quite content with the poor and simple dress supplied them, and they were not on the look-out for singularities. Dressed in this way, they attracted

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 224.
[35] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 620.
[36] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, pp. 18, 187–188, 285, 295–299, 350.
[37] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 314.

far less attention, which helped to safeguard their virtue, but even if they had not the artificial aids to beauty which women can so cleverly adopt, nevertheless, all danger was not eliminated. Saint Vincent's wise regulations multiplied precautions in their regard : they were forbidden to go out alone, to converse in the streets with men or to introduce them into those parts of the house reserved for the Community.

The discipline of those early days was, in most instances, not so severe as it subsequently became. A former member of a third Order was, for instance, allowed perfect freedom to carry out the obligations entailed by her profession.[38] In the first months, and even for the whole of the first year, the rule of silence was unknown.[39] Permission was easily given to visit their families on the occasion of a wedding or for such like reasons. Jacqueline, Margaret and Barbara of Saint Leu went to their brothers' weddings.[40] When Barbara returned it was found that her vocation had been shaken ; Henrietta stayed away longer than the time appointed[41] with the result that faults or results such as these led to permission to visit one's home being granted with much less readiness.[42]

The hour for rising was half-past five and from that on until ten at night the Sisters' day was usefully employed. A large part of it was taken up with exercises of piety : mental prayer, Mass, listening to selections being read from the Gospels and other edifying books, morning and evening prayers, particular and general examinations of conscience, prayers before and after meals. Mlle Le Gras notes in one of her writings that the Sisters 'greatly desired to go to Holy Communion on Sundays, and occasionally on Holy days.' Before Sisters mentioned their desire to go to Communion to the confessor, her permission to do so was asked, and she used to seize the opportunity to draw their attention to faults that had escaped their notice. After God, came the poor, in Whom He is to be found under another form.

[38] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 378.
[39] *Pensées* de Louise de Marillac, p. 140.
[40] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 232, 397.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 397. [42] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 610.

After morning prayer, one Sister went round with the medicines ; another set off to the person who had been entrusted with the task of cooking the food and, at half-past nine, carried round a soup-pot for distribution to the various houses. In the afternoon two set out again : the first to receive the physician's orders, and the second to remind the woman whose duty it was to prepare meals for the sick on the following day.

The free time at their disposal was spent in various ways : they followed courses of lessons in religious knowledge, learned to read, performed household duties, sewed, mended, looked after the linen, firewood, and prepared preserves and drinks for the poor.[43] Some visited the Confraternities of Charity in the city and suburbs, and showed the women who accompanied them how to nurse the sick, dress wounds and sores, prepare and apply medicaments. In country districts, they taught little girls and sought for some charitable soul who would be kind enough to carry on the school after their departure. Whilst the Company was thus increasing in numbers and spreading in various directions, Saint Vincent felt the necessity of supplying it with a much more fixed and definite organisation.

As we have already seen, the new Institute presented an almost entirely new type of the religious life. The Daughters of Charity were not, like the members of other communities of women, confined to their homes ; they were perfectly free to walk about the streets, and this was even a duty inasmuch as their functions called them to leave their houses and enter those of the poor. ' Your monasteries,' Saint Vincent said to them, ' are the houses of the sick ; your cell, a hired room ; your chapel, the parish church ; your cloister, the streets of the city ; your enclosure, obedience ; your grille, the fear of God ; your veil, holy modesty.'[44] He wished them to be seculars, not regulars, ' children of the parish ' and not isolated from the general body of the faithful ; under the rule of their parish priest, which did not however, exclude that of their lawful superiors ; bound by

[43] *Pensées* de Louise de Marillac, pp. 138–140.
[44] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 661.

the ties of a simple confraternity, though living a community life.[45]

He often and frequently urged them not to change their state : ' If some mischief-making person should ever appear in your midst saying : " We should be religious ; it would be far nicer," Oh ! my dear Sisters, the Company would then be in a fit state to receive Extreme Unction. Fear, and if you are still alive, prevent that. Weep, groan, tell the Superiors about it, for whoever says " religious " says " cloistered " and Daughters of Charity are bound to go everywhere.'[46] In order to avoid this dreaded misfortune, he multiplied precautions, and pointed out dangers. He insisted, as we have already said, that nothing in their houses, costume or mode of speech should recall the cloister ; he forbade his Daughters to put themselves under the direction of members of religious Orders, and dissuaded them from visiting monasteries. ' Leave the grandeur of religious women to themselves,' he told the Sisters, ' esteem them highly, but do not frequent their company ; their particular spirit is not suitable for you, and that is as true of men belonging to religious Orders as of women. You should never turn to either the one or the other in your need, so profoundly should you fear to participate in any other spirit than that which God has given your Company. And how could you receive advice from a religious person whose life is utterly different from yours, and who could, as a rule, only give you advice in accordance with his own maxims and his own spirit ? '

Whilst he was saying this, Saint Vincent remembered that one day when he chanced to be in a Convent of the Visitation Order, two Daughters of Charity called to ask his permission to be present at the profession of a nun. When the permission had been given, one of them, filled with remorse, said : ' Father, Mademoiselle Le Gras once told us not to be curious, and not to frequent the company of nuns.'

' Well, well, Sister,' he said, ' would you mind very much if you did not go ? '

[45] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 237 ; Vol. IX, pp. 533, 662 ; Vol. X, pp. 651, 658, 661–667 ; Vol. XIII, p. 603.
[46] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 658.

'As for me, Father,' she replied, 'I don't mind; I shall do whatever you say.'

'Well, since that is the case, mortify yourself in this little matter.'

After recalling the incident, he added: 'So, Sisters, it is important, therefore, that you should not have any intercourse with religious women. But, observe, you must not tell them so, because they might, perhaps, think it was because you despised them. Oh! no, no, no, quite the contrary. . . . What else could they think, as they do not know our reasons for giving you this piece of advice.'[47]

Another danger arose from the attraction which the idea of the highest perfection exercises on devout souls: a secular community, it might be thought, is not worth very much; religious represent a much higher plane in the spiritual life. Saint Vincent, in order to combat such an illusion, springing as it does from a false conception of mysticism, constantly told the Sisters that they had no reason to be envious of religious: 'There are no nuns of whom God demands so much as of you. . . . God desires greater perfection of you than He does of them. . . . Do you think it is only religious men and women who should aspire to perfection? . . . All Christians are bound to do so, and you even more than religious women. It is not the religious Order that makes saints; it is the care its members take to become perfect.'[48]

The Daughters of Charity were, as a matter of fact, simply a group of secular persons, unmarried girls or widows, who had placed themselves at the disposal of the Ladies of the Confraternities of Charity to assist them in their work amongst the poor. Saint Vincent, despite his resolute determination to establish a very wide and a very clear line of demarcation between the community of the Daughters of Charity and religious Orders of women, had no desire—quite the reverse—to deprive his Daughters of the spiritual privileges arising from the vows of religion. On July 19, 1640, speaking of the service of the poor, he read out to the Sisters a formula of vows then in use by a nursing community in Italy: 'I vow and promise to God to observe poverty, chastity and obedience, and to serve our lords the poor for the whole of

[47] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 584. [48] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 143.

my life.' He pronounced these words with so much feeling that the Sisters could not restrain their tears, and they asked him why could not they too offer themselves to God in the same way.

'Yes, yes, indeed, my Daughters,' he replied, 'but with this difference : the vows of these good religious are solemn, they cannot be dispensed, except by the Pope ; but those you might take, could be dispensed by a bishop. Nevertheless, it would be much better not to take them at all than to do so with the intention of procuring a dispensation any time you pleased.' The dialogue proceeded in the following strain : 'Could we not make these vows at least, each one for herself, privately, and as she felt moved by a spirit of devotion ?'—'Take great care not to do that. If any of you feels so disposed, let her see her Superiors ; tell them of her desire and then accept with indifference whatever decision may be given.' And then Saint Vincent, with his eyes raised to Heaven, offered up the following prayer from the bottom of his heart : 'O my God, we give ourselves entirely to Thee. Grant us the grace to live and die in the perfect observance of holy poverty. I beg that favour from Thee for all our Sisters present and absent—Do you not desire this, my Daughters ?—Grant us, moreover, the grace to live and die chastely. I implore this mercy for all Sisters of Charity and for myself, and also that of living in the perfect observance of obedience. We also give ourselves to Thee, O Lord, to honour and to serve, all our life, our lords the poor, and we ask this grace from Thee, by Thy holy love.—Do you not desire this also, my dear Sisters ?'—They all signified their assent by a sign, fell on their knees, and received the blessing of their venerated Father, who prayed God to accomplish His eternal designs on them.[49]

The advice he gave on this occasion to consult their superiors would seem to show that the practice of taking private vows would not long be deferred.

Two years later, Saint Vincent authorised the first perpetual vows. On March 25, 1642, Mlle Le Gras, Barbara Angiboust and three other privileged Sisters, in all probability Madame Turgis, Mary Denis and Henrietta Ges-

[49] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 25.

seaume, bound themselves, during Mass, to observe their vows for the rest of their lives.[50] The same favour was subsequently granted, by Saint Vincent or by Father Portail, to Sisters who, after spending four or five years in the Company, were considered worthy of it.[51] It certainly seems that very few obtained the privilege but, however that may be, there is no further trace of perpetual vows after the death of Saint Vincent, and it may safely be asserted that, in 1718, the practice of taking annual vows had become universally established.[52]

The vows, by the sacred character of the engagement assumed, strengthened the Daughters of Charity in their vocation ; it was also important to consolidate the Institute itself by establishing it on solid foundations and, to this end, to obtain its authorisation by the civil and religious authorities. In 1645, Saint Vincent saw that the time had come to take the preliminary steps as God had blessed the Company, increased the number of its members, and multiplied its houses. The Daughters of Charity were by this time at work in nine parishes in Paris ; there were two or three Sisters in Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois, two or three in Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, Saint Leu, Saint Saviour, Saint Gervase, Saint Sulpice, Saint Merry, Saint Etienne du Mont and Saint Paul. Under the direction of the Ladies of the Confraternities, they carried out such ' low and menial functions ' as were not suitable to persons of rank, namely, carrying pots of soup through the city, bleeding the sick, preparing and administering clysters, dressing wounds and sores, making beds and sitting up at night with the sick. They also occasionally taught poor little girls. They were supported by the Confraternities, but the cost of maintenance was the merest trifle, as not more than a hundred livres a year and, in some parishes, not more than twenty-five crowns, were spent on their food and clothing. There were three Sisters engaged in the Hôtel-Dieu, ten or twelve

[50] *Ibid.*, Vol. V., p. 353 ; Vol. X, p. 638.
[51] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 393 ; Vol. VIII, pp. 188, 207 ; Vol. IX, p. 534.
[52] *Statutes and general Rules of the Company of Daughters of Charity*, Article 7.

in the Foundling Hospital, and two or three in looking after convicts. They were in charge of hospitals at Angers, Nantes and Saint Denis, and had houses at Saint Germain-en-Laye, Richelieu, Sedan, and other towns of less importance.

The Mother-House established in the parish of Saint Lawrence, in a suburb of Paris, rendered a service to the little girls of the district by providing them with a primary school, and to the sick poor a dispensary and house to house visits. There, under the eye of Mlle Le Gras, more than thirty ' seminary ' Sisters, or beginners, were trained in the virtues and duties of the new Institute. The less instructed were taught how to sew and to read and write ; the better educated were employed in the school and all took a share in assisting the poor. The expense entailed by their maintenance was met in part by their manual labour, in part by alms, and in part, by an annual grant of 2,000 livres from the King, the Queen, and the Duchess d'Aiguillon. Such was the state of development reached when Saint Vincent resolved to ask John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, to erect it into a Confraternity, and to approve the rules. The first draft of the petition was drawn up in 1645.[53] The text was slightly altered, after Mlle Le Gras had furnished a list of observations and comments and, in the following year, revised again, before it was laid before the Archbishop.[54]

There was no difficulty experienced in obtaining approval, which was given by the Coadjutor, in his uncle's name : ' We have erected and hereby do erect, by these presents, the group of aforesaid girls and widows in this diocese into a special form of Confraternity under the title of *Servants of the poor of Charity* ; we desire and ordain that all those already admitted, and who may hereafter be admitted, shall be free to do all in their power to comfort and console the aforesaid sick poor, on condition that the aforesaid Confraternity shall be and shall remain in perpetuity under the authority and control of His Grace the Archbishop and his successors, and that it shall exactly observe the statutes

[53] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 548.
[54] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 53.

annexed, which we have approved and do hereby approve by these presents. And inasmuch as God has blessed the care and toil which our dear and well-beloved Vincent de Paul has taken to bring this pious design to success, we have confided and committed to him the government and direction of the above-mentioned Society and Confraternity, as long as it may please God to preserve his life.'[55] The Company is called ' Confraternity of Charity of the servants of the parochial sick poor.' The word confraternity offended ' some sensitive minds,'[56] but Saint Vincent and Mlle Le Gras preferred it to any other as it had the advantage of making it more manifest that the new Institute should be regarded as a secular association.

The maidens and widows who compose it shall,[57] it is stated, make it their duty to please Jesus Christ, their Patron, in all their actions, and to imitate Him more particularly in His charity, poverty, humility, simplicity, temperance and meekness. They have come together to help ' the sick poor in parishes and hospitals, convicts and foundlings, both corporally and spiritually ' : corporally, by procuring food and medicines gratuitously ; spiritually, by preparing the sick to live and die in a Christian manner, as God calls them to Himself, or leaves them in this world. The Company preserves as much of the organisation of the Confraternities of Charity as is compatible with its own field of work. At the head is Saint Vincent and when he shall no longer be there, a director appointed by the Archbishop ; a Superioress, an Assistant, a Treasurer and a Bursar, chosen by a majority of votes, on Whit-Monday, in presence of the Superior ; the three last to hold office for one year, the Superioress for three, and to be eligible for re-election for another period of three years, but no longer, except the exercise of her office be interrupted. ' The Superioress and the aforesaid ecclesiastic shall have the entire direction of the said Confraternity ; she shall be as it were the soul that animates the whole body, and see that the present rule be observed, and admit into the said

[55] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 558.
[56] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 406 ; Vol. VII, p. 440.
[57] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 559 ff.

Confraternity those whom she may judge suitable, after having conferred with the Director and acting on the advice of the other office-holders ; and she shall train them in all things concerned with the exercise of their functions, but especially in the practice of the Christian virtues and of those suitable to their state, instructing them rather by example than by words, she shall send, recall, retain and employ them in all those things that concern the end of the said Confraternity, not only in the parish in which the said Confraternity may be established, but also in all places to which she may send them, and in all this she shall act in conjunction with the aforesaid ecclesiastic.'

The three other officers shall act as her advisors ; in case she is absent, her place shall be taken by the Assistant ; if the Assistant be not there, then the Treasurer shall act, and if all three are away, power devolves on the Bursar. The last mentioned officer shall keep the accounts, and her books shall be submitted for inspection to the Superioress once a month, and to the Director once a year, in presence of the other office-holders. With the exception of one hundred livres for current expenses, all monies shall be kept in a strong-box, of which she shall take charge, but which she cannot open by herself, as the Superioress shall also keep a key of one of the two locks. ' The Bursar shall provide for the ordinary needs of the Company,' and the Superioress shall examine her accounts every week.

The Rule then goes on to enumerate the duties of the members of the Confraternity.

In the first place, obedience : obedience to the Superioress and to the other officers who may take her place ; to the Director, in all that regards their conduct ; to the Officers of the Confraternity of Charity ; to physicians, in all that pertains to the care of the sick ; to the written rule or to the living rule as set forth by customary observances ; obedience shall also be paid to the parish priest, who should be honoured and respected and before whom they shall kneel, on arriving in a parish, to receive his blessing.

To the poor, they shall show themselves patient, compassionate and kind ; and shall edify, console and exhort them to be resigned. When necessity or obedience calls them

to the poor they shall not be afraid to leave aside their exercises of devotion 'reflecting in their minds that, in doing so, they are leaving God for God.' If the poor, in return for these good offices, reply with reproaches, scurrility or abuse, they shall ask Our Lord to give them the patience He displayed 'towards those who calumniated, struck, scourged and crucified Him.' When their poor die, they shall if possible go to the funeral, 'and shall pray to God for the repose of their souls.'

There shall be perfect unity of heart amongst them. 'They shall cherish and respect each other as sisters whom Our Lord has united and bound together by His love; they shall assist at the burials of those who die and offer up Holy Communion for the repose of their souls.' There shall be no coldnesses, aversions or special friendships, 'those two vicious extremes being the sources of the division and of the ruin of a Company, and of the individuals who indulge themselves, and trifle, in these ways.' If in the course of the day there has been any coolness shown, even though it be involuntary, 'they shall ask pardon of each other in the evening before going to rest.'

The principal duty or rather that which embraces them all is to be attentive to keeping one's conscience free from sin, even venial. They shall especially avoid anything calculated to stain the virtue of chastity. In order to prevent such a misfortune, the Rule encircles the Sisters with a whole armoury of precautions; never to go out alone and without permission; great modesty in church and in the streets; no visiting or idle conversations; never to introduce a man into their rooms; to hand their letters open to the Superioress and to allow her to know the contents of letters received; and neither to receive nor to give presents. Uniformity is recommended 'in regard to food, clothing, speech, the service of the poor and especially the head-dress.' If, at the end of the year, in any particular house, there is a favourable balance then the surplus shall be sent to the Mother-House as a contribution to the general fund that serves for community expenses, such as the purchase of clothes.

The Statutes accompanying the episcopal letters say nothing as to how the day was to be spent; they simply

recommend fidelity to the rule that is in use ' especially for times prescribed for rising and going to bed, prayer, general and particular examinations of conscience, spiritual reading, Confessions, Holy Communion and silence.'[58]

The Rule which Saint Vincent had forwarded to the Archbishop for his approbation went into details. The hour for rising was four o'clock ; next came mental prayer for half an hour, and then Mass at the parish church. The Sisters went in two groups ; the second setting out to Church after the first had returned home. At half-past eleven, a particular examination of conscience on a selected virtue ; then dinner in common and in silence, the mind attending to what was being read aloud ; afterwards, for half an hour, recreation ' modestly gay,' whilst they sewed or spun or occupied themselves usefully in any other way. At two o'clock in the afternoon, silence and, whilst at work, they should listen to a spiritual book being read. At three o'clock, they dispersed, each Sister going about her own special duty. At six o'clock, another examination of conscience on a special virtue, to be followed by a meal and then a second period of recreation taken under the same conditions as the first. At eight o'clock, general examination of conscience, the reading over of the points of meditation for the following day, and then all retired to rest.

This order of day, which was followed as far as possible by the Sisters of the Mother-House, was not so rigid as to be incapable, in other places, of such modifications as were demanded for the successful prosecution of their various works. The hour for rising had not always been the same ; at first, it was half-past five, then five and finally, four,[59] so as to allow the Sisters time to finish their mental prayer before going to visit the sick. This change entailed an alteration in the time for retiring which at first had been ten o'clock, and was then altered to nine. There was a special order of day for Sundays and Holy days, when the Sisters used to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. The annual retreat took place in the Mother-House, and the Confession then made extended back over the whole past year.

[58] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol XIII, p. 551 ff.
[59] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 50.

The Archbishop's approbation is dated November 20, 1646, but it was only on May 30, 1647, that Saint Vincent informed his Daughters of the fact. 'Up to the present,'[60] he told them, 'you have worked by yourselves and without any obligation on God's part, save that of carrying out the order prescribed and the mode of life that was given you; up to the present, you have not formed a separate body to that of the Ladies of the Confraternity of Charity and now, my Daughters, God wishes you to be a special body which, without being separated from that of the Ladies, shall nevertheless, have its own particular functions and exercises. Hitherto, you have laboured without any further obligations, and now God wishes to bind you more closely by the approbation which He has permitted to be given to your mode of life and your rules by His Grace, the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Archbishop of Paris.' He then read the Archbishop's decree, and began to read the Rules.

'The Confraternity of Charity of the servants of the parochial sick poor. . . .' 'Oh! what a lovely title, my Daughters!' he exclaimed without proceeding any farther. '*O Mon Dieu!* What a lovely title and what a beautiful description! What have you done for God to have merited it? *Servants of the poor*, that is just the same as to say *Servants of Jesus Christ*, for He regards as done to Himself what is done to them, and they are His members. And what did He do whilst on earth but serve the poor? Oh! my dear Daughters, carefully preserve this characteristic for it is the most beautiful and most advantageous you could possibly have.'

He went on reading and when he came to the clause: 'The Company is composed of maidens and widows who shall elect a Superioress from amongst themselves for three years,' he added, 'that is to be understood as referring to what will take place after God has disposed of Mademoiselle.' On hearing this, Louise knelt down and besought him to make no exception in her favour. 'Your Sisters and I, Mademoiselle,' he replied, 'should pray to God to leave you with us for many a year to come. God usually preserves by extraordinary means those who are needed for the fulfilment of His works; and if you only reflect on it, Mademoi-

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 323.

selle, you will see that for more than ten years you have not been alive, at least in the ordinary way.' A little farther on, on coming to the rule of silence, he admitted that it would not always be easy to observe it at the prescribed times, as their duties brought them into contact from time to time with externs. ' In such cases,' he added, ' remember what I told you just now about mental prayer, that to nurse the sick is to pray. The same holds good of silence, but it should be exactly observed at least from after night prayer and after rising in the morning up to the end of morning prayer. And if you are on your guard nothing can hinder you from doing so ; all that is needed is a little care and reflection, and, above all, a desire to observe the rule.'

The Rule regarding Community funds was also commented on. Having said that the Sisters in the Mother-House should be supported from its scanty revenue and from the labours and savings of the Sisters, he burst out : ' My Daughters, how beautiful that is ! Out of your savings, that is to say, out of what you may be able to lay aside as a reserve after leading the frugal sort of life you do. And out of your manual labour, just consider ; manual labour, this means what you have been working at, during the time you were not serving the poor. In the time set apart for recreation, you earn what will help to instruct others who will afterwards do the same good as you are now doing ! Oh ! may God bless you, my Daughters, and may He grant you His grace in abundance.'

When he comes to the care to be taken to preserve chastity he pauses again, and insists on the dangers that intercourse with men may entail : ' My daughters, you should never stop in the streets to speak to them, except in case of urgent necessity. You should cut short the conversation. Say what you have to say as concisely as possible, and then dismiss them.' When he had finished reading the Rules, he recommended the Sisters to be most exact in observing each and every one of them : ' It has been our desire, my Daughters, that what was said about Our Lord may be said about you, namely, that He began to do and then to teach. Now, is not what you have just heard been exactly what you have been doing ? Is there anything in

them that you have not done? No, by the mercy of God; what you have been commanded to do to-day, you have been doing already. It is true that I received orders from the late Pope to do so, but up till now you have not had an express command.

'Thousands of years before Our Lord came into the world, God sent Moses, to whom He gave a law, the type of that which Our Lord was to establish. The people observed it; but when Our Lord had given His law, all abided by it.

'You should look upon these rules as having come to you from the hand of God Himself, since they are given by order of His Grace the Archbishop on whom you depend. What a consolation, my Daughters, should you not experience at seeing such a result of God's guidance and spirit in your regard! Return Him thanks that you have already observed them; return Him thanks that you are now under greater obligations to observe them, and that it has pleased the divine Goodness to give you orders to do so and, thereby, an assurance and testimony that this is pleasing to God.' Here he reminded the Sisters that Moses said to the people of Israel when he delivered the Law: 'My people, this Law has been given you from God. If you observe it, I promise you, on His part, a thousand blessings on all your works, a blessing in your homes, a blessing when you leave them; a blessing on your labour; a blessing on your repose; a blessing on all that you do and a blessing on all that you do not; in short, all blessings shall abound in, and for, you. But if, instead of observing my law, you despise it, I promise you the exact opposite of all that I have just said; for you shall have a curse on your house; a curse outside your house; a curse when you enter; a curse on what you do and a curse on what you do not do; in short, all curses shall come unto you and on you.'

'What Moses said to the people of God,' Saint Vincent added, 'I say to you, my Daughters. There are your rules sent to you by God. If you are faithful in observing them, all the blessings of Heaven will be showered upon you; you shall have a blessing on your work; a blessing on your repose; a blessing on coming in; a blessing on going out; a blessing on what you do and a blessing on what you

do not do, and all things shall be filled with blessings for you.

'If, which God forbid, one of you is not willing to do so I say to her what Moses said to those who would not fulfil the Law he taught them on the part of God : you shall have a curse in the house ; a curse outside it ; a curse on what you do and on what you do not do. I told you before, my Daughters, that whoever goes on board a ship for a long voyage should fall in with whatever is done on board ship ; if he did not carry out all the laws observed there, he would be in danger of perishing. It is just the same for those who are called by God to live in a holy community—they should observe all its rules. I think each of you intends to put them into practice. Are you not all prepared to do so ? '

The Sisters, who were listening on their knees, replied in a voice trembling with emotion :

'Yes, Father.'

Saint Vincent went on :

'I trust His mercy will second your desires by helping you to accomplish what He asks of you. Do you not give yourselves wholeheartedly to Him, my Daughters, to live in the observance of your rules ? '

'Yes, gladly.'

'Do you not desire with all your heart to live and die in them ? '

'We do.'

'Oh ! I beseech the sovereign goodness of God to be pleased to pour forth all manner of graces and blessings in abundance on you, so that you may be enabled to fulfil perfectly and in all things the good pleasure of His most holy will in the observance of your rules.'

A Sister then spoke up and accused herself of having broken the rules from time to time ; some others followed her example, and when this public accusation was finished, Saint Vincent resumed :

'I pray God with all my heart to forgive you your failings my Daughters. And I, wretched man that I am, do not keep my own rules ! I ask your forgiveness ; I am very guilty in your regard in all that concerns your work. Pray to God, I implore you, to have mercy on me. For my part, I will pray

Our Lord Jesus Christ to impart to you Himself His holy benediction, and I shall not pronounce the words of blessing to-day for the faults I have committed in your regard render me unworthy to do so. I therefore pray Our Lord to give it.' And kneeling down, he kissed the ground. Mlle Le Gras, in the name of all the Sisters, begged him not to refuse his blessing, and insisted so strongly that he agreed. 'Pray then to God,' he told them, 'not to look upon my unworthiness or on the sins of which I am guilty but that, having mercy on me, He may pour fourth His blessings upon you, whilst I pronounce the words.'

Thus ended the conference of May 30, 1647, one of the most beautiful and touching of all those given by Saint Vincent to the Daughters of Charity.

The archiepiscopal approbation opened the way to the Company's recognition by the State. Saint Vincent began to take the necessary preliminary steps and had no difficulty in obtaining the Letters-Patent which, in accordance with usage, should be registered in Parlement. They were deposited with the Procurator, Blaise Méliand, who was to study and give his decision on them. One day in the month of April, 1650, Mlle Le Gras called on him.

'Have you come about your affair?' he asked.

'I came, Sir, as a matter of fact, to refresh your memory on the matter,' she replied.

'Let us see now, what do you intend to be? Regulars or seculars?'

'Seculars.'

'Do you really? But there is not a single community of women which is not regular.'

'Well, Sir, I know of at least one: Madame de Villeneuve's Daughters are not cloistered; they go in and out of their houses quite freely.'

'I am far from disapproving of your plan, and I have the highest opinion of your Company, but it is a matter of such great importance that I should do wrong to treat it casually. So be patient.'

'Sir,' she replied, 'I thank you for the interest you take in us. If our little Company does not deserve to live, destroy it entirely; if the design is praiseworthy, establish it solidly.

It has now been in existence for twelve or fifteen years, and thanks be to God, nothing but good has come of it.'

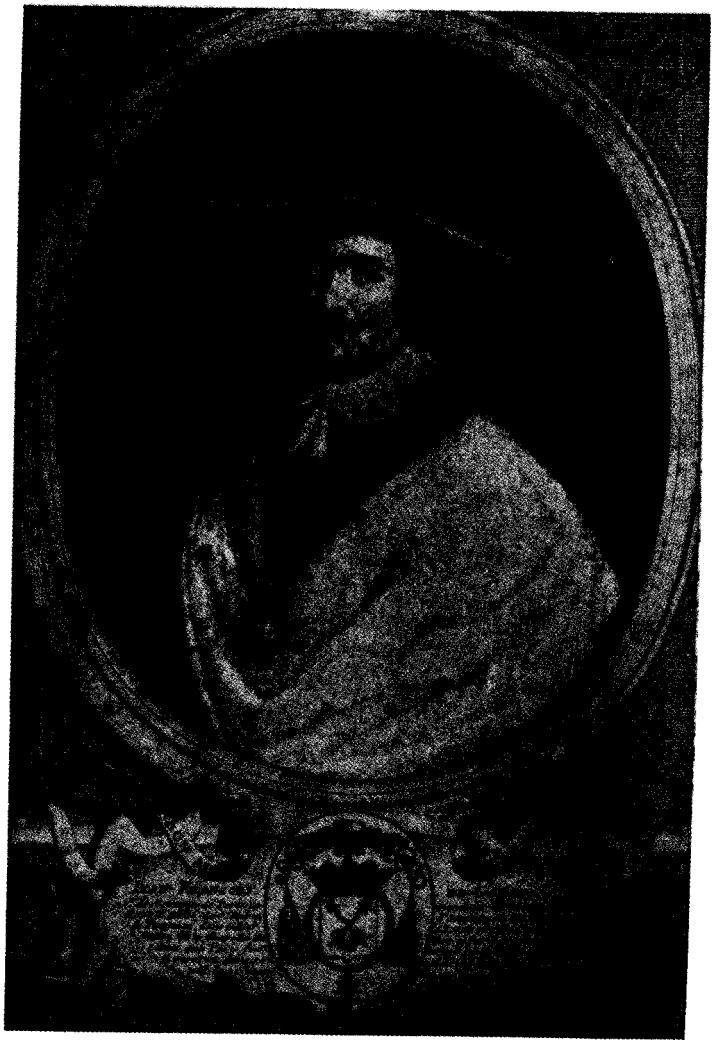
'Pray allow me a little more time for reflection' said Méliand, 'I do not mean months but some weeks.'

Hereupon he accompanied her to her carriage and as she was thanking him for the kindness with which he had listened to the Sisters in charge of the Home for convicts and the Foundling Hospital, when they had recourse to him, he said: 'I should be a usurer if I were to accept your thanks.' And the conversation ended with the words: 'I beg you to be so kind as to present my respects to Monsieur Vincent.'[61]

The business seemed to be almost settled but, unfortunately, Méliand died, as also did his secretary, and when the new Procurator General, Fouquet,[62] asked for the documents, they could not be found. Search was made for the missing papers in his office, in Saint-Lazare, and at the Mother-House of the Sisters but no papers could be found. Hence it became necessary to have a new ecclesiastical approbation, and Mlle Le Gras rejoiced at the fact. In the episcopal letters of 1646, a clause had given her alarm for it placed the Company 'under the authority and jurisdiction' of the Archbishop of Paris.[63] It was quite true that John Francis de Gondi had appointed Vincent de Paul director for life, but nobody knew what would happen afterwards. She would have preferred that the holy founder's successors in office should be the Superiors General of the Congregation of the Mission, and that this point should be laid down in the Act of Approbation. In her mind, this was a matter of life or death to the new Institute.[64]

It has been suggested that she may have had something to do with the mysterious and fortunate disappearance of the documents, and it is beyond a doubt that her friendship with the mother of the Procurator General, Nicholas Fouquet, would have easily enabled her to obtain an act of kindness from him, but such a supposition cannot well be

[61] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, pp. 4–5.
[62] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 570–571, 581.
[63] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 558.
[64] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 121, 255; Vol. IV, p. 221.



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reconciled with her letter of November 25, 1651, in which she declares her ignorance of the whereabouts of the missing papers, and seems rather inclined to believe that they were in Saint-Lazare.[65] However this may be, she moved Heaven and earth to attain her end, and it may be supposed without rashness that it was she who, directly or indirectly, inspired the petition sent by the Queen-Mother in 1647 to obtain from the supreme authority what the Archbishop of Paris had declined to grant.[66] Anne of Austria, in this petition, after recalling that the Prelate had given his approbation, 'on condition that the said Confraternity or Society shall remain in perpetuity under his authority and jurisdiction,' goes on to add: 'Now, inasmuch as this good work has spread to several bishoprics throughout the Kingdom, such as Angers, Nantes, Poitiers, Sens, Rouen, Beauvais, Reims, etc., and that our Prelates are unwilling to admit it under this condition, and as this good work was begun and has been cultivated for nearly fourteen years by the General of the said Congregation of the Mission, and that, at present, by the establishment of the said Confraternity or Society, His Grace of Paris has constituted him its director for life, the Queen begs His Holiness to appoint the said Superior General of the said Congregation of the Mission, and his successors in that office, perpetual directors of the said Confraternity or Society.'

Mlle Le Gras had the happiness of seeing her efforts crowned with success. She must surely have trembled with joy when, on reading the new Act of Approbation signed at Rome by Cardinal de Retz, her eyes fell on the words: 'And inasmuch as God has blessed the work undertaken by our dear and well-beloved Vincent de Paul to bring this pious design to success, we have accordingly confided and committed and, by these presents, do confide and commit the government and direction of the above-mentioned Society and Confraternity for the course of his life and, after him, to his successors, the General of the said Congregation of the Mission.'[67]

[65] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 274–275.
[66] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 566.
[67] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 572.

This is the only notable difference between the Act of November 20, 1646, and that of January 18, 1655; the others are of no importance. However, one slight fear still remained, for what one Archbishop of Paris had established might be destroyed by another. Mlle Le Gras would have much preferred if the Sovereign Pontiff himself had settled the matter, and to-day she would be entirely happy for the Holy See has officially declared that no change should be made in the established usages concerning the direction of the Daughters of Charity.[68]

All that now remained to do was to obtain the consent of the Civil Authorities, and this was not difficult; the Royal Letters-Patent were signed in November, 1657,[69] and registered by the Parlement on December 16, 1658.[70]

Saint Vincent had not waited till then to organise the Company on the lines laid down in the episcopal letters. On August 8, 1655, on the opening of the conference, he read the two Acts of Approbation, the old and the new, and then the rules, insisting once more on the secular character of the Institute. ' Sisters, it has been judged fitting that the name of *Society* or *Confraternity* should be retained, and His Grace the Archbishop has so ordained it, lest if the name of Congregation were given you it might come to pass that some persons in the future might desire to turn the house into a cloister, and become members of a religious Order, as the Daughters of Saint Mary have done. God has permitted poor girls to take the place of those ladies. And as it is to be feared lest, in the course of time, some foolish, thoughtless person might wish to introduce changes in this Society or Company of poor girls, in their clothing or in their way of living; someone who would wish to change your head-dress or your habit, or who would say to you: " What! are we to wear a head-dress like that when visiting the poor? We should have at least a coif and a kerchief over the

[68] *Nihil esse innovandum quoad regimen enuntiatae associationis Puellarum Caritatis, quod per Pontificia indulta Superiori Generali Congregationis Missionis, vulgo Lazzaristi, a Saint Vincentio a Paulo institutae pertinet.* (Decision of the Congregation of Religious, June 25, 1882.)

[69] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 578.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 585.

shoulders to cover ourselves" ; now, if anyone should ever wish to persuade you to do such things, cast them far from you and say that you wish to have the crown God had prepared for the Daughters of Saint Mary. Never consent to a change in any single point ; fly that as a poison and say that this name of *Confraternity* or *Society* has been given you that you may stand fast in the first spirit God gave your Congregation in its cradle.[71] Sisters, I conjure you to do so from the depths of my heart.'

In accordance with the Rules, office-holders should be elected by a majority of votes and the Superioress for three years, but Saint Vincent did not think that the time had yet come for the full observance of these clauses in the Statutes. He kept Mlle Le Gras in office for the whole of her life and, on his own authority, appointed Juliana Loret, first Assistant, Mathurine Guérin, second Assistant and Treasurer and Joan Grassier, Bursar.[72] Whereupon, the deed of establishment was drawn up and submitted for signature to all the Sisters ; the nine or ten who were not able to write simply made a cross. The list opens with the name of Louise de Marillac and closes with that of Vincent de Paul who, out of humility, wished to take the last place. The happy idea occurred to someone to add the names of those Sisters who were absent and who signed, though in their hearts only, this precious document.[73]

Before leaving his Daughters, the holy Founder said a few more words of exhortation to fidelity in the observance of the Rules : ' You have been chosen to be the foundation of your Company. You should give yourselves wholly to God to observe your Rules. All that now remains is to ask, do you all wish to persevere in this observance ? Do you really intend to do so ? '

The Sisters unanimously replied in answer to this question :

' Yes, Father.'

And Saint Vincent went on :

' Do you accept these Rules ? '

' We accept them willingly.'

Then turning to the Mother of God he offered up a

[71] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 102. [72] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 574.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 575.

prayer : ' O Blessed Virgin, who speakest for those who have no tongue and cannot speak, we implore Thee,—these dear Sisters and I,—to aid this little Company. . . . I beg this on behalf of those who are present and those who are absent. And to Thee, O my God, I make this petition, through the merits of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, to complete the work Thou hast begun. Continue to bestow Thy protection on this little Company, and all the blessings Thou hast been pleased to heap on it up till now, and grant, if it be pleasing, the grace of final perseverance to those dear children, for without it they could never enjoy the merit which I trust, O my God, Thy Goodness will bestow on those who are faithful to their vocation.'[74]

The three assistants given by Saint Vincent de Paul to Louise de Marillac fully deserved the confidence he had placed in them. The first, Juliana Loret, was an adopted daughter of the parents of James de la Fosse, Priest of the Mission, and had been a member of the Community since June 9, 1644. ' Her tiny frame,' says a contemporary, ' enclosed a great spirit.' The posts she had hitherto filled were an excellent preparation for that for which her superiors had chosen her. She became second Assistant in 1646, first Assistant and Directress of postulants in 1647, Secretary in 1650, Superioress at Chars in 1651, at Fontenay-aux-Roses in 1653, and carried out her duties in all those offices in the most perfect manner. On account of Mlle Le Gras' infirmities, the first Assistant had occasionally to carry out some of the duties of the Superioress, such as presiding over the Community exercises and prayers. Juliana Loret was called on to act in this capacity for a third time under Mother Chétif and for a fourth, under Mother Haran. She died at Fontainebleau on August 9, 1699. Her Life was written by Father Durand, Priest of the Mission, that the memory of her virtues might be preserved for posterity.[75]

Whatever may have been the gifts of Juliana Loret,

[74] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 104.

[75] Notice on Sister Juliana Loret in *Circular Letters of the Superiors General and of the Sisters Superior to the Daughters of Charity* and *Remarks or notices on deceased Sisters of the Community*, Vol. II, p. 524, etc.

Mathurine Guérin, born at Moncontour (Côtes du Nord), seems to have been even still more richly endowed. Whilst still a young girl she had heard some of the Priests of the Mission from Saint Méen preach near her native village and, charmed by what she heard about the vocation of the 'servants of the poor,' she set off for Paris with some companions. Mlle Le Gras admitted her into the ranks of her Daughters on September 12, 1648, and after three months probation lent her to the Confraternity of Saint Jean-en-Grève. After a serious illness, it was decided to send her away from Paris, and she went to Liançourt, where a series of hard and painful trials strengthened and revealed her virtue. She was recalled to Paris in 1653, and acted as Secretary, Procurator and Directress of postulants, at the same time. A few months as Superioress of the Hospital at La Fère (1659–1660) and several in charge of the Hospital at Belle-Île, of which she was also Superioress, completed her training. When, in 1667, Mother Chétif terminated two periods of office, each lasting three years, Mathurine Guérin, then thirty-six years old, was elected. Up to 1694, she was re-elected as often as the Constitutions allowed, that is to say six times. No elected Superioress of the Daughters of Charity has ever remained for so long a period in the highest office of the Company. When her life was in danger, from ulceration of the legs, fervent prayers were offered up by the Sisters to Vincent de Paul. She suddenly recovered, and the cure, which was officially recognised as miraculous by the Congregation of Rites, was made use of in the process of the holy Founder's beatification. She died on October 18, 1704, regretted by the whole community.[76]

There is little information to be had about Joan Grassier, the Bursar, who was from Senlis, and later became first Assistant.

Those who were elected in 1655 held office for two years, and were replaced, in 1657, by Joan de la Croix, Genevieve Poisson and Magdalen Ménage.[77] This was not the first occasion for Joan de la Croix to hold office, for on the death

[76] Notice on Sister Mathurine Guerin in *Circulars of the Superiors*, etc., pp. 556 ff.

[77] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 270.

of Elisabeth Hellot (1651), the Bursar, Mlle Le Gras proposed Joan for the post, representing her as ' a virtuous girl who gave much good example,' and was most meek, charitable and hard-working.[78] Joan had shown her worth at Serqueux, and her rare qualities were also displayed in the Hospital of Chateaudun, where she was also Superioress. Genevieve Poisson, born at Chars (Seine-et-Oise), passed the years of her community life in the Hôtel-Dieu and the Foundling Hospital, of which she was appointed Superioress and in that position showed much wisdom, kindness and intelligence. Magdalen Ménage, of Serqueux, had three other sisters members of the Company, but we know little about her save that the esteem in which she was held by Saint Vincent is her best title to fame. In 1658, Mathurine Guérin, Frances Paule and Joan Grassier were elected, as we may legitimately deduce from the fact that their three names are signed to an official request, issued in the name of the Community.[79] We should be in ignorance of elected in 1659, if Saint Vincent's letters had not informed us that Joan Grassier was first Assistant when Mademoiselle Le Gras died.[80]

After her death, Saint Vincent did not think that the time had yet come for the Sisters to elect a Superioress, as laid down in the Statutes, and, accordingly, he selected Margaret Chétif. Their liberty in regard to elections was also circumscribed in other respects, for only two names were submitted for each post, and they had to vote for one or the other. Juliana Loret was elected first Assistant, Louise Christine Rideau, Treasurer, and Phillipa Bailly, Bursar. Saint Vincent thought Juliana would be chosen and was quite surprised to find that Joanna Christina Prévost had obtained the majority of votes. This upset his plans, and he would not have it. ' Sisters,' he said, ' the majority of votes has gone to Sister Joanna Christina ; but you should know that we should have the greatest trouble and difficulty in removing her from where she now is, for the Gentlemen of Sedan will not allow her to leave, all the more so as, quite recently,

[78] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 672.
[79] Arch. Nat. Q1 1200.
[80] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, pp. 277, 297.

they have had another task entrusted to them, which is to look after those who have been recently converted. Now, how can we remove her? The Gentlemen will not tolerate it? What are we to do? Well, Sisters, what should be done is this; when a Sister has been elected who cannot either on account of her infirmities or for any other reason, take up office, then the lot falls on the other Sister who has been proposed with her. Hence Sister Juliana is the Assistant, Sister Louisa Christina, Treasurer, and Sister Philippa, Bursar. We must abide by that, and Sister Margaret Chétif shall be Superioress.'[81]

Saint Vincent had been for a long time debating with himself whether, after the death of Mlle Le Gras, it would not be better to place the President of the Ladies of Charity or some one of the Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu, at the head of the Community. On the one hand, he thought the 'simplicity' of his Daughters might not quite fit in with such an important position and, on the other, he recognised that an extern, who did not possess the spirit that animated the Community, would not be able to preserve it. He prayed, took advice, held several meetings and, in the end, came to the conclusion that the second alternative presented more disadvantages than the first.[82] When he had settled this point, the next thing was to find out which of the Sisters was best fitted for the post. The question became more urgent when, on one occasion, Mlle Le Gras fell ill and it was feared that she was about to die. Saint Vincent accordingly asked her: 'Mademoiselle, will you not please cast your eyes over your Daughters to see who can take your place?' She thought over the matter for some time, went over several names, but finished by saying: 'I think Sister Margaret Chétif would be very suitable. She has always displayed wisdom wherever she went, has been successful everywhere, and where she is now, in Arras, she has done very well and displayed great courage amongst the soldiers.' And she added: 'Sir, as you selected me, by divine Providence, it seems to me that on the first occasion it would be expedient if the election did not depend on a majority of votes, and

[81] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 740 ff.
[82] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 228; Vol. X, p. 723.

that you should make the appointment, but only for once.'[83]

This appointment of Margaret Chétif's was not in accordance with the Statutes approved by the Archbishop of Paris, but one can easily understand why Saint Vincent, in these first years of a Company still in its infancy, did not like to expose the choice of a Superioress to the chances of an election. There was another point in the Statutes which seemed to him to be gravely inconvenient, and this was the limitation of the period of office to one year. Accordingly, he announced that those who held office should be elected for a period of three years, like the Superioress, but that, nevertheless, an election should be held every year, but only for one of the official posts.[84] In addition to the Superior, the Superioress, the Assistant, the Treasurer and the Bursar, the Council had also a Director, selected by Saint Vincent ; this office was held up to 1660 by Father Portail, and then by Father Dehorgny.

In each house, authority resided in the local Superior. Saint Vincent did not favour keeping local Superiors in office for a long period of time as he feared lest the habit of commanding might injure that of obeying.[85] At first, in Paris, a Superioress was appointed only for a month,[86] but what was possible in the beginning ceased to be so after a time ; nevertheless, although removals from office were not so frequent subsequently, yet they were frequent enough.

In order that Superiors should not forget that their functions do not precisely consist so much in ruling as in serving, Saint Vincent wished that the name of Superioress should be changed to that of Sister Servant.[87] ' A few days ago,' he told the Sisters in 1642, ' I happened to be in a monastery of nuns —Sisters of the Annunciation—I think, and I noticed that their Superioress was called *ancelle*. That made me think of you. The word *ancelle*, my dear Sisters comes from the word *Ancilla*, which means handmaid ; and that is what the Blessed Virgin called herself when she gave her consent to the angel that the will of God in the mystery of the Incarnation of His Son should be accomplished in her ; it was this, my dear

[83] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 740.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 743.
[85] *Ibid.*, Vol. V., p. 260.
[86] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 8.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Sisters, that led me to think that, instead of calling the Sister Superior by the name of *Superioress*, we shall in future only use the word *Sister Servant*. What do you think of it ? ' The suggestion was adopted unanimously ; the custom was established, and is still in use.

The statutes of 1646 give a very incomplete idea of the duties of the Daughters of Charity ; Saint Vincent condensed into one book of Rules all community obligations, both general and particular, obligations that bound all the Sisters and obligations that affected only Sisters employed in certain houses or in certain offices. The Sisters of the Parisian Confraternities had a set of rules of their own, and the same is true of Sisters attached to village Confraternities, to the House for Convicts, to the Hôtel-Dieu, to Hospitals and to schools. The rules for hospitals, apart from a general set of rules, contained special instructions for different offices ; the Superioress, the cook, the night-nurses, the laundresses, the Sisters who supplied the bread and wine, who looked after the infirm, who had charge of the pantries, who buried the dead, or who had charge of the clothing department.

The author of the book of Rule is undoubtedly Saint Vincent himself ; it is written in his style and is redolent of his thought and spirit ; if it be compared with the rules of the parochial Confraternities or with those of the Priests of the Mission, it is quite obvious that he was the author. He was in no hurry to consign it, in any definite shape, to writing, for he much preferred to be free, as long as he possibly could, to correct, alter, change or complete it in accordance with the lessons of experience. Amongst those whom he consulted, Mlle Le Gras naturally took first place, and she replied to his enquiries with equal frankness and moderation. ' That, most honoured Father,' she wrote to him once, after pointing out some passages which she thought should be modified,[88] ' is what I have remarked but, in God's name, pay no attention to the memorandum or remark but decree what God demands of us.'

Up to 1655, the Sisters lived in accordance with these provisional rules. The first set, written entirely by Mlle

[88] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV., p. 472.

Le Gras and slightly modified by Saint Vincent, seems to date from 1633 or, perhaps, the early months of 1634,[89] and the second is explained in the conference held on July 31, 1634.[90] There is some mention of another set of regulations in May, 1636, in a letter to Mlle Le Gras. 'I am sending back,' he wrote, 'the rules for the Daughters ; it is so good that I have nothing to add.'[91] These rules were not, in all probability, in circulation amongst the Sisters for, at a conference held on July 19, 1640, after pointing out that the Daughters of Charity, in imitation of the 'Son of God in the establishment of His Church,' have had tradition and not a body of writings to guide them, he goes on to say :[92] 'With the help of God, you shall have your little rules in the future.' The Sisters had to wait for a very long time for the 'little Rules' which he then promised them. In 1643, Mlle Le Gras wrote at the beginning of a conference held on June 14 : 'M. Vincent . . . did us the charity of speaking to us on the rule and the mode of life of Daughters of Charity, after a Sister working in one of the parishes had asked him for a written account of what is observed in our house. Our most honoured Father had not, so far, been able to bring himself to set down the rules in writing ; and, in this fact, we have reason to recognise that divine Providence has reserved to Itself the guidance and ruling of this work which It advances or retards at pleasure.'[93] The Rules explained in the course of this conference form two chapters which were or might well have been entitled : 'How to spend the day' and 'Some hints on how to carry out well the exercises of piety.' They numbered thirty-two : fifteen in the first part, and seventeen in the second. Saint Vincent laid it down that they were to be read at least once a month in the Mother-House.

We know, from the conference of January 22, 1645, that no further move had been made.[94] 'Up to the present,' he said, 'you have not had your rules in writing ; nevertheless, you are bound by the customs of the first Sisters.' And

[89] *Pensées* of Louise de Marillac, p. 138 ff.
[90] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 1 ff.
[91] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 326.
[92] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 18.
[93] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[94] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 213.

this statement agrees with what Mlle Le Gras wrote at the same time : ' The Company has long desired and asked that our way of life should be drawn up in the form of a set of regulations so that we may, by reading them, be encouraged to observe them.'[95] Whence came all these delays ? It may reasonably be supposed that Vincent de Paul wished to give his Daughters a definitive text, and a rule that had not yet been submitted for the approval of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities could scarcely be given such a shape. In 1645, he drew up another form to be forwarded with his petition to the Archbishop of Paris.[96] These Statutes, after examination and approval, with certain modifications, were sent on to the Procurator General, and we have seen how they went astray, and how the formalities had to be begun all over again.

The Sisters, meanwhile, were deeply distressed at waiting so long for their rules, and Mlle Le Gras, acting on their behalf, wrote to Saint Vincent, on July 5, 1651, requesting that ' the way of life should be set down in writing, and supplied to places where there are Sisters who can read it,' and, ' in Paris, it should be read every month by the Sister Servant, the Sisters in the parishes coming here for that purpose, one section one fortnight, and another section fifteen days later.'[97] Saint Vincent asked nothing better, but the matter rested with the Archbishop of Paris, and he had to wait to begin to read and comment on the Rules until Cardinal de Retz approved the modified Statutes of 1646. Before this approbation, it would have been impossible for him to write the first lines of Article 20: ' They shall render honour and obedience to the Superior General of the Mission, as the Superior and Director General of their Company.'

His first conference on the Rules was delivered on September 29, 1655, and the last on November 25, 1659. This certainly implies that, on September 29, 1655, the text of the rules was definitely fixed for, in answer to one of his priests who had asked for them, he wrote : ' The rule of the Daughters of Charity for which you ask is not yet in such

[95] *Ibid.*, p. 213.
[96] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 551 ff.
[97] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 221.

a state as that it can be shown.'[98] When everything was definitely settled, he decided to multiply the number of copies so that each house might have one of its own. On August 11, 1659, he had not decided whether it would be better to have the rules printed or simply transcribed, and this hesitation may have persisted till the day of his death.[99] However this may be, it was the second alternative that was decided on, and its disadvantages appeared some years later when, on comparing some of these manuscript copies, it was found that there were numerous and, at times, notable variations in the text. If copyists were allowed to proceed in this way, unfortunate divergencies were bound to be multiplied in the course of time, and hence Father Alméras decided that in future only such copies should be regarded as authentic as were signed by the Superioress and one of the officers in charge, and sealed with the Company's seal, and that each house should have only one copy which should be kept under lock and key.

This measure entailed another. The definite text which should serve as a model for all others had to be fixed, and Father Alméras entrusted this delicate task to his Secretary General, Father Fournier. The choice lay between reconstituting the primitive text and producing a new work, as far as arrangement and style are concerned. The first plan was obviously the better, but the second was adopted. Saint Vincent's seventy rules were expanded into seventy-five, arranged in nine chapters. We may see from the obituary notice on Mathurine Guérin that this rather free and easy method of handling a text, regarded in some sort as sacred, provoked discontent and murmurings.[100]

Saint Vincent, in the book of Rules, did not consider merely the external side of the obligations imposed ; he also set out what was the spirit that should animate their actions

[98] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 66. We know however, that the Sisters who were sent to Arras on August 31, 1656, or a few days later carried with them a copy of the Common Rules (*Pensées* of Louise de Marillac, p. 223).

[99] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 656.

[100] Attestation added to the end of the *Common and Special Rules* ; notice on Sister Guérin in the *Circulars of the Superiors General*, p. 565.

and, indeed, this was the side on which he chiefly insisted. His code of obligations is, at the same time, a code of perfection ; an ideal towards which the Daughters of Charity should strive, but an ideal so lofty that they will never fully succeed in realising it in their lives. Three virtues are more particularly recommended : charity, humility and simplicity. ' They shall perform all their exercises,' says Article 3, ' in a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity and . . . they shall bear in mind that these three virtues are, as it were, the three faculties of the soul which should animate the whole body and each member of their Community, and which, in one word, is the spirit of Company.'

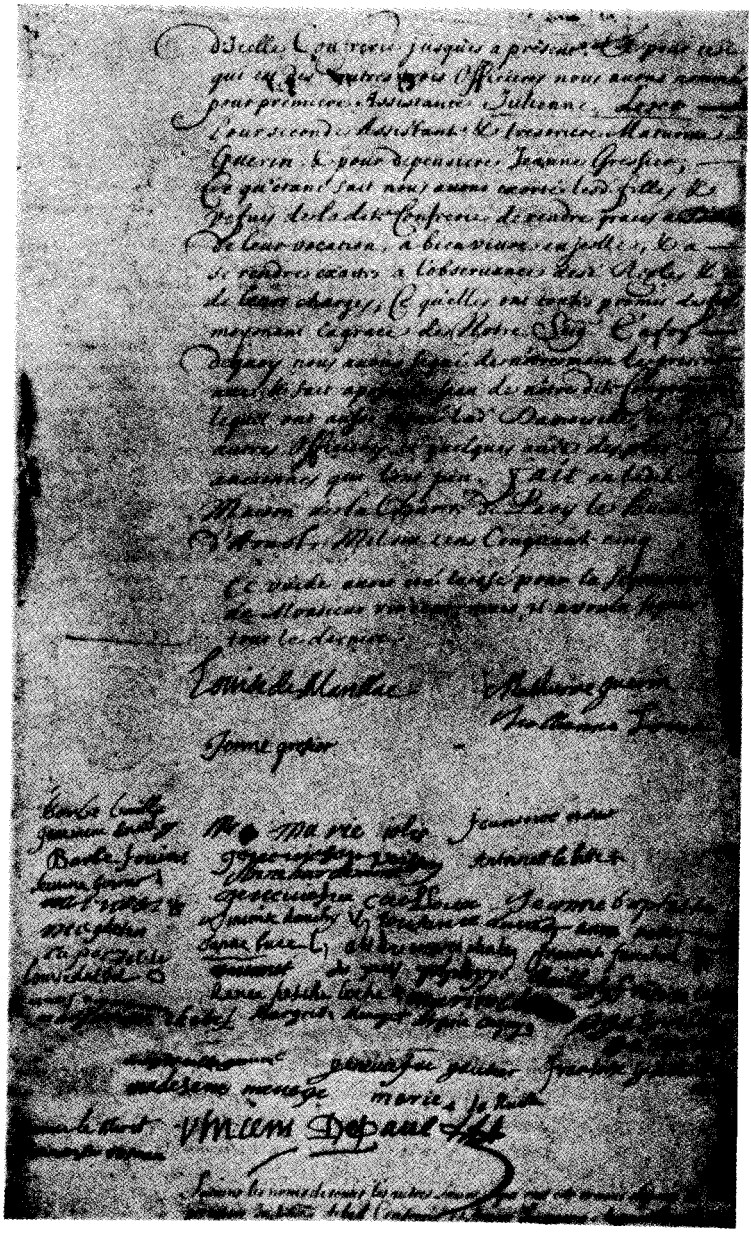
There is not, and there never will be, a better commentary on the rules than the holy Founder's conferences, and there can be no more authoritative interpretation of what he himself had conceived and written. These conferences were announced several days in advance by a circular note which set out the points to be treated, and they were listened to, at least the concluding ones, by eighty or a hundred Sisters from the various houses in Paris and the suburbs. Questions were put to several Sisters ; some answered quite freely ; the more timid read out the notes they had prepared, whilst others, speechless with emotion, handed their little reply to the Saint. He encouraged them by a word or a gesture ; put those who seemed to be embarrassed at their ease, set right, without seeming to do so, those who had made mistakes and, in the end, showed his satisfaction by expressions such as ' May God bless you, my daughter ! ' or, when he had been particularly pleased with the ideas expressed, by some more laudatory phrases such as ' Oh ! that is quite true ! May God bless you, my Daughter ! '—' Ah ! my child, what you have just said is most true and important ! '—' *Mon Dieu*, but that was well said, that was well said '—' Oh ! how true, how true ! ' He never grew tired of listening to the Sisters ; from one he would go on to another : ' Pray continue, Sister, you who are next,' and so on to a third or fourth, or at times, to several. Mlle Le Gras was not forgotten, and he showed greater deference towards her than the others, always questioning her in a respectful tone : ' Mademoiselle, would you be so kind as to let us have your thoughts on this sub-

ject ? ' And when she had finished, he expressed his thanks in some eulogistic form such as ' That is very beautiful, indeed ! May God bless you, Mademoiselle ! '

It was their venerated Father whom the Sisters chiefly came to hear, and for half an hour or even an hour, if time permitted, they remained under the spell of his simple, familiar words. When he spoke to them of their vocation, their rules, the spirit of their state, the graces poured out by God on the Company, his heart grew warm, his voice animated, and reminiscences came pouring forth ; his emotion was communicated to his hearers and all, on leaving the room, were determined to do their all that in them lay.

His conference on the virtues of village girls, whom he set before them as models, is most delightful.[101] Consider for a moment the charming picture he draws of ' a true village girl.' ' She is an extremely simple sort of child ; she has no clever ways about her ; no double-meaning words ; she is not too impulsive or too much attached to her own ideas ; her simplicity leads her to believe quite simply what she is told. . . . Great humility will be observed in a true child of the fields. They do not boast about their possessions ; they do not speak of their ancestry ; they do not think themselves clever but act in a good-natured way and, though some possess more than others, they are not conceited, but live just the same as the rest. . . . The humility of country children prevents them from being ambitious. . . . They only wish for what God has given them, and do not long for any higher position or greater riches than they possess ; and they are quite content to live and dress accordingly. Still less do they think of making pretty speeches ; they always speak with humility. If they are praised, they do not understand what is said, and so pay no attention to it. They always speak quite simply and truthfully. . . . Village girls, my dearest Sisters, live very frugally ; most of them are satisfied with bread and soup, although they work without ceasing, and their work is very hard. . . . In quite a number of places, even bread is rarely eaten. In the Limousin and other places they live for most of the time on bread made from chestnuts. . . . In the place where I come from . . . the

[101] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 79 ff.



FOUNDATION DEED OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

people live on a little grain called millet, which is cooked in a pot and, at dinner-time, this is poured out into a large dish, and the family sit round, have their meal, and then go off to work. . . . Village children are also very pure . . . they never remain alone with men, never look them in the face, never listen to their flattery. They don't even know what flattery means. If a good village girl were told that she was beautiful and kind, her modesty would not endure it—she would not even understand what was said. . . . True village girls are extremely modest in dress, which is cheap and coarse. . . . To desire to have what one has not, O my daughters, is not the sort of poverty that true village children practise, for they are satisfied with what they have, both in food and in clothing. And as for their possessions, they never think about them ; they even make nothing of what they have, so fond are they of poverty ; they work just as if they possessed nothing. . . . There is no greater obedience than that of real, true village girls. If they come home from work to eat a frugal meal, tired out and fatigued, wet through and covered with mud, they scarcely remain a minute, if the weather is favourable for work in the fields, and if their father or mother tells them to return to work, off they go, and they do not stay at home because they are tired or wet and muddy, and they go off without thinking of how they have been treated.'

These pages are of such a nature that they can always be reread with pleasure, and it would not be difficult to find others equally delightful in the two volumes of conferences. Vincent de Paul, as a writer, was a master of easy and natural character drawing and equally at home and equally forcible in depicting good and bad moral qualities. Take, for instance, his description of the girl ' who buys pretty shoes and has her dress quilted,' wears gloves, pulls out her hair from under her cap to show that she has some and, dissatisfied with a bodice because the sleeves are a little frayed, demands finer material than that worn by the others, and who could ask for a more accurate and amusing description of feminine vanity and coquetry ?[102] The conferences were interspersed and brightened with the most varied touches,

[102] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 652 ; Vol. X, pp. 187, 296.

frequently personal, and with stories drawn from the Scriptures, the lives of the Fathers of the Desert and of the Saints. They were often the merest trifles, but related in the most delightful fashion and exploited in the most skilful manner. Take, for instance, the story of the lady and her dog. He wished to let the Sisters see the dangers run by those who allow themselves to be gradually dominated by any one particular feeling.[103] 'I knew a lady,' he says, 'who loved nothing in the world except her dog, but she loved it passionately. It chanced to die when the two were travelling together. So there she was! lamenting aloud that she had lost her little dog. She said: "Who will come and caress me when I return home, now that my dog, which was my little pet, is dead!" The poor woman! She kept sighing away in her carriage! Why? For a dog! She was so deeply afflicted that she thought she would go out of her mind, and the doctors recommended her to take a trip for the express purpose of distracting and amusing herself.' And then came the moral. 'O Sisters! O my Saviour! If the love of a poor wretched creature produced such a result as that, in what danger are not we?'

However, Saint Vincent much preferred to speak of incidents or events suggested to him by the acts of virtuous persons, especially if performed by a Sister, than to draw morals from one's neighbours' faults and failings. He was overjoyed, on one occasion, to call his Daughters' attention to an edifying letter sent by a Sister in the country to her Superioress who happened to be in Paris. 'My dearest Sister, I salute you, at the foot of the Cross of our dear Saviour suffering for us. I am writing you this little line to ask you to oblige me by telling Mademoiselle of all my failings, without concealing a single one; that will be the greatest proof of love you could possibly show me; for, if you love me, you will also love my perfection and, in that case, will not refuse what can so greatly contribute to it. And to oblige you the more to do what I request, here is a little picture of the Blessed Virgin which I am sending you and She, through the merits of her Son, will invite you not to refuse me such a true act of kindness; for you know, my dear Sister, the good

[103] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 399.

done to yourself when something similar occurred, so please believe me then that, with God's help, it will also be profitable to me.'[104]

These lines moved him to tears, and he commented on them so that all might see their beauty : ' Look, my Daughters and consider the sentiments of one of your number. What do you say to that, Sisters ? Could she, if she were asking for something that might be of greater advantage to herself, do so with greater insistence than she now does when begging to have her faults revealed ? And, in order to oblige you, she says, here is a picture I am sending you which will urge you to do so, by the merits of her Son. Remark that ! to make a present to oblige a person to mention one's faults, and to make a present of a picture of the Blessed Virgin, which was perhaps very dear to her, so that, in case her Sister forgot, she might remember when she saw it. Oh ! may God bless her ! '

Traits such as these both interested and edified his hearers ; their attention was also kept alive by the questions he kept asking, now of one and now of another, either to make sure that they understood him, or the better to fix in their memories by repeating, in the form of a dialogue, what he had just said. These conferences were in the truest sense of the word, conversations ; questions and answers succeeded each other, and they were both short and rapid. If we open the conference on particular friendships we shall find him asking :

' Sister, are particular friendships good ? '

' No, Father, it's a silly sort of love.'

' How many sorts of friendship are there, my Daughter ? '

' There are two ; one that makes us love all our Sisters equally for the love of God, and the other is a love of inclination.'

' Should one love in the second way ? '

' No, Father, that is not really loving a person.'

' Is it very dangerous ? '

' Yes, Father, and it may harm a house.'

' What should be done to set that right ? '

' Father, one should abstain from speaking to the person

[104] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 321.

one loves or, if one does speak to her, it should be about very good and holy things.'

'Do you wish to act in that way?'

'Yes, yes, Father, with the help of God's grace.'[105]

If the conference dealt with some point of the rule, such as rising in the morning at four o'clock, or on mental prayer, the questions were mainly concerned with fidelity to the exercise. Saint Vincent made his enquiry as wide as possible by asking Sisters from different houses, and by questioning them, not precisely on their own personal conduct, but in general, on the way things were carried out in their particular house. 'Do you rise at four o'clock, Sister, in the Foundling Hospital?—'Do you have mental prayer in the morning, Sister, at Saint Paul's?'—Some of the Sisters explained: 'It is impossible to go to bed before ten o'clock, and how then can we rise at four? The sick must be visited very early in the morning, and it would be too late to do it after prayer.' He discussed these difficulties with them, and pointed out how matters might be arranged without injury to the rule.[106] General manifestations of goodwill were not rare in the course of these conferences, and he gladly encouraged them by his questions. He was genuinely pleased to receive unanimous testimonies from the lips of his Daughters as to their willingness to accept some proposals mortifying to nature, such as that their faults might be mentioned to Mlle Le Gras, or to themselves or, in general, when he asked them to be prepared to respond to the call of divine grace.[107]

The Sisters, on their side, were quite at liberty to question him; they submitted their cases of conscience quite frankly, accepted his solution unhesitatingly and without further discussion. These questions were, as one might guess, very easily solved; for instance, if it were permissible to admit women to their rooms, and in case they were on terms of intimacy, invite them to sleep there; if there were only time either to make one's mental prayer or to assist at Mass, which should be preferred; if Ladies of Charity ordered something to be done which the Sister Servant had forbidden,

[105] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 498.
[106] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, pp. 583, 584, 594, 604.
[107] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, pp. 43, 108, 329, 371; Vol. X, p. 154.

which of the two should be obeyed? Amusingly simple questions were, of course, asked from time to time, such as, if it were meritorious not to put perfume on one's linen or clothes? Mlle Le Gras wrote that: 'M. Vincent, being unable to conceive that anybody ever had such vain thoughts, manifested the greatest astonishment, and this was almost his only reply. Nevertheless, he added that it would be a great fault for a Daughter of Charity even to think of such a thing.'[108]

The conferences are also interesting from the light they shed on the acts of humility which were then customary. Sisters who remembered that they had failed in the particular virtue, or particular rule under discussion, were free to kneel down and ask for the Community's forgiveness; this was permitted and even recommended. One Sister would confess that she had slept during prayer; another that she had accepted a book without permission; a third that she was free and easy in her practice of the rules, and so on. These public acts of self-accusation gave rise to scenes that were highly edifying. 'I was so proud lately,' said a Sister one day,[109] 'that when I was told of my faults by one of my Sisters whom I had asked to be charitable enough to do so, I showed that I did not like it at all. I ask your forgiveness for this, and also yours, Sister, who had the charity to tell me.' At these words, the other Sister knelt down and said: 'Sister, it is I who should ask for your forgiveness; I did not tell you in the proper manner, for there were others present.'—'Oh!' said Saint Vincent, who was delighted, 'just look at how beautifully everything is going! One accuses herself for not having taken a correction well, and the other for not having given it properly, and so each wishes to take the fault on herself. . . . Rise up, Sisters . . . but the holy custom is to kiss the floor when one accuses oneself of a fault. . . . Oh! that is excellent! As long as Daughters of Charity will tell one another of their failings in a spirit of charity, humble themselves, know and admit their faults, Oh! so long shall hell be powerless to prevail against or injure them.' Good example, however, came from above, for both Saint Vincent and Mlle Le Gras gladly

[108] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 23. [109] *Ibid.*, p. 381.

took occasion to confess their slightest acts of negligence, in the presence of their Daughters. It was in this way, above all, that they kept alive and in vigour the practice of such acts of humility, and it became one of the most useful and edifying customs of the Community.

When the Sisters left the conferences they felt attracted more than ever to their glorious vocation and better fitted to fulfil its obligations ; they understood more clearly what a great grace God had given them in calling them to the service of the poor.

Their title was ' Servants of the poor,' and the wealthy had nothing to expect from them ; they had other masters to whom their time belonged, and who were the objects of their devotedness. Saint Vincent strongly insisted on the observance of this rule which he placed at the beginning of the Common Rules : ' They shall often reflect that the principal end for which God has called and brought them together is to honour Our Lord, their Patron, serving Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor, now in the guise of a child, now in that of a beggar, now of the sick and now of prisoners.' As a child : in the parish schools, in the Foundling Hospital, in the orphanage at Etampes during the Fronde, and afterwards at Cahors ; as a beggar, in the Hospice of the Holy Name of Jesus and in the parishes ; as the sick, in hospitals, military ambulances, and in the houses of the poor, and as prisoners, amongst the convicts.

All were aiming at the same object : to help the poor. If a Sister seemed to forget this, he reminded her of her duty. ' We are frequently being urged here in Paris,' he wrote to a Superioress,[110] ' to allow some Sisters to visit other sick persons besides the poor, but we cannot consent to Sisters serving them, not even their confessors, both because Sisters are only for those who have no one to help them, and on account of inconveniences that might arise.' He never would tolerate the slightest exception to this rule save when he had to obey Queen Anne of Austria who asked him to let her have two Sisters nurse Cardinal Mazarin's sister through an illness.[111] The Duchess d'Aiguillon exerted all her influence

[110] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 41.
[111] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 258.

to obtain a like favour. 'Sir,' said she to Saint Vincent, 'I love the Daughters of Charity so much that I wish to have one of them to live with me; I beg you to send me one.' It was hard to refuse Richelieu's niece and so, after conferring with Mlle Le Gras, it was decided that a Sister might be sent for a short time, but only on condition that part of her time should be given to the poor of the parish. Mary Denis seemed to have the requisite qualities for the position, and she was sounded: 'I left my father and mother,' she said, 'to serve the poor, and nothing shall turn me from that determination; pray excuse me if I cannot place myself at the disposal of this great noblewoman.' It was clear there was no use in urging Mary, so they had to seek elsewhere, and Barbara Angiboust was next approached. 'Sister,' said Saint Vincent to her, 'a great lady wishes to have a Sister of Charity with her; we have thought of you; will you consent, my Daughter?' Big tears flowed down poor Barbara's cheeks, and that was all her response. 'Oh, well, my Daughter, offer up those tears to Our Lord; He will know how to be glorified by them some day.'

He did nothing, thinking, perhaps, that the Duchess d'Aiguillon would forget all about it, but such was by no means the case. As a result of further requests, Barbara received orders to go to the Hôtel du Petit-Luxembourg, and Vincent de Paul went there to meet her.[112] She was crying, and he kept on consoling her until two young ladies came looking for her to present her to the Duchess. 'Sister,' they said to her, 'you are most welcome, and Madame has been asking for you.' As she still hesitated, he said to her: 'Go, my Daughter.' So Barbara followed them, drying her tears; the sight of the courtyard which happened to be full of carriages alarmed her so she stopped and, telling them that she wanted some advice from the Saint, went back. 'Oh, Sir,' said she, 'where are you sending me? this is a regular Court.' 'Go, Sister,' was his reply, 'you will be in the company of a woman who really loves the poor and, if in four or five days' time, you still wish to return to Saint Nicholas, they will take you back.' Consoled by these words, she rejoined the ladies; the Duchess gave her an affectionate

[112] Now, the Senate.

welcome, embraced her and when they were together explained what duties she was expected to perform. Her kindness, however, had no effect on Barbara's feelings, and the sadness depicted on her countenance, her sighs and want of appetite clearly showed that she was suffering in mind and body. The Duchess said :

' My child, why are you not content to remain with me ? '

' Madame,' she replied, ' I left my father's house to serve the poor, and you are a great, wealthy and powerful lady. If you were poor, Madame, I would gladly serve you.'

And to all who asked her why she was so sad, she gave the same reply :

' If Madame was poor, I would devote myself with all my heart to serve her, but she is rich ! ' It would have been cruel to prolong such an experiment beyond four or five days and when they were over Barbara left the magnificent palace of the Duchess d'Aiguillon.

' What do you think of that ? ' wrote Saint Vincent to Mlle Le Gras. ' Are you not delighted at seeing the power of God's Spirit in those two poor children, and the contempt with which it has inspired them for the world and all its grandeurs ? You cannot believe what courage it has given me in regard to the Charity.'[113] A similar incident occurred in Poland, in 1652, shortly after the arrival there of three Sisters, as we shall see later.[114] This love of the poor filled the hearts of the Daughters of Charity ; and if they did not undertake night-nursing, and left to others maternity work and Lock Hospitals this was from no want of zeal, but because they were forbidden to do so by their Rule, for reasons easily understood.[115]

Corporal assistance was only part of their task, for their Rule said they were to serve the poor ' corporally and spiritually,' as, indeed, charity itself demands. ' No doubt it is something to assist the poor as far as the body is concerned,' said Saint Vincent to them, ' but, in truth, it was not Our Lord's intention, when He created your Company, that you should only take care of the body ; for there will never be

[113] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 329–331 ; Vol. X, pp. 643–644.

[114] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 588. [115] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 682.

wanting people to do that ; but Our Lord's intention is that you should help the souls of the sick poor. . . . One good word coming from the heart and uttered in the right spirit will suffice to bring them to God. . . . Such a kind word should tend to teach them to be patient, or to make a general Confession, or to die well, or to live well, if they recover their health, and to teach them all that is necessary for their salvation.'

Some people profess to be shocked at seeing Saint Vincent mingling religion and charity, but nothing can be more easily justified. His whole soul was profoundly attached to Catholic teaching and he believed, like every other Christian, in a future life, a life of eternal happiness for those who die in the state of grace, and of endless misery and remorse for those who die in the state of mortal sin. Since that is so, he would not have been really and truly charitable if he had not done all that he possibly could to prepare the sick to appear spotless in the sight of God or if, whilst doing his best to relieve the body from earthly ills, he had shown no interest in the sad fate, as the Scriptures tell us, of the souls of sinners after death. Moreover, in his eyes, corporal and spiritual works of charity were intertwined ; one was the complement of, whilst not subordinate to, the other. He never said to his Daughters : ' If a sick man refuses to go to Confession, don't nurse him.' If anybody had made such a remark in his presence he would have blushed with shame. Whilst he believed that charity should be extended to all man's needs, to those of the soul as well as to those of the body, he saw and fully acknowledged that if, on account of individual resistance or for any other motive, the first cannot be provided for, the obligation of fulfilling the second is thereby in no way diminished. His Daughters, educated in his school, act in conformity with his principles. If they exhorted the sick to practise their religious duties, they did so with tact and discretion, rather by way of friendly advice than constant pressure. If they spoke to heretics and unbelievers of the truth and superiority of the Catholic religion, it was only when their hearers were willing to listen and with no intention—far from it—of hurting personal convictions. And their words were always inspired with a spirit of charity,

that is to say, with a desire to do good to those whom they called their ' dear masters,' of whom they regarded themselves as the servants.

Saint Vincent had proof of their ardent love of the poor many and many a time. He was called one day to see a Sister who was dying and asked : ' Is your conscience at rest ? Examine your past life carefully ; do you see anything that causes you pain or remorse ? ' She answered : ' No, Sir, nothing at all, except that I felt too much pleasure when I used to go and visit the dear people in the villages ; I used to fly to them because I felt so much joy in serving them.'[116]

The joy of serving the poor was shared by all the Sisters, by those in towns as well as by those in the country, although the former could not ' fly ' as easily as the latter, as they moved through the streets, modest and recollected, with a pot on their arm and a basket on their back. If they chanced, on their way, to notice any of those sights that attract the attention of idlers, they moved on without turning their heads. Sister Margaret Lauraine related during a conference that, whilst passing through Saint Lawrence's Square one day whilst the great Fair was being held, ' in which games and fooleries were being carried on,' she had the curiosity to look at them for a second, but she recollected herself and, taking the crucifix of her rosary beads in her hand, said to herself : ' It is much better to look at You, at You, than at all the follies of this world.'[117]

The Sisters going about their work met with other dangers than those ' follies ' of which the world is the theatre. On February 10, 1646, a Sister was ascending from the first to the second floor of a house to visit a poor man. Suddenly an ominous cracking sound was heard, and a heartrending cry came from a water-carrier in front of her : ' We are lost.' She instinctively put her back against the wall, as if seeking for some support and in a moment the house collapsed, with a terrifying crash, burying about thirty-eight people in its ruins. A large section of the wall supporting the step on which the Sister was standing remained

[116] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, pp. 683–684.
[117] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 37.

upright, and she was unscathed. A crowd hastened to her rescue ; cloaks were held out ; a pole with a hook attached was pushed up to her and on it she hung her pot of soup. She then threw herself into the cloaks spread out for her, landed safely, picked up her pot, and continued her journey. She and a child were the only persons who escaped. A few days later, the Sisters had their usual Conference. Saint Vincent questioned her ; it was an excellent opportunity to encourage his Daughters to thank God for the graces vouchsafed the Company. When her story was finished, he added : ' Do you think, my Daughters, that God permitted this new house to fall, without any design ? Do you think it fell simply by chance just when our Sister happened to be there and, finally, do you think it was just by good luck she has escaped without harm ? Oh ! no, no, no, my Daughters ! The whole thing was a miracle. God ordained it all so that your Company may know the care He takes of it ; such a signal grace was not meant for our Sister alone but for you all, to strengthen the belief you ought to have that your services are pleasing to Him ; to make you see that you are as dear to Him as the apple of His eye ; to oblige you to have a perfect confidence in His Providence, which will never abandon you entirely.'[118]

This confidence in divine Providence bore fruit, for young girls and widows in great number came to Mlle Le Gras asking to be admitted into the ranks of the Servants of the Poor. When Saint Vincent died, the Company had houses all over France ; it stretched as far South as Narbonne, as far East as Metz, as far North as Arras, and as far West as Belle-Île en-Mer, and had even crossed the frontiers in response to the Queen of Poland's appeal. As well as hospitals in Paris, it had charge of those in Angers, Nantes, Saint-Denis, Ussel, Belle-Île, Bernay, Châteaudun, and Hennebont ; it had charge of an orphanage in Cahors and, in twenty other districts, maintained two Sisters, one a nurse and the other a schoolmistress.

A Sister was never left without a companion, as it would have been impossible to preserve the spirit of her state if she were living all alone, deprived of community life, in

[118] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 241.

some little country village. If there were not enough work for two, they washed clothes, sewed, spun and thus helped to defray part of their maintenance. In this way, they fulfilled the wish to which Saint Vincent one day gave utterance, in the course of a Conference : ' If God be pleased, my dear Sisters, to grant you the grace of being able some day to earn your own living, and thus come to serve villages that have not the means of providing for you, I see nothing more beautiful. Just consider ! Sisters, whilst working for others, will be in places where they will serve the poor and educate the girls, without anybody contributing to it, and it will all be due to the work of Sisters in other places, and also to the work that they themselves have done in their free time ! If bees gather honey from flowers and bring it to the hive to feed the rest, why should not you, who ought to be real heavenly bees, do likewise ? '[119]

To work in this manner was also to work for the poor. Sisters in the villages were also working for God by helping the parish priests, by looking after the sacristy and the church, when their services were required, and seeing that the sanctuary lamp was never extinguished.[120] Saint Vincent was very much afraid of the dangers of idleness and, above all, of prolonged conversations with villagers in which it is so easy to take part in detraction and fault-finding, to conceal one's faults by too much familiarity, and to let outsiders become aware of little family quarrels.[121] The Confraternities of Charity in the cities were far harder worked than those in the villages, and yet his preferences went to the latter, for he had proof that the good done there was more solid and serious. ' Poor villages should be chiefly considered,' he wrote on one occasion to Mlle Le Gras,[122] ' for nothing very much can ever be done for the cities, and to bother very much about them is merely to flatter oneself.' When Saint Vincent sent his Daughters to a place it was always in reply to the express wishes of a Lady of Charity or of some person of rank, and when there was

[119] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, pp. 494–495.
[120] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 758–760.
[121] *Special rules for Sisters in villages*, Art. II.
[122] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 357.

question of establishing houses of Charity all the arrangements were carried through in a friendly spirit and without contracts. Sisters selected for a new foundation never set out without having first paid a visit to the Saint to ask for his blessing and advice, and Mlle Le Gras reminded them of the practices of the Community when Sisters were on a journey.[123] 'Take holy modesty as your veil,' she said to them in substance, 'edify your travelling companions, because they will have their eyes on you. In the coach, sit side by side ; it is better that you should be able to converse together and that what one says the other can hear. Be faithful to your rules, as far as circumstances permit. When passing through a village, adore the Blessed Sacrament as you pass before the church and salute the angel guardians of all the inhabitants. At stopping places reserve a little room for yourselves alone. Go to the church, to pray, and to the hospital, if there be one, to visit and catechise the poor. Instruct all poor people and children you may meet with, and even the servant-maids of the inns, and give them some pious pictures. Go to the baker's for your bread ; it will not cost so much. Purchase your provisions for the next day. Take your meals, not at the common table, but apart. Assist at Mass as often as you can. Go to Holy Communion on Feast Days, after first taking the precaution of going to Confession the previous evening. In all things, take the greatest care not to incommode your travelling companions, and be always present when the coach is about to start.'

Before following the travellers to the provinces, we shall pause for a while in Paris and, in going through the various establishments, we shall naturally enough begin with the Mother-House.

[123] *Pensées de Louise de Marillac*, p. 191.

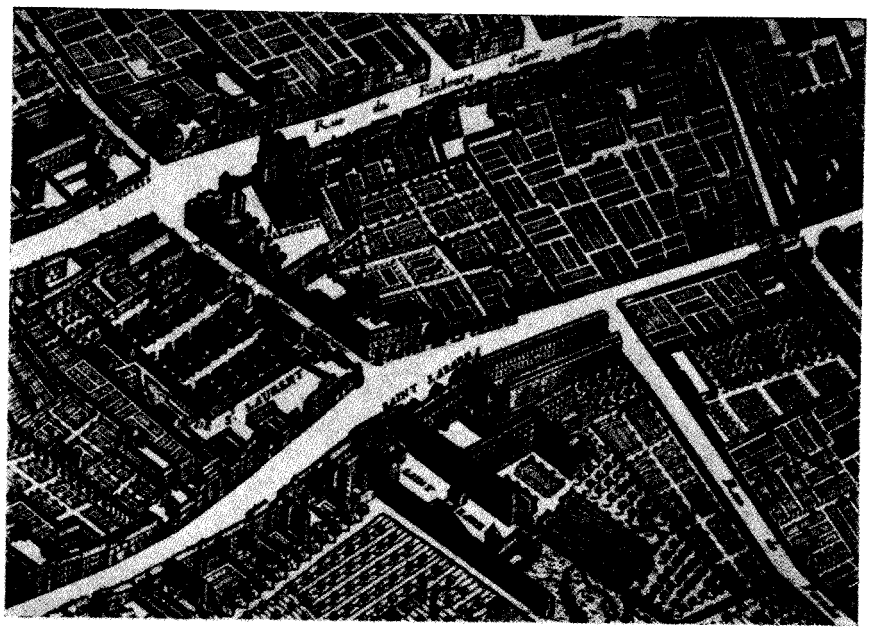
CHAPTER XVIII

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY (*continued*)
THE MOTHER-HOUSE

MLLE LE GRAS received her first Daughters into her own house, in the parish of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, not far from the Collège des Bons-Enfants, until a larger building was found or arranged for.[1] There is no document extant that enables us to determine with certainty the exact spot where the Company began. When Saint Vincent wrote to his fellow-worker, he never gave an address, never, is not quite correct, for there is one exception ; one of his letters, the date of which (between 1632 and 1636)) can be settled by the context, bears on the back : ' To Mademoiselle Le Gras, Rue de Versailles, opposite the Royal Sword.'[2] The little Rue de Versailles, which has now disappeared, lay parallel to the Rue d'Arras and, like it, linked up the Rue Saint-Victor with the Rue Traversière. The house bearing the sign of *The Royal Sword* lay almost half-way between the two extremities, from which we can conclude, by comparing the plans, that she was residing in a house on which now stands No. 21, Rue Monge.

In 1636, the question of a change of residence came up again for discussion as the community of Saint Nicholas had outgrown the accommodation. The district around Saint-Lazare seemed naturally indicated as the place to which a move should be made and the point was debated, but Saint Vincent raised some objections.[3] ' We are living here,' he wrote to Mlle Le Gras, ' in the midst of people who watch every move, and who judge everything. They would not see us entering your house three times without comment-

[1] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[2] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 215
[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 316.



THE MOTHER-HOUSE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY AND ITS ENVIRONS
(From Turgot's Plan of Paris, 1734-1739.)

ing on it, and drawing the conclusion that no one should find fault with themselves wherever they may go.' A place farther off was sought for, and, as there were plenty of houses for sale, Madame Goussault found one that would cost from forty to fifty thousand livres. Another, more modest, was to be sold at a more reasonable figure, seven or eight thousand livres. Vincent de Paul weighed the pros and cons and wrote to Mlle Le Gras : ' The first would be a scandal in the case of poor Sisters, and the second too remote from the Church. You will see. I see nothing incongruous in honouring both the prudence and the simplicity of Our Lord, but there are fewer inconveniences if one fails in the second virtue than in the first, and especially in your case.'[4]

To sum up, he found both proposals unacceptable, and they were abandoned. A few days later, he heard that there was a house to let at La Chapelle, then a suburb of Paris, which had the double advantage of allowing Mlle Le Gras and her Daughters to breathe fresh, country air, and of being close to Saint-Lazare. All that remained to be done was to find out what was the rent ; the owner does not seem to have been too exacting, for a price was agreed on. Madame Goussault herself signed and sealed the deed and, in the month of May, the community of Saint Nicholas, with the exception of a few Sisters who remained behind to carry on their work in the parish, moved out to the new Mother-House.[5] There is nothing in Gobillon's account, or in Saint Vincent's correspondence with Louise de Marillac, to prove that she was most unwilling to move to La Chapelle, and yet this was Mgr Baunard's view, in support of which he quoted these words of hers : ' O my God, no more self-will . . . and may Thy will alone reign in me. Grant me this grace, O my Jesus, by the love Thou hast for me, and by the intercession of Thy Blessed Mother who loved so perfectly all that Thy holy will effected. I beg this grace of Thee with all my heart, and I give myself entirely to Thee, beseeching Thy bounty to take no thought of the contrary dispositions to be found in me, and desiring that the power of Thy love may force, by the sweetness of its strength, the

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 318. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 319, 320, 322, 324.

consent of all my senses that may be opposed to it. I will go to the new house with the intention of honouring divine Providence which leads me there, and I will dispose myself to carry out all that this same Providence may permit to be done there. I will honour, by this change of abode, that of Jesus and of the Blessed Virgin when they went from Bethlehem into Egypt and, afterwards, to other places, and, like them, I will not desire to have any dwelling-place of my own on this earth.'[6]

These words clearly show that the change was painful to nature, but there is nothing to prove that they were written in 1636 ; they are just as applicable to a previous change of abode, and to one even prior to the establishment of the Company. In going to La Chapelle, she had no reason whatever to be sorry, for she was going to live near Saint-Lazare, that is to say, Saint Vincent ; her community was being provided with greater accommodation, and the country air would benefit their health. No doubt, she would be no longer in her own home, and that was bound to be a source of grief but, on the other hand, it had this advantage that it rendered another change of dwelling, if it were deemed advisable, much more easy. Saint Vincent would never have urged Mlle Le Gras to move to La Chapelle if he had observed that she felt any disinclination to go there. However, after she had been there three years, she did manifest a dislike of the place and, as soon as he heard of it, he began to look about for some other home. The parish priest of La Villette offered him the presbytery.[7] On November 1, 1640, on the outskirts of that village, and on the Saint-Lazare side fairly close to the church, there was a small country-house up for sale ; it consisted of one or two main buildings, with a barn, a stable, and a garden covering about an acre and a half, and its price was four or five thousand livres.[8] Both of these proposals were set aside for reasons unknown. Their attention was next called to a house for sale in the Faubourg Saint-Martin ;[9] they went to see it and decided that it was too small. Something, how-

[6] *Pensées de Louise de Marillac*, p. 41.
[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 18.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 133. [9] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

ever, had to be done, and as it was proving so difficult to find a suitable house they could buy, there was some talk of hiring one, whilst waiting for something better. Time went on, and the small house at La Chapelle became more and more uninhabitable. Mlle Le Gras began to grow uneasy and Saint Vincent wrote to her : ' We must continue to pray for the house, but just now I am not worrying so much about that as about finding some way to set you up here in a hired one. O Jesus ! Mademoiselle, your work does not depend upon a house, but much more on the continuance of God's blessing on it.'[10]

The Ladies of Charity had taken an active part in this search for a house, and were equally interested in the purchase money.[11] ' Madame, the Duchess d'Aiguillon,' we read in another letter, ' told me yesterday that she has been thinking again of the proposal that Madame de Lamoignon made her of investing the 45,000 livres and, in the meantime, of hiring a house. We shall see on Saturday afternoon when we meet the Ladies who hold office.'

In the end, after all this waiting, the matter was settled satisfactorily. Two citizens of Paris, John du Maretz and Claude Sadot, with their wives, leased to the Sisters two adjoining houses, with a common entrance, in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, opposite the church of Saint-Lazare. The first house had a cellar, two rooms on the ground floor, two on the first, two on the second, garrets and outhouses ; a stable, a courtyard and a well. The second consisted of a kitchen, one large room, two panelled chambers, and a granary covered with tiles. There was, moreover, a small penthouse, in the shape of a pavilion behind which lay the garden. The whole property was surrounded by walls.[12] Not a trace of these buildings remains to-day ; the last vestiges were swept away when the Boulevard Magenta was laid out.

Neither the day, nor even the month, on which the Sisters took up residence is known, but the fact is beyond all doubt that they were living there on May 9, 1641.[13] It is fairly

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 166.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[12] Arch. Nat. S 6,608.
[13] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, pp. 63–64.

probable that, for want of accommodation or for some other reason, some of the Community remained on at La Chapelle until the end of 1641, or even the beginning of 1642.[14] Saint Vincent would have much preferred to purchase a house rather than hire one and the proprietors, falling in with his wishes, sold the property, on September 6, 1641, not to the Company of the Daughters of Charity, which had as yet no official existence, and consequently could not own property, but to the Congregation of the Mission. He paid 6600 livres cash down, and undertook to spend every year 300 livres, the interest on the sum of 5400 livres still in hand.[15]

Alterations, improvements and the addition of a third wing to the building brought expenses up to 5000 livres. The houses were old and the collapse of a floor, on June 7, 1642, showed that they were not yet completely safe.[16] When Saint Vincent purchased the house, he intended to re-sell it to the Daughters of Charity as soon as he possibly could. On April 1, 1653, it was put up for sale at a reserve price of 17,000 livres ; Mlle Le Gras offered 17,650 and, as the bidding went no higher, the property fell to her at that figure.[17] In 1639, Madame Goussault bequeathed 9000 livres to the Company for the purchase of a house and, in all probability, the Sisters were enabled to buy their new home by additional donations from the Ladies of Charity.[18]

In 1658, the Sisters began to enlarge the buildings, and we have a statement of Mlle Le Gras' which enables us to see what were her plans : ' First, the bakehouse and then the school ; next, a room in which the wounds and sores of the sick can be dressed ; and then, the main-entrance ; next a base-court, if possible, in which there will be a stable, a fowl-house, a pig-sty, and a well or fountain, if possible, and a pit. Upstairs, a dormitory should be erected opening out from the parlour and, over the dormitory an infirmary and, over that

[14] It is certain that there were still Sisters at La Chapelle in the month of October. *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 130.

[15] Arch. Nat., S. 6,608.

[16] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 258, 528 ; Vol. IX, p. 57.

[17] Arch. Nat., S. 6,608.

[18] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 98 ; *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 547–548.

a loft. Some means must be found for gaining access to all these upper rooms by means of the main staircase of the old building and, if possible, an office or small room should be constructed opposite the dormitory.'[19] All that she really cared about was that the house should contain accommodation necessary for the works and general welfare of the Community, whatever was indispensable or useful, on the material side. Not only had she no place in her plans for the beautiful or the artistic, she positively excluded them, for she believed, with reason, that servants of the poor should be poorly housed. On April 27, 1656, shortly before the work began, she gave stong expression to her views on this point at a meeting of her council. 'If it were possible,' she said, 'to have stained and blackened stones for the building, so that it might not look like a new one, we should have them.' And Saint Vincent, who was quite pleased to hear such language, added: 'It is true that it would be desirable to leave posterity some signs of the love of poverty, if that were possible. The Lieutenant . . . always attacks me, when he comes here, for not having our pavilion restored. When he mentions the matter, I laugh with him, without telling him what prevents me from doing so, but, at bottom, my reason is: I wish the Company should be erected on the foundation of humility, and that it should conform, as far as possible, to the mode of life lived by the Son of God. Now, I am very much afraid lest, if you had a beautiful house, persons of rank and condition might be attracted to it, and that would be most disadvantageous.'[20] The instructions issued to the architect were inspired by this reverence for holy poverty. 'Sir,' she wrote to him,[21] 'it is absolutely essential that the building should be erected in a simple, village style, and be as little attractive as possible. I know you cannot stoop to this without pain, accustomed as you are to do things in a grand and lofty style; but when you have reflected . . . how necessary it is for the Company, if it is to last, to appear poor and humble in all things, you will see, Sir, that this is the work of Our Lord.'

[19] *Pensées de Louise de Marillac*, p. 258.
[20] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 716.
[21] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 652.

As a matter of fact, there was not enough money to erect a beautiful building and the sums that had been set aside as a reserve were exhausted before the work was completed. They turned to their benefactors, put their trust in Providence, and were not disappointed ; but their confidence never went so far as imprudence ; a day came when it would have been rash to carry on, and then the building was stopped. Later on, when resources permitted, they began again, on June 1, 1657.[22] The name of the first Sister to enter and to die in the new infirmary, on April 24, 1658, had been preserved, it was Sister Joan Mary.[23]

At the end of the plans mentioned above, Mlle Le Gras expressed a wish : ' If we could have a fountain ! '[24] Nothing was needed more badly if we are to judge by the tenor of the petition addressed to the Provost of the Merchants of Paris, to obtain a water-supply. ' The Daughters of Charity humbly petition . . . and state . . . that their poverty prevents them from being able to purchase water, and compels them to go to the aforesaid fountain (a public one) where they have to listen to the filthy, wicked language indulged in by the water-carriers, who frequently abuse and maltreat them and prevent them from approaching near enough to draw water.'[25] One day, Sister Mary de la Ruelle, tired out at having to endure the objectionable remarks of some insolent fellows, carried her two pitchers to the gates of Saint-Lazare to be filled there. Saint Vincent happened to meet her and consoled her, for she was in tears ; he took the two pitchers away and brought them back filled with water.[26]

The Provost and Sheriffs could not turn a deaf ear to such a reasonable request and, on the recommendation of the architect, signed a deed of concession on August 19, 1659.[27] ' Bearing in mind,' it states, ' the services rendered

[22] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 846 ; *Louise de Marillac, widow of M. Le Gras, Her life, virtues and spirit*, Vol. I, p. 251.

[23] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 915.

[24] *Pensées de Louise de Marillac*, p. 258.

[25] Arch. Nat. Q1, 1200.

[26] Deposition at the Process of Beatification of Saint Vincent de Paul.

[27] Arch. Nat. Q1, 1200.

to the public by the said Daughters of Charity, we have given, conceded, and granted by these presents a water-supply to be drawn from the pipe that is close to the house where they reside.' Although the water-main ran opposite the Sister's dwelling, the process of linking it up with the house lasted until the end of the year, and Mlle Le Gras had the happiness of seeing, before she died, one of her dearest wishes realised.[28]

This, however, is quite enough about the material side of the Mother-House, by which we mean not merely a definite place of abode, but much more the group of persons who lived there, under the direction of Mlle Le Gras : the councillors, novices, sick and the Sisters indispensable for the smooth running of domestic arrangements and external works. It was here that postulants came to study their vocation and to be trained ; before Saint Vincent admitted them, he made enquiries as to their bodily and mental qualities and dispositions. All the conditions required may be found in a passage in a letter to his confrère, Father Delville : ' If you meet with strong, healthy girls, inclined to join the Charity, who are of irreproachable life, fully determined to humble themselves thoroughly and to labour at the acquisition of virtue and to serve the poor for the love of God, you may give them hopes of admission. . . . They should be at least eighteen or twenty years old, bring sufficient clothing when they first come, as well as linen and their little wearing apparel, and some money for their return home, in case they may not be able to fall in with the mode of life of this little Company, or be judged unsuitable.'[29]

He wanted them to be ' healthy ' and ' strong ' as the life of a Sister of Charity amongst the poor is hard and painful : ' inclined to join the Charity,' that is to say, attracted solely by a desire to join the Community so as to comfort the afflicted, and not out of curiosity, a mere desire to see Paris, or a secret idea of securing a livelihood for the rest of their days ; ' fully determined to humble themselves thoroughly,' as it is impossible to persevere living as a servant of the poor without humility.

[28] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 1009.
[29] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 189.

Married women, widows with families,[30] and nuns who had been members of communities for a long time[31] were debarred.[32] Most of the postulants came from the country, and were of the decent farming class ; girls from cities, or those who had once been servants, experienced greater difficulty in the process of formation, according to Mlle Le Gras, but she added : ' Nevertheless, the spirit of God is poured forth everywhere.'[33]

The poor, frugal, hard-working life of a Sister of Charity did not suit girls reared in comfort and idleness. ' The rich,' Saint Vincent used to say,[34] ' would like everything to be done in the grand style and to want for nothing,' hence he feared if the Company were recruited from the ranks of the wealthy, it would lose its spirit of poverty. ' As God turned to a poor village girl,' he added,[35] ' it is His wish that the Company should consist of poor village girls. If some come from towns, well, that is all right ; and you should believe that it is God Himself Who has drawn them ; but if He introduces persons of rank and wealth amongst you, you should fear lest it might prove the ruin of the Company, in case they have not the spirit of a poor country child, but yet it is quite possible that God may grant them this spirit. If young girls, or ladies of rank come, one must be on one's guard, and they should be well tried in order to see if the spirit of God intends them to be here.' He was very much afraid lest a day might come when it would be said : ' Persons of rank and wealth are needed who will bring us money and help us to improve the house,' and he showed his indignation against those who might be tempted to seek for money in this way, at the risk of ruining the spirit of the Company.[36] He did not give a bad example himself because there were not more than half a dozen ' maidens ' or ' ladies ' of wealth and position amongst those whom he admitted into the ranks of the Sisters.

Postulants began their probation, or ' seminary,' by a few

[30] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 203.
[31] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 278. [32] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 679.
[33] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 72.
[34] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 755.
[35] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 602. [36] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 358.

days' retreat; before they were sent to a house, where they could serve the poor, it was essential to develop qualities appropriate to their new state of life by training them in the practice of solid virtue and of prayer. Mlle Le Gras herself was the first directress of the Seminary, but her declining strength, as well as the increase of work necessitated by the ever-growing number of new undertakings, forced her, in 1647, to give up this duty and her place was taken by her assistant, Juliana Loret.[37]

Beginners learned what 'the active life' meant by intercourse, and even collaboration, with their elders and, from this point of view, the Mother-House was an excellent school as, in addition to visiting the poor, the Sisters had a dispensary and a school,[83] and retreats were held for externs. During the first five years in the parish of Saint-Lawrence, the Sisters used to visit the poor only in the morning and, at a council held on July 5, 1646, the question was raised as to whether it would not be advisable to send visitors from house to house, in the afternoon, several times a week, who could instruct and console the sick. In Paris, the Ladies of Charity performed this act of spiritual charity, but it was hopeless in Saint-Lawrence's to rely on a parish confraternity, the members of which were of a much more modest condition of life. On the other hand, the Sisters who, in the morning, distributed food and medicines had too much to do to have much time left for imparting religious knowledge and stirring up devotion. The afternoon visit met another need, for it enabled young Sisters to be trained in a work which they would later on have occasion to carry out in country districts. But the suggested solution gave rise to an objection; the parish clergy, who had already manifested a certain amount of touchiness in another matter, might not be too well pleased to see Sisters taking the place of ecclesiastics in the exercise of one of the functions of their ministry. This last consideration showed that prudence was desirable, and it was decided that visitors in the afternoon should not devote themselves entirely to the spiritual side of their task, but

[37] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 658.
[38] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 550; Vol. III, p. 55.

should take medicines along with them, as was done in the morning.[39]

The Mother-House had also a school attached, for scarcely had Mlle Le Gras arrived at La Chapelle than she pensioned off the man who was teaching in the village school, and she herself took over the education of the little girls.[40] One of the first things she did, when the Sisters moved to Saint-Lawrence's, was to write to Michael Le Masle, Canon, Prior and Lord of Roches, who had charge of all the elementary schools of Paris and its suburbs, and who granted her request, which was to teach and educate poor girls in ' good manners, reading and writing and other pious and honourable exercises.'[41] The teachers themselves, however, needed to be taught, at least the method of teaching, and several plans were carefully examined. Saint Vincent suggested that they should avail themselves of the experience of a girl who had been employed as a teacher by the Ursuline nuns for six years.[42] ' She knows,' he wrote, ' all that these good nuns teach, and she is an expert in the art of tapestry weaving. It just occurred to me that she might be of great use, for two or three months, to the Sisters at La Chapelle, and especially in the method of conducting a school. What do you think of it, Mademoiselle ? '

Mlle Le Gras, on the other hand, was in favour of sending her Daughters to the Ursulines ; she received the following reply : ' I do not hope for very much from this intercourse of the Ursuline nuns with your Sisters. However, if you like, send them.'[43]

From about 1636 or 1637, the Mother-House threw open its doors to ladies who wished to spend some time on retreat. They were admitted gratuitously, as were men at Saint-Lazare, but in much fewer numbers as the accommodation was very limited.[44] Some of the names of those who went on retreat there have come down to us : Madame de Liancourt, Madame Goussault, Mlle Lamy, Madame de Mirepoix,

[39] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 607 ff.
[40] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
[41] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 62 ff.
[42] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 164.
[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 437. [44] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 76 ff.

Madame Lotin, Madame Le Roux, Madame Caregré and Madame de Miramion, not to mention a nun and an actress. Occasionally girls went there to prepare for marriage, and sometimes, after a misfortune or calamity, to recover peace of mind and strength. Occasionally husband and wife went on retreat together ; he to Saint-Lazare and she, with the Sisters. The priests of Paris were accustomed to send thither persons in search of means of sanctifying themselves. When those about to make a retreat arrived, they first received a copy of the order of day and the rules, which insisted on reading at meals, but permitted ' gay and modest ' recreation afterwards ; apart from these periods of relaxation, talking was forbidden. The books chiefly recommended for spiritual reading were the Gospels, the *Imitation of Christ*[45] and the writings of Louis of Granada. Mlle Le Gras was the counsellor and guide of those on retreat.[46] ' I beg you,' Saint Vincent wrote to her on one occasion when he knew that his friends Madame Goussault and Mlle Lamy were with her, ' I beg you to indicate to them the subjects for mental prayer, and to listen to the account of their prayer, which they will give you in presence of each other. . . . You will be very careful to see that they do not excite themselves too much in these exercises of piety. I beseech Our Lord to give you His spirit to that end. It would be well if they wrote down the chief thoughts that occurred to them during prayer, and arrange for a general Confession on Wednesday.' She also helped those on retreat to make resolutions which, according to Saint Vincent, should be definite and practical : ' Anything else,' he added, ' is merely a production of the mind which,[47] having experienced a certain ease and even pleasure whilst reflecting on a virtue, flatters itself at the thought that it is now really virtuous. Nevertheless, to become solidly virtuous, it is expedient to make good resolutions to carry out particular acts of the virtues and, afterwards, to be faithful in carrying them out ; without that, one is often only virtuous in imagination.' Hence it is clear that the guidance referred to above is real ' spiritual direction ' in the strict sense of the term, which Mlle Le

[45] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 382 ; Vol. II, p. 162.
[46] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 382. [47] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 190.

Gras continued to give after the retreat, for we have letters written by her full of advice and instruction for persons with whose spiritual state she was intimately acquainted. The fact that no money was taken from those who made a retreat was not acceptable to all ; the Baroness de Mirepoix, for instance, made an offering of ten crowns, which was declined, so she deposited the money on the threshold as she was leaving. The money was taken to Mlle Le Gras who was placed in an embarrassing situation for, as the rules forbade her to take money, it would have pained her to keep it, and she did not like to send it back to the Baroness, lest she might be offended. She consulted Saint Vincent, but his reply, unfortunately, has been lost.[48]

Apart from the permanent employments of the Mother-House, additional ones were undertaken and carried on for as long as the circumstances that dictated them lasted. For instance, during the wars in Picardy and Lorraine, Mlle Le Gras gave hospitality to girls who had to leave their homes either from hunger or the approach of the soldiery ;[49] and during the troubled times of the Fronde, when famine was raging in Paris, food and clothing were distributed at the door. And yet the Mother-House was not rich ; if other houses had not had the praiseworthy custom of sending it whatever little balance remained over after defraying expenses it would have been impossible to board and lodge the staff there.[50]

Moreover, it was to the Mother-House that the Sisters living in and around Paris went for their annual retreat, and they were even invited to go there every month for spiritual communication and Confession. ' You will take care to pay a visit there at least once a month,'[51] Saint Vincent told them ' whenever it is most convenient. And why so, my Daughters ? Well, to have a little talk with the Sister Servant about your spiritual state, and in the simplest and friendliest manner, just like a child going to its mother for consolation, to tell her your troubles, big and little, to ask for her advice,

[48] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 475.
[49] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
[50] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 89.
[51] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 124.

to tell her how you are observing the rules, how you are getting on and all about your little differences, in case you have any, and all with the greatest sincerity, cordiality and absence of pretence.' The Sisters attached to the Paris Confraternities, to the Hôtel-Dieu, the Foundling Hospital, the Hospital of the Name of Jesus and that named 'The Little Houses' used also to go, as far as their engagements permitted, to listen to their venerated father on Conference days. They all appreciated the happiness of being able to approach so easily to the source from which they could draw, and maintain in themselves, the spirit of the Company in its utmost purity. Sisters living at a distance from Paris were not so fortunate but they were not completely isolated from the Mother-House of Saint-Lazare ; there was a bond that united them with the centre, namely, correspondence, and it is chiefly by means of this interchange of letters that we have a knowledge of their history.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY (*continued*)
FOUNDATIONS IN FRANCE AND OTHER COUNTRIES

THE first establishment offered to the Sisters outside Paris, and its immediate environs was that of Saint Germain-en-Laye, some miles from the city. A Confraternity of Charity had just been erected there and Madame de Chaumont, the Lady Superior, thought that the presence of a Sister would help to train the Ladies of Charity in the service of the poor. She was given two, one of whom was Barbara Angiboust,[1] and they arrived there shortly after February 15, 1638. To succeed in such difficult surroundings uncommon qualities were essential; Barbara soon showed that she possessed them and, in her own simple way, this 'village girl' succeeded admirably with the Ladies of the Court.

However, she was needed elsewhere for, even in the preceding year, her name had been mentioned in connection with a house of the Sisters which Madame de Combalet, the future Duchess d'Aiguillon, proposed to establish in a parish in Richelieu which had been entrusted to the Priests of the Mission.[2] The time for departure had been postponed as it was hoped that Mlle Le Gras herself would be able to accompany the Sisters in the following Spring. Spring went by, then Summer and when Autumn arrived there were urgent and repeated demands from Richelieu. Barbara Angiboust and Louise Ganset were chosen; it would have been a great joy for them to go and ask Saint Vincent for his blessing before setting out but they were unable to do so, and had to be content with a letter.[3] 'Most gladly,' he wrote, early in October to Mlle Le Gras, 'do I beseech Our Lord

[1] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 421, 433.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 411. [3] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 513.

to bestow His holy blessing on our dear Sisters, and to grant them a share in that Spirit which He gave the holy women who accompanied and co-operated with Him in assisting the sick poor and educating children. *Bon Dieu*, Mademoiselle, what a happiness for those dear children to be going away to continue the charity exercised by Our Lord when on earth, in the place to which they are now proceeding ! . . . Oh ! how Heaven will rejoice at the sight, and how wonderful will be the praise they shall have in the next life for having done so ! Certainly, it seems to me that crowns and empires are mere dust in comparison with those with which they will be crowned hereafter.' After this preamble, which is marked with a certain touch of solemnity, he goes on to give some advice for the journey. ' It only remains to remind them to conduct themselves according to the spirit of the Blessed Virgin, during the journey, and in all that they do ; let them often look at her as if she were under their eyes, before or beside them ; let them act as they imagine the Blessed Virgin would have acted ; let them bear in mind her humility and charity, and let them be humble towards God, cordial with one another, kind to all around them, giving disedification to none ; let them perform their little spiritual exercises every morning, either before the coach starts or on the road ; let them take a little book along with them, to read from time to time or let them say the Rosary ; let them take part in conversation when it treats of God, but not when of the world, much less when it becomes frivolous, and let them be like rocks against any familiarities that men might wish to take with them. They shall sleep apart in a room which they shall at once ask for at the inns, or in a room with some upright and honourable women, should any such happen to be in the coach ; but if there be no suitable apartment in the coach-house inns, then let them lodge near-by, if they can find accommodation.' Saint Vincent does not leave the two travellers even when they have reached their destination, he follows or rather guides them in the town that was to be the scene of their charitable exertions : ' At Richelieu, they shall first go and venerate the Blessed Sacrament, and then see Father Lambert, from whom they will receive orders, which they shall strive to carry out,

regarding the sick and the children who will attend their school, observing the little daily exercises of piety which they now practise. They shall go to Confession only once a week, unless one of the major festivals falls on a week-day ; they shall strive to assist the souls whilst tending the bodies of the poor ; . . . they shall obey the officers of the Charity, and deeply respect the others whom they shall endeavour to animate with a love of their holy exercise ; and, continuing in this way, it will be found that, in the sight of God they will have lead a most holy life and that, from poor girls, they will become great queens in Heaven.'

The tone of majestic gravity so perceptible in this letter recalls another which he wrote somewhat later to Father Nacquart, the first of the Missionaries sent to Madagascar. Richelieu was not, indeed, an island of Africa, but this first departure of the Sisters to a place relatively at a considerable distance from Paris marked, for all that, an important date in the history of the Company. The holy Founder, doubtless, perceived in it the beginning of the dispersion of his Daughters throughout France and, perhaps, the whole world. In the following month, he was himself in Richelieu and observed with satisfaction the happy results of Barbara's and Louise's exertions. ' The Charity (of Richelieu) is going along very well,' he wrote to one of his confrères when he returned to Paris.[4] ' It has looked after sixty sick people since Easter, only one of whom, a girl, died, whilst before that not a single one of them escaped. The two Sister Servants of the poor whom we sent there are doing wonders ; one, nursing the sick, and the other, educating the girls.' Barbara and Louise did not earn compliments alone, for scarcely had a year elapsed from their arrival in Richelieu than we find Mlle Le Gras trying to re-establish peace and harmony between them. She reproached Barbara for her ' lack of cordiality,' her ' little acts of disdain,' and her ' want of patience,' whilst Louise was much too independent and committed faults against poverty. Her letter ends thus : ' Do you know, my dear Sisters, what I expect from your reconciliation, after a renewal of your affection ? It is this—that you be open-hearted with each other . . . that you will

[4] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 526.

THE DUCHESS OF AIGUILLON

avoid particular friendships with the Ladies, not visiting them at all, and loving nothing so much as your own room, and one another's society ; I do not say you should refuse the visits the Ladies may be so kind as to pay you. True humility will settle everything.'[5] Barbara was sincerely humble, so too was Louise, and hence their little tiffs did not last very long. When Saint Vincent was in Richelieu, in the following month, he noticed that there was not the least sign of their past differences ; his visit put the seal on their union and he completed their happiness by giving them an unexpected piece of news—an approaching visit of Mlle Le Gras.[6]

The question had, in fact, arisen of sending Daughters of Charity to Saint John's Hospital at Angers, and Mlle Le Gras had raised hopes that she would go there. The patients in the hospital had not for many a long day had the care and attention their condition required ; both chaplains and nurses were accused, not without cause, of neglecting their duties, but the evil was not confined to them alone, and was to be found from top to bottom of the whole administration.[7] A memorandum dated 1675, states : ' There were about thirty or forty patients, and three dozen of shirts in all. There were very few poor patients, because the poor of the city would not go to the hospital if they could avoid it ; and if there were some who had been forced to go there, they used to have white shirts brought to them from home, or from some of their friends.' The chaplains, who were all Canons Regulars of Saint Augustine, were so thoroughly uninterested in their duties that, to borrow a sentence from a petition addressed to the King, in 1639, by the Governing Body, Sheriffs and people of Angers, ' the sick were destitute of all succour.'[8] Madame Goussault was thoroughly wel informed about the whole matter, and had implored Saint

[5] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 20.

[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 602.

[7] Arch. Nat., S. 6,160. The report concludes thus : ' Sisters Claude Carré, Margaret Lavalle, known as the eldest, and Barbara Rouelle were eye-witnesses of all that has been set down here, as they were the first who were sent to this hospital, where they are at present.'

[8] Arch. Nat., S. 6,160.

Vincent, during her last illness, to allow himself be moved by the appeal which had been addressed to him.[9] It was, in all probability, owing to her influence that the Mayor, Sheriffs and Governing Body had asked him for some Sisters, and delegated his great friend, Guy Lasnier, Abbé de Vaux and Vicar General of the diocese, to carry on the negotiations. Urged on all sides, Saint Vincent consented. No doubt, it would have been most helpful if Mlle Le Gras could accompany her Daughters to Angers, but it was now winter, and the state of her health demanded much care and attention. Saint Vincent hesitated, but at length agreed. 'As Our Lord has given you an inclination to go to Angers,'[10] he wrote to her from Richelieu, 'go there *in nomine Domini*; what He protects is well protected.' And he went on to map out her route, avoiding all that might cause her too much fatigue and mentioning places of devotion to be met with on the way. She was very nearly prevented from leaving Paris by an attack of illness, but she set out, visited the sanctuaries of Chartres, Notre-Dame de Cléry, and Notre-Dame des Ardilliers, and reached her destination, completely exhausted by fourteen days' travel by coach and canal boat.[11] In the meantime, Saint Vincent had left Richelieu and, after a stay of two days at Valpuiseaux, arrived at Saint-Lazare on December 11, thinking that he would find Mlle Le Gras in Paris taking care of her health. There was a letter from her awaiting his arrival and he replied to it on the following day: '*O mon Dieu!* how worried I am about yourself and your Daughters! I thought I should find you here, on account of the attack of catarrh of which you told me We shall see in Heaven the reason why Providence had arranged matters thus. In the meantime, I beg you above all things to take the greatest care of yourself, amidst the great dangers you will meet with in Angers.'[12]

The city, as a matter of fact, had been attacked by the plague,[13] and the contagious nature of the disease rendered

[9] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 479.
[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 603. [11] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 605.
[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 40.

residence in the hospital especially dangerous ; on the advice of Saint Vincent, Mlle Le Gras accepted the Abbé de Vaux's hospitality but, after staying a few days with him, rejoined her Daughters in the Hospital.[14]

The holy Founder's letters enable us to follow her step by step in the capital of Anjou. A proposal was made to defray the expenses of her journey ; he told her to decline it ; a wish was expressed that a young lady should remain in the hospitals whose presence would embarrass the Sisters, he begged her to oppose it ; she was urged to draw up the terms of a contract, he replied that before going so far as that ' an essay should first be made as to what was the divine good pleasure.'[15] The essay lasted for only a few days for, in a letter dated January 11, 1640,[16] we read : ' Seeing that these Gentlemen wish to settle the matter in writing, you may do so *in nomine Domini*, as Directress of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the sick poor in hospitals and parishes, subject to the good pleasure of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission, Director of the aforesaid Daughters of Charity. . . . And if you are asked for the letters of establishment of this body, you may say that there are none apart from the powers granted the said Superior, Director of the Confraternity of Charity.' Several points supplied matter for discussion. Mlle Le Gras would have wished to have had a clause inserted stipulating that the Board of Governors should be at liberty to dismiss Daughters of Charity and the Superiors in Paris to recall them, but her desire was not granted.

The Sisters were officially installed on February 1, the day on which the contract was signed.[17] At the foot of the official document, drawn up in the name of the Lieutenant General in the Seneschalship of Anjou and Presidial Court of Angers, after the name of Mlle Le Gras come those of eight Daughters of Charity : Isabella Martin, Cecilia Agnes Angiboust, Margaret Francois, Mary Matrilonneau, Barbara Toussaint, Clementia Ferrence, Magdalen Mongel

[14] Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
[15] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 605.
[16] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 1.
[17] The contract is in the National Archives, S. 6,160.

and Genevieve Caillou. The eight Sisters were to remain in the hospital, with Sister Turgis as Superioress; perhaps the reason why her signature is missing is that it had not yet been definitely settled that she was to remain.

The new set of circumstances necessitated new regulations, and these were drawn up by Saint Vincent; some dealt with the ordinary obligations of the Daughters of Charity, but what interests us here are the special regulations in regard to hospitals. The most important point was to define the limits of the Board of Governors' authority over the Sisters, and this was settled in the following way: 'They shall obey their Superiors in the city of Paris in all matters of discipline and internal government, and the Board of Governors in external, that is to say, in all matters concerning hospital regulations for the care of the sick; and they shall obey their Superioress in the carrying out of the said regulations and, in general, in all that she may command.' The first two hours of the day were at the disposal of the Sisters for dressing themselves and performing their exercises of piety. 'At six o'clock,' we read, 'they shall go to the wards' after having eaten 'a piece of bread' and swallowed 'a finger of wine' and, on Holy Communion mornings, after inhaling some vinegar or rubbing some on their hands, and they shall then make the beds, sweep out the wards, clean all that needs to be cleaned and administer the various medicines. At seven o'clock came the patients' breakfast, and then Mass for those who had been unable to be present at Mass at five o'clock, and afterwards breakfast for Sisters who might need one. After breakfast, they returned to the wards to comfort, exhort and instruct the sick in the truths of faith; to lead them on to pray and to speak to them of their religious duties and, if their end was drawing nigh, of the necessity of preparing for death by receiving the Last Sacraments; nor were they, for all this, to neglect the care of their bodies but to supply those who were thirsty with cooling drinks and 'sometimes with little sweetmeats and dainties.' The patients' meals were preceded by the *Benedicite*, and followed by grace after meals. The two o'clock repast consisted of cooked apples and pears and also, perhaps (for this was subject to the approval of the Governors), preserves and sugared toast.

The three great medical panaceas of the day were bleedings, purgations and clysters, for which last there was a definite time allotted, four o'clock in the afternoon. This was also the hour for changing the soiled linen of insane paralytics, for dressing the beds of patients unable to rise, and for rendering them other services as humble as they were meritorious. At half-past six, the Sisters ' shall put to bed all the sick who are able to be up, and shall give orders for some wine and various other little comforts to be provided for the needs of those who are most ill. At half-past seven, all the Sisters shall go to the main ward, and shall there make a general examination of conscience, which will also be made by those patients who are able to do so, all the points being read out aloud by one of the Sisters standing in the middle of the ward ; they shall then recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and read the points of the meditation, after which the Superioress shall give Holy Water to all the sick and to the Sisters.' The sick were never left alone ; one Sister remained with them whilst the rest were at the community exercises, and a Sister remained up with the patients all night.

The Rules end with some recommendations from which we select the following : ' They . . . shall avoid intercourse with externs and especially the priest of the house, to whom they shall never speak save when another Sister is present and even then, briefly and only on necessary matters, or those concerning their work, even on the pretext of charity ; they shall not speak of their own little private affairs and personal difficulties, except to the Superioress . . . they shall read the present set of regulations every Friday at the principal meal and, finally, they shall reflect on the happiness of their lot : how they are serving Our Lord in the persons of His poor ; how He will acknowledge that the services they render the sick poor are rendered to Himself and how, at the Day of Judgement, they will walk with heads erect ; how they are fulfilling the law of God in its entirety by carrying out their duties and, lastly, how they shall always abide in God, and God in them, as long as they abide in charity.'[18]

[18] Apart from the general regulations, there were special rules for each post in the hospital. See Arch. Nat., S. 6,160.

When the contract had been signed and sealed and the regulations begun to be enforced, nothing remained for Mlle Le Gras to do but return to Paris. She was in a hurry to leave as her health, gravely impaired from the moment of her arrival, was slow to show any signs of improvement under Angevin skies, and amidst the worries and anxieties of her mission. Saint Vincent was growing nervous about her and when he thought of the hardships of the return journey sought means to alleviate them. 'What are you saying, Mademoiselle, about returning by water?' he wrote on January 31.[19] 'O Jesus! you must do no such thing; I beg you to have a litter made, and to hire or rather buy two good horses (we will pay here whatever they may cost) and make the return journey in that way.' She set out on February 25, after promising the Abbé de Vaux to send three additional Sisters to the hospital.

It would be easy to reconstitute a detailed account of the history of the first twenty years of this foundation from the letters—there are over a hundred still extant—written by Louise de Marillac to the Abbé de Vaux, and from other documents. On August 16, 1641, Saint Vincent remarked: 'Our dear, good Sisters in Angers took up duty in the hospital when it was filled with cases of contagious diseases, and they have nursed even the plague-stricken just as readily as the others. It would seem as if this disease was on good terms with them, for they have nursed all without exception.'[20] The new-comers did not disappoint the hopes that had been placed in them. One of the Sisters wrote afterwards: 'The number of patients increased; the wards were enlarged and also the number of beds in proportion; at present there are one hundred and ten beds for men and ninety for women, without counting those who have to be treated in exceptional circumstances.'[21] The Sisters, guided by two holy priests, the Abbé de Vaux and their confessor, M. Ratier, preserved the spirit of their state, and the esteem of the city and its inhabitants. The Governors were delighted to have them, and Vincentians sent from

[19] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 11.
[20] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 40.
[21] *Memoire* (Arch. Nat., S. 6,160).

Paris to make visitations sent back glowing reports.[22] The city authorities wished to have the 'hospital of poor Prisoners' placed in charge of the Sisters and, finally, when Saint Vincent was passing through the town, in 1649, he wrote to Mlle Le Gras : 'I cannot express the consolation I have experienced in visiting our dear Sisters of Angers. O Mademoiselle, what great reason is there not for praising God for the admirable manner in which He has guided and governed those dear Daughters !'[23]

The effort made to send twelve Sisters to the hospital at Angers had temporarily exhausted their reserves but, all the same, in the following year, they were able to gather together a contingent for a new home at Sedan. On October 28, 1640, Saint Vincent wrote to Mlle Le Gras : 'Here is a letter written to me by a good ecclesiastic from Sedan. See if you can send us a really excellent Sister. It is a new focus of the Christian religion, as the Duke and Duchess are recent converts. It is ninety years ago since heresy began to reign in that principality. Oh ! how I wish you were in good health ! But there you are ! Winter is at hand, and it mustn't be thought of.'[24] However, it was no easy matter 'not to think about it,' for strong pressure was being brought to bear on them from Sedan. It was essential to have a thoroughly reliable Sister in a town so remote from Paris and so Mary Joly, then at the parish of Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois in Paris, was selected. It was suggested that she should be sent there all by herself; the prospect terrified her and Mlle Le Gras pleaded for her in a letter to Saint Vincent dated February 9, 1641 : 'The resolution which it seems to me you took never to send a Sister alone has remained so strongly impressed on my mind that I think somebody should be sent along with her. She may fall ill on the way. . . . She may be very much worried and, being unable to solace her mind, there is reason to fear she may grow discouraged. And I also fear that it might injure others

[22] Father Portail visited the Sisters in 1646. The advice he then gave them 'on behalf of M. Vincent' will be found in the Arch. Nat., S. 6,160.

[23] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 428.

[24] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 131.

who may say that we do not care very much about the Sisters since they are allowed to travel alone.' And she accordingly suggests 'big Sister Clare' as a travelling companion, for she is of a 'fairly docile disposition and I think they will get on well together.' Furthermore, as she knows how to read, she can take charge of the school.[25] Saint Vincent quite agreed with this, but expressed some doubts as to Sister Claire's educational abilities, and suggested that the matter should be looked into.[26]

Mary Joly left for Sedan where she remained till 1654, that is to say, she held the same post for thirteen years, a unique incident in the history of the first quarter of the century which shows us, apart from documentary evidence, how fully she deserved the high opinion her Superiors had formed of her worth. One of Saint Vincent's fixed principles was frequent change of Sister Servants, even those who were succeeding best and, if Mary Joly's case was an exception, the reason was that he was not absolutely free, for we have reason to think that his hand was forced by the aristocratic ladies of Sedan who were fully resolved on keeping Sister Mary. A day came when he repented for having delayed the change so long, and the Sister was recalled. 'As for Sister Mary,' he wrote to the parish priest of Sedan a few days later,[27] 'let us hope that Monsieur and Mademoiselle de Santeuil's annoyance at her return here will gradually pass away, for we decided that it would be well to withdraw her from Sedan on account of the length of time she has been there ; this was an exception to the established order of the Daughters of Charity, who should be changed more frequently, and I hope that as long as I live, nothing like it will ever occur again. And if Monsieur de Santeuil or Mademoiselle his wife, should speak again to you about this matter and say that Sister Gillette has been left just as long in Sedan and is still there, you might tell them that this was done because no one but she could get on with Sister Mary and that now, as she is no longer there, Sister Gillette will be recalled at the first opportunity.' Poor Sister Mary's heart was in Sedan, for scarcely had she arrived in Paris than she dis-

[25] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 159.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 260. [27] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

appeared one fine morning, moved by a violent desire to live for ever in the place from which she had just come. However, she grew calmer after thinking things over and returned in the evening to the Mother-House and consented to make a retreat after which she repaired, by an exemplary life, a momentary forgetfulness of her duty.[28] As a successor to Mary Joly, Sister Joanna Christina was chosen, ' a most virtuous, gracious and intelligent girl, whom God has blessed wherever she has been.'[29] Although, on August 27, 1660, she had a majority of votes for the post of Assistant at Paris, Vincent de Paul, as we have seen, refused to appoint her on account of his fear of the resistance that would be offered to her recall from Sedan. This fear shows the place which she had taken in the hearts of the inhabitants of that town by her devotion to the poor.

Two other foundations, at Fontenay-aux-Roses and at Nanteuil-le-Haudouin, were made in 1641. Mention is made for the first time of the Sisters at Fontenay in a letter dated October 1641.[30] ' Yesterday a man from Fontenay,' he wrote to Louise, ' was telling me marvels about your poor Daughters.' They had therefore taken up duty by then, and were still there, for on March 30, 1649, a citizen of Paris, Denis Béguin, left a large sum of money for their works : a school and the service of the sick.[31] The legacy was not available until the foundation contract had been signed, and this was done during the following year.[32] In 1654, Juliana Loret was placed at the head of this little establishment and remained there for a year. Mlle Le Gras wrote to her frequently and the six letters extant keep us in touch with the various little incidents of community life during that brief period.[33]

Some months before the house at Sedan was opened, Madame de Maignelay had asked Mlle Le Gras for a schoolmistress for Nanteuil-le-Haudouin, where there was a mixed school with a master in charge, and Mlle Le Gras offered

[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 222–224.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 207. [30] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 192.
[31] See an extract from this will in the Arch. Nat., S. 6,167.
[32] The original is in the Arch. Nat., S. 6,167.
[33] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 190.

her two Sisters, one of whom was to look after the sick poor. A letter from the Marchioness to Saint Vincent, on August 26, 1640, reveals her anxiety to have her request granted quickly : ' The need of our Charity is urgent, for the servant we have . . . is anxious to leave us. . . . Ever since Easter we have had, thanks be to God, very few poor—a dozen at most—and I think there are nine just now. . . . We pay out a hundred livres in wages. Medical treatment and clysters are given here. . . . If the girl we obtain by your efforts proves to be a good girl, we shall try to provide her with free lodging. . . . Even if she does not know how to bleed, that does not matter ; she can learn how to do it ; the girl whom we had learned in a very short time.'[34] Three days later, the Marchioness informed Saint Vincent, in another letter, that ' a kind widow ' had presented herself as a nurse, and hence there was no need for the Sister asked for on the 26th.[35] The ' kind widow ' did not remain very long, and they had to fall back on the first solution, so two Sisters—Agnes and Margaret—left for Nanteuil, in October, 1641. Agnes fell ill ; Madame de Maignelay wrote ' a third Sister is required ' and, in all probability, it was Sister Joan Dalmagne who was sent.[36]

Joan's heart was full of charity, and although she had had no previous experience she effected some wonderful cures. There was, in Nanteuil, a poor girl almost eaten alive by scrofula so that nobody would venture to approach her, and her state was so repulsive that even her mother was ostracised. It was almost impossible for mother and daughter to exist in the circumstances, but fortunately Sister Joan was there. She provided for all their needs ; visited the patient twice a day and cleansed and dressed her sores, but the poor girl's state was so revolting that Joan's gorge rose at it ; she experienced violent fits of nausea and vomiting, and even fainted. When she recovered her senses, she scolded herself for her want of courage and set to work anew. Early in the morning, long before the mother and child were up, she was

[34] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, 94.
[35] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 108.
[36] Letter to Mademoiselle Le Gras (the original is in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity).

to be found at their door, with whatever alms she had managed to collect, The Sisters lodged in the local hospice and were brought into daily contact with tramps and beggars who could find no other place to stay. Joan grew into the habit of teaching them the catechism and, one day, a tramp asked her for a piece of bread ; she went off to the nun in charge of the hospice who offered her a hunk of stale bread. Joan refused to take it and said : ' It won't do, Sister, I will eat that myself, but nothing except what is good should be given to God.'[37] After the Marchioness of Maignelay, the next best protector of the Charity at Nanteuil was the Marchioness of Schomberg ;[38] these two charitable women were most kind to the Sisters, and stoutly defended them whenever their rights were violated or even challenged.

About thirty miles north of Nanteuil lay the magnificent Castle of Liancourt. One day, in 1635, when Mlle Le Gras was staying there as a guest of her illustrious friend, the Duchess, the latter told Louise of her plans ; she desired to have a Confraternity of Charity which would care for the sick poor of the town and of three places in the neighbourhood : La Bruyère, Cauffry and Rantigny ; she would build a hospital and place it under the protection of the Holy Ghost, after Whom it would be named, and two nurses chosen by herself would take charge of the hospital and bring medicines and remedies to the poor in their own homes.[39] This plan did not appeal to Saint Vincent who anticipated that, in the course of time, something similar to what had happened at Joigny would result : the sick would be urged to come and be treated in the hospital where alms and medicines would be distributed as from a centre ; visiting the poor in their own homes would die out and, in this way, the Hospital would kill the Charity.[40] We learn from a letter that, in 1636, a Sister named Genevieve had been removed from a parish in Paris to go to Liancourt,[41] but it is not quite certain whether she was being sent there to start a new foundation or to lend her experience for a time to the members of a new Charity. The second of these two hypo-

[37] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 190.
[38] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 298.
[39] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 273.
[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 244–245.
[41] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 363.

theses seems to be the more likely for, in 1652,[42] as Mlle Le Gras herself tells us, the house was only ten years in existence; moreover, there is no trace to be found of it, before 1645, in letters or other documents.[43] The only other supposition is that scarcely had the establishment been begun than it was abandoned, for no known reason, except perhaps as a result of the panic provoked amongst the inhabitants by the capture of Corbie, and that it was reoccupied at a later date. However this may be, there were three Sisters there in 1652, and Mlle Le Gras was then able to write : ' Ever since the Sisters went to Liancourt, there has not been the slightest trouble, thanks be to God.'[44]

This auspicious beginning was not destined to continue and a period of trials followed, due, it must be admitted, to the fault of the Sister Servant, Joan Pangoy, who would have benefited by a visit to the Mother-House, to imbibe at its source the spirit of a true Daughter of Charity. She had her faults ; but calumny discovered vices in her, and the mud thrown at Joan was splashed on to her two companions. It was said that they were leading disorderly lives ; that they were visited at night by two men on Sundays and holidays, and during divine service. Two young men went around everywhere spreading these calumnies ; they had, they alleged, been eye-witnesses of it all, and their stories, packed with definite details, presented every appearance of truth. Even the Nicolaite Fathers of Liancourt,[45] convinced by these assertions, deplored the scandal given by the Sisters, who were the last to hear of these abominable calumnies. It was on the feast of Saint Joseph, and from the lips of their own confessor, that they heard the first echo of them ; when Sister Mathurine Guérin presented herself in the confessional, the priest was not over-tender. ' Depart,' he said to her, ' you are a cheat ; you come here and accuse yourself

[42] *Letters of Louise de Marillac.* The letter containing this assertion is not dated but, from its contents, it would seem to have been written in 1652.

[43] The contract is dated December 31, 1645, and the regulations, 1648 (Arch. Nat., S. 6,169).

[44] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 1066.

[45] The priests of Bourdoise's Community of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet.

MARGVERITE DE GONDY MARQVISE DE MAGNELAIS,
Beatus qui Itelligit Super Egenum et pau perem. spalm 40.
Londry fecit.

MADAME DE MAIGNELAY

of little faults, and conceal enormous sins ; look for some other confessor, for I have no absolution to give you or your two companions,' who also had to listen to the same language. The three Sisters withdrew in a state of confusion, and trusted entirely to God to manifest their innocence. Four months went by without Confession, Holy Communion, or authorisation to fulfil their Easter duty. Sister Mathurine could endure it no longer and wrote to Saint Vincent telling him of all that had occurred. Madame de Liancourt happened to be in Paris just then, and on being told by Mlle Le Gras of the severe trial her Daughters were enduring, hastened back and began an enquiry. The Superior of the Nicolaites told her that he had not the slightest doubt of the Sisters' guilt ; when Sister Mathurine was interrogated, she contented herself with saying : ' Madame, I place my whole trust in God, and I hope for my complete justification from Him ; it is His affair more than mine, and my cause is His.' All that remained was to hear the accusers ; the Duchess questioned them separately, and then together, whilst the Superior of the Nicolaites, concealed in an adjoining room, listened to their replies, which were so utterly contradictory that when the men were pressed they admitted that they had lied all the time. Sister Mathurine took pity on them and asked for their forgiveness ; it was her manner of taking vengeance. Shortly afterwards, she was recalled to Paris and appointed secretary to Mlle Le Gras. Her rare gifts of mind and heart had been fully manifested in this severe trial.[46]

The house at Issy, founded in 1642, experienced great difficulties but of another nature than those of Liancourt. The Sisters, abandoned by those who had promised to assist them, were themselves poorer than their poor. Mlle Le Gras, in a letter dated February 9, 1643, admitted that they had nothing to live on,[47] and it was probably the want of resources that placed them in the painful necessity of having to withdraw in 1649.[48]

The opening lines of a letter of February 9, 1643, reveal

[46] Obituary notice on Sister Mathurine Guérin in *Circulars of the Superiors-General*, Vol. II, pp. 561–562.

[47] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 364.

[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 39 ; *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 410.

the approaching arrival of a new foundation ; that of Saint-Denis. ' Madame de Lamoignon and Madame de Nesmond,' we read, ' came here, on their return from visiting the hospital at Saint-Denis, for they wish to have Sisters of Charity, in case the nursing nuns do not accept the conditions which they wish to impose on them.' As the nuns refused the conditions, the Governors of the Hospital approached Saint Vincent, who sent three Sisters—Elisabeth Turgis, Frances Pauline Nolet and Margaret Le Soin—who took up office on August 22, 1645, the day on which the contract was signed.[49] By this deed the ' Fathers of the Poor ' agreed to treat the Sisters, not as mere servants but as a nursing community. The Angers regulations were adopted with some slight modifications ; great authority was given to the Superioress of Saint-Denis, who admitted and discharged the patients. She was urged not to send them out until ' they had been purged and fortified ' and not to ' yield to a certain natural timidity which might cause her to keep idlers and malingerers too long ' in the hospital ; she was further recommended to look out for situations for girls who were out of employment. The Sister in charge of the pharmacy or, as she was then called, the Apothecary, was Assistant Superioress, in fact though not in title ; she acted as her adviser and took her place from 1649 to 1651. Sister Barbara Angiboust was Superioress of the hospital of Saint-Denis and was as well beloved there as everywhere else. Her religious instructions attracted the girls and women of the town so that there were, at times, sixty of them gathered around her, to whom she taught catechism or read the lives of the Saints. When the session was over, she often used to say : ' Now, let us kneel down and meditate on what we have just heard,' and she was obeyed with docility. The political troubles of 1649 deprived the hospital of all help ; the Governors sent away the poor and removed the beds.

[49] Arch. Nat., S. 6,166. There are two autograph manuscripts of Mademoiselle Le Gras dealing with the hospital at Saint-Denis ; one is entitled *Manner of treating the sick in the Hôtel-Dieu at Saint Denis* ; and the other, *A plan of the order which the Daughters of Charity should keep in the hospital of the city of Saint Denis of France.*

Sister Barbara was thoroughly distressed ; she went and knocked at the doors of the wealthy, implored their pity and collected sufficient money to prevent the hospital from being closed.[50]

The establishment at Serqueux (Seine-Inférieure) was begun in the same year as that of Saint-Denis (1645). The Sisters were invited there by the parish priest, Francis du Marché, who gave them land and buildings as a gift on condition that they would conduct a school and nurse the sick of the place and its neighbourhood.[51] We are in almost entire ignorance of this little community, as it is very seldom mentioned in Saint Vincent's correspondence ; however, we do know that the schoolmaster at Forges, which was close by, in order to humiliate the boys for faults committed, thought it would be a good idea to bring them along to the Sisters to be caned. Saint Vincent was consulted on the matter, and thoroughly disapproved of the practice.[52]

Two other houses, those of Maule and Crespières,[53] would seem to date from 1645 or thereabouts, as the first letter referring to them, dated July 20, 1646,[54] shows that they were in full activity. The first lasted until 1658, but there is no mention of the second after 1649.[55]

The excellent order maintained by the Daughters of Charity in the hospital at Angers produced such a high opinion of their work that two more hospitals in the West were offered to them. Mans was the first ; the Chaplain of the hospital was a priest of the Mission and another Vincentian, the Superior of the diocesan seminary, had certain rights in its administration so that it seemed quite natural that the Daughters of Saint Vincent would be preferred to other nursing Orders. Father Portail, his first assistant, happened to be in Mans just then, and was charged with the negotiations. At first, everything went well, so well in fact that he wrote to Mlle Le Gras, on March 18, 1646 : ' We are most impatiently awaiting the arrival of your

[50] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, pp. 640, 649.
[51] Arch. Nat., S. 6,176.
[52] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 468.
[53] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 612. [54] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 584.
[55] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 405.

Daughters. . . . The administrators are urging us, the nursing (Sisters) here are waiting ; the sick and the foundlings need your help, and the past great disorders call only too clearly for a remedy.' Father Portail looked at everything in the rosiest light : ' The authority we enjoy in this house, combined with that of its administrators, will quickly remove all difficulties, especially if you come here yourself with two or three of our Sisters.'

The same optimistic tone is to be found in his next letter. The Board of Governors are quite satisfied with the Angers regulations ; the nursing Sisters, and the servants, will obey the Superioress out of fear lest they may be dismissed. Apart from the patients, there is an old female employee, soon due to retire, and four or five pensioners living in the hospital ; it will be quite easy to arrange matters with the first and to send away the others after giving them back their money. Six Sisters were needed, but they would not insist on that point, and three would do to make a beginning. So far there was no serious obstacle on the horizon, and when Father Portail learned from Paris that the three Sisters for Mans were to be Joan Lepeintre, Claude and Andrea, he was so delighted that he wrote to say there could not have been a better selection.[56] Everything then was going well, and the decision taken to send an additional Sister must have filled his cup of happiness to the brim.

Saint Vincent expressed a wish to see the four travellers on May 3,[57] the eve of their departure, to give them a few words of advice, and Mlle Le Gras added some of her own in writing : ' Sister Joan Lepeintre,' she begins,[58] ' will bring to Mans a heart filled with charity both for the sick poor and the Sisters she is taking with her, as well as for those whom she may find there.' Then follows a series of counsels on their relations amongst themselves and with those with whom they may be brought into contact : the nursing Sisters, the Governors and the Superior of the Missionaries. Saint Vincent's chief preoccupation was the choice of a confessor, and he wrote to Father Portail to select ' a most

[56] *Archives of the Daughters of Charity.*
[57] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 587.
[58] *Thoughts of Louise de Marillac*, p. 214.

spiritual, elderly and prudent' man who would be satisfied with 'continuing the method of spiritual guidance suitable to them.' He added: 'No one but him shall speak to the Sisters, save in a passing way, and he shall speak to them only in Church.'[59]

It does not seem as if Father Portail's optimism was shared in Paris, for they were well aware that the chief inhabitants of the town were not favourable to the Sisters taking charge of the hospital, and this could not fail to make them feel uneasy. On May 2, Mlle Le Gras wrote:[60] 'As far as I can see, we shall need to pray hard for this establishment.' Father Portail at last began to see that the difficulties would not be settled so easily, and his letters began to show some doubts as to the successful issue of the negotiations. On May 25, she wrote to him: 'If Providence does not wish to have them in Mans, then our Sisters in Angers will be delighted for I think the Board of Governors there are determined to ask for four more.'[61]

Whilst waiting for the matter to be arranged, the Sisters in Mans were left unemployed, and, at length, on June 1, Father Portail wrote to Paris to say that all negotiations had been broken off. 'Here at last, Mademoiselle, are your dear Daughters on their way back to see you once again, in accordance with your orders! I think that they are no less laden with merits by their forced inactivity here than if they had performed heroic deeds. Even if they had done nothing else than to have preached by their modesty and equanimity in the midst of tempests, the time and money spent on their journey would not have been wasted, especially as God will know, in His own good time, how to pay interest on it to the great advantage of . . . all your little Company.' Those opposed to the Sisters had spread all sorts of rumours about them through the town. It was said that young Sisters in the novitiate in Paris were shipped off to Canada and married to Red Indians to propagate the true religion there; and these rumours were all the more distressing as there were several young girls from Mans in the Mother-House. The

[59] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 588.
[60] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 213.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

state of mind of their families can well be imagined. 'The only thing to be done,' wrote Father Portail, 'is for them to write and deny it, and to say how happy they are with their lot.'[62]

Saint Vincent resigned himself all the more easily to this disappointment as another hospital, that of Nantes, had asked for six Sisters. The first request came from Marshal de la Meilleraye's chaplain, and this was followed by a letter from the three principal members of the Governing Body who pledged themselves to enter into a contract similar to that of Angers.[63] The Sisters for the new foundation were selected at a council held on June 28. 'We have now,' said Saint Vincent, 'to consider who shall be the three Sisters to be sent to Nantes.[64] Mademoiselle proposes, in the first place, Sister Elisabeth of Liancourt or Sister Barbara, who is now in the Foundling Hospital, as Sister Servant; which of the two do you consider, Sister, to be the more suitable?' All voted for Sister Elisabeth. 'And in case, my Daughter,' he went on, 'we cannot have her, do you think Sister Barbara should be sent?' Here again, all agreed. When this point had been settled, Mlle Le Gras submitted a list of six Sisters to accompany Sister Elisabeth Martin. This, too, was agreed on. The next council was held on July 5 and, at Saint Vincent's request, Elisabeth Martin was sent for and on her appearance, was welcomed by him with a fatherly smile. 'Pray sit down, Sister Elisabeth,' he said, 'why did you come here?'

'To do the will of God.'

'Very well,' he replied, and turning towards his assistant, Father Alméras, he said, 'do you wish for anything more?'

Looking at Sister Elisabeth, he went on: 'Blessed be God, my Daughter, that you came here to do His will! You have now a great opportunity of doing it, as a new foundation of your Company is about to be made in one of the most famous cities of the Kingdom, where they will take charge of a hospital, and divine Providence has chosen you to be the

[62] These letters of Father Portail are in the Sisters' Archives.

[63] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 591. See the contract in the Arch. Nat., S. 6,172.

[64] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 600–601.

Sister Servant.' Sister Elisabeth was distressed, and expressed her surprise at being chosen for such an important post. After a fairly prolonged deliberation on the Sisters who should act as her advisers, Saint Vincent asked : ' What shall we give Sister Elisabeth for her journey ? Everyone should make her a present.' And, turning to one of the Sisters, he said :

' Come now, Sister, what virtue have you to give her ? '

Each of them offered a gift ; one said, the love of God ; another, charity towards God, the poor and the Sisters ; a third, humility ; a fourth, patience in adversity ; Mlle Le Gras, friendly toleration with her fellow-Sisters. Father Alméras hesitated ; he had first thought of charity, and then patience, but as he had been anticipated in both of these, he selected a gay patience, cheerful and even joyous with the joy produced by the certainty that one is suffering because, and as, God wishes one to suffer. Saint Vincent concluded : ' So there, my Daughter, you have plenty of riches, of which I wish you an abundance. But what I most particularly desire for you is the accomplishing of the will of God ; which does not consist merely in carrying out what your Superiors prescribe, although . . . that is a sure way of doing it, but also in responding to all the interior movements God sends us.' When the Council was over, he gave his blessing, and then remembered that he had forgotten to speak about the confessor. His own candidate was M. des Jonchères, formerly Lieutenant General of Nantes, but now a priest, who had the kindness to offer his services in case they were needed. ' Consider, my Daughter,' he said, ' if it is fitting that he should be their ordinary confessor, or if the ordinary confessor should be some other priest ; and that they should only go from time to time to him, for he is a remarkably good man, a man of prayer, and most friendly to your Company.'[65] This proposal was also adopted.

Mlle Le Gras set off by coach with eight Sisters : Frances Noret, her travelling companion ; Elisabeth Turgis, who was returning to her post in Richelieu, and the Sisters intended for Nantes, namely, Elisabeth Martin, Superioress, Claude, Margaret Noret, Catherine Bagart, Perette, de

[65] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 611–617.

Sedan, and Antoinette Larcher. At Saint Vincent's request, she wrote an account of their journey, which is still extant.[66] She salutes, on the way, the angel guardians of the places through which they pass, venerates the patrons of the churches she sees, and, from the coach, adores the Blessed Sacrament ; wherever the coach stops, she goes to the church to pray, and to the hospitals to speak of God to the sick. At Orleans, she takes ship, sleeps at Meung-sur-Loire, bids good-bye at Port d'Ablevoie to Sister Turgis, who goes on to Richelieu, remains in Tours for six hours which she spends in visiting places of devotion and the parents and friends of Sisters from that city. At Saumur, she makes a pilgrimage to Notre Dame des Ardilliers, and at Ponts-de-Cé, the innkeeper proposes to kill some fowl for dinner but Mademoiselle refuses, as it is Thursday, and what remained over might possibly be served up on Friday. The innkeeper grew furious, and drove out the Sisters who were given hospitality by a surgeon's wife. They remained at Angers from Friday to Monday arriving at Nantes on Wednesday, August 8, where they were accorded a magnificent or rather a triumphal reception. On disembarking, they were met by a large deputation of ladies, ecclesiastics and citizens who accompanied them to the Church of the Ursuline nuns, where they prayed to God to bless their sojourn in that city and were then conducted to the house of Mademoiselle des Rochers. Afterwards, a carriage arrived to bring them to Saint Roch's Hospital, where a private room had been prepared for Mlle Le Gras who, however, declined it, preferring not to be separated from her companions.

The Governors themselves introduced the Sisters into the hospital telling them that the whole place was under their control ; every precaution had been taken to facilitate their work ; the maids had been dismissed and the chaplain who was also Master of the hospital, had been replaced by M. des Jonchères. Word had gone round the city and suburbs that the Sisters had come, and there was not a single lady of rank or a superior of a religious community who did not wish to see them. Nuns, unable to leave the cloister,

[66] It has been reproduced in the *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 261 ff.

begged their lady friends to bring the new arrivals to the convents, and their wishes were gratified.

On the day after their arrival, the Sisters set to work ; they cleaned and tidied up the hospital, put aside all unserviceable articles and concealed such as should not be seen ; the wards were rapidly transformed and order and cleanliness everywhere charmed the eye. Crowds began to come in, and when the hour for dinner arrived they were so large that even the Sisters themselves were unable to reach the patients' beds and tables. A new method of organisation, that of the Confraternity of Charity, was obviously required ; ladies of rank and position in Nantes had long been accustomed to visit the hospital taking with them abundant supplies of food. Mlle Le Gras told them of the Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris, explained the rules of the Confraternity which she asked them to adopt, and this was unanimously agreed on.

Her letters to Paris kept Saint Vincent fully informed of all that was happening in Nantes ; they show how pleased she was at the good results obtained, and how disturbed at the honours with which she was laden. ' If your charity,'[67] she wrote on August 11, ' only knew how the guidance of God is assisting us, how grateful it would be ! I know not what will happen to this foundation in which, so far, I have seen no thorns, save a little fault-finding by some but, on the other hand, the general applause is so great as to be unbelievable.' On August 22, she wrote : ' I blame your charity a little for the honours that are being paid me here. In the name of God, do not deceive anybody in future about me. I am looked upon as a great lady. . . . Oh ! how I shall burn one day, and how I shall be humiliated.'[68] She realised that there were not enough Sisters and, in October, two more were sent ; Mary and Henrietta Gesseaume, the latter an experienced and clever pharmacist.[69]

The house at Nantes which had begun so happily was destined later to prove a house of crosses and trials and, perhaps, no house caused Saint Vincent and Mlle Le Gras

[67] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 6.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[69] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 276.

more anxiety. The first source of trouble was that the Superioress and the confessor did not see eye to eye on the question of spiritual direction ; she considered his methods not sufficiently in harmony with the customs of the Community. Each had partisans, both within and without the hospital, and the Sisters themselves were divided. Passions were aroused ; calumnies were disseminated, and scandal was the natural outcome. ' Tell our Sisters,' wrote Mlle Le Gras,[70] ' that people in Nantes are clamouring about them, more than they can possibly imagine, and in regard to matters of great importance ; but it is the Evil One who is playing this game and he shall not win, provided they come together and solidly unite around the Cross, like chickens around their mother, when the owl is lying in wait for them.'[71] A few days later, she added : ' Slanders and calumnies cannot be entirely prevented but must be endured, for Our Master lived and died in the greatest peace amidst calumniators.'

As division amongst the Sisters still persisted, the Superiors in Paris resolved to apply the best remedies at their disposal and a double visitation was decided on ; one by Sister Joan Lepeintre and the other by Father Lambert aux Couteaux. Moreover, both Saint Vincent and Mademoiselle Le Gras wrote to the little community at Nantes : ' I never think of you,'[72] he wrote, ' and of the happiness you have of being Daughters of Charity, and of being the first to be employed in the assistance of the poor, where you now are, without feeling consoled. But, when I hear it said that you are living like true daughters of God, that is to say, like true daughters of Charity, this increases my consolation to such a degree that only God Himself could make you realise it. Continue, my dear Sisters, and perfect yourselves more and more in your holy state.' He then enumerates the reasons they have for making themselves more and more worthy of the benefit of their holy vocation, and goes on to examine the objections that might occur to them. ' I willingly put up with . . . externs . . . but I cannot, I cannot endure that my own Sisters who should be a consolation to

[70] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 316. [71] *Ibid.*, p. 320.
[72] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 174.

me, are a cross, a punishment and an affliction, and are so in all that they say, and do, and don't do.' Still less, 'the pain and annoyance I receive . . . from our Sister Servant,—her coldness, disagreeableness, and taciturnity; she never utters a gracious word and, when she does speak, always makes some dry and peevish remark; now, I cannot stand that, and this it is which causes me to seek for consolation from some other Sisters, who experience the same annoyance as myself, which makes me converse as much as possible with my confessor and tell externs of my troubles.' He showed quite clearly, although indirectly, that he was thoroughly well informed as to the causes that were producing discontent amongst the Sisters at Nantes. Mlle Le Gras received his letter, read it, and was moved to tears. 'Oh Sisters!' she said in her own letter,[73] 'the gentleness of his style, the remarks which he has made about the graces God has granted you and us, and the instruction which his charity has given in such a gracious manner, have given me such a fright as to render me unable to express it, when I remember how often God has warned us through him of our obligations, how often he has observed and wished to forget our faults and failings, how he has never grown weary of encouraging us, and of taking the most fatherly care of us, taking as much pains in that respect as if we were really persons of the greatest merit.' She proceeded: 'Sister Joan Lepeintre is going to you on the part of M. Vincent, and I think his charity would have sent myself if I had recovered sufficient strength since my last illness; and do you know why? . . . In order to learn from your own lips the disposition of your minds, and what can be the source of the little troubles that have appeared in your Company, and how the cockle has been introduced which seems to be choking the good grain.'

Sister Joan Lepeintre had a delicate mission to fulfil and of this Saint Vincent was fully aware, for he said, in her presence, at the Council held on June 20, 1647, 'Now Sister Joan Lepeintre would need four spirits for this business, and if she could bring away with her the spirit of Mademoiselle Le Gras, she would gladly do so; is not that true, my

[73] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 296.

Daughter?'[74] Joan Lepeintre and Lambert aux Couteaux gave a careful and prolonged study to the causes of the trouble on the spot, and as a result of their enquiries three Sisters were removed and the confessor changed.[75]

Peace was restored for a time, but not for long, for, in the month of April, 1649, when Saint Vincent was passing through Nantes he found his Daughters in tears and filled with anxiety. The Town Council, the Chapter and the Presidial Court[76] had met to take cognisance of charges brought against them, such as theft of the property of the poor and other grave accusations; an enquiry had been held, and they had been unanimously proclaimed innocent. But the Bishop, Gabriel de Beauvau de Rivarennes, continued to be hostile, and had recommenced the enquiry with a secret desire to find them guilty, and to procure their dismissal. Saint Vincent held a canonical visitation, saw the principal inhabitants of the city, and, in *tête-à-tête* conversations, strove to dispel prejudices,[77] but in this he was only partly successful for, as we may see from the letters that followed his departure, the possibility of dismissal still remained.[78] The Sisters would, without doubt, have regarded this solution as a deliverance, but Vincent de Paul was all in favour of patience. His letter to Joan Lepeintre, dated February 23, 1650, lets us see some of the annoyances which the Sisters had to endure. 'If the entry of young men into your kitchen,' he wrote, 'is a necessary evil, it must be supported, for the love of God, Who permits it; if it can be avoided, it will be necessary to wait until the Fathers have seen to it. You say that a spy has been set on you and that he causes you annoyance. I confess that that is annoying, but after the effort you have made to rid yourself of this slavery, you must have patience. Alas! my child, I do not know who is without a watcher; the greatest have them even in their very rooms, and this wretched state of

[74] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 643.
[75] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 214.
[76] *Presidial:* the name of a civil and criminal Court of first instance, created by Henry II in 1551, and suppressed in 1792.
[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 430–433.
[78] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 417.

affairs is so great in the world at the present day that almost as many persons as we see are so many spies, and from this we should draw the moral that we should always act with great reserve, and in the presence of God.'[79]

The year 1651 passed off quietly, but Saint Vincent, in his letters to Joan Lepeintre, happy to announce that calm had followed on the storm, replied that here below calm is never certain : ' We need to love Our Lord profoundly and, with that, to hold ourselves ready to suffer other difficulties and new dangers. Man's state is never the same ; he is brought low and then exalted ; sometimes in peace and sometimes persecuted ; to-day enlightened and illuminated, to-morrow plunged in darkness ; what are we to do ? Be prepared, as I have said, for whatever may befall ; when we suffer, let us hope that God will deliver us and when He treats us graciously, let us acquire a stock of patience and meekness to be made good use of when troubles come.'[80] He spoke as a wise man and a prophet for the relative calm of the years 1651 and 1652 had ended before August 20, 1653, as we learn from a letter to Joan Lepeintre of that date : ' I am deeply afflicted by what is happening amongst the Sisters. It is providing the world and the Evil One with a good opportunity of vanquishing both you and them. May God forgive the men and women who are causing this division ! When you are left in peace from without, you make war within. Oh ! what a pity ! I know well that it is not your fault, and that it is not due to you that the state of misunderstanding continues. I have requested Father Alméras to go and see you in order to remedy this state of affairs.'[81]

Father Alméras perceived that some changes were needed and suggested the recall of Sister Joan Lepeintre and two other Sisters ; he also requested that Sister Henrietta Gesseaume should be reprimanded, not without cause, for the freedom with which she talked to outsiders about the sayings and doings of her companions.[82] Sister Joan was succeeded by Sister Martha Trumeau. Before the three new

[79] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 615.
[80] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 279. [81] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 6.
[82] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 51 ; Vol. XIII, p. 680.

Sisters appointed to Nantes left for their destination they paid a visit to Saint Vincent, who thought it advisable to put before them, with the utmost frankness, the difficulties of the situation so that, being aware of the reefs and shoals, their attention might be concentrated on the means of avoiding them. 'The devil has been so powerful as to be able by his trickeries to produce discord amongst our Sisters, and you will remedy this by the concord and union that will reign among you. We must not be surprised that the devil has fought such a hard battle, because it is his usual method to direct his attacks especially against men and women who are serving God ; he attacks the holiest Companies because he hates them most.' The second source of danger came from some of the inmates. 'There are some ecclesiastics lodging in the hospital,' he continued, 'and it is rather hard to say how you should act towards them. Because they wish to be boarded differently from the way laid down by the fathers of the poor,[83] they blame the Sisters for not having the food they desire. Now, my Daughters, that is a little bit disagreeable, and this has been the source of the troubles and disorder. But no matter what is said, and even if these ecclesiastics wish to have different and better food than the fathers of the poor have prescribed, do not interfere and do nothing contrary to the orders of the Superiors. Strive to be as kind as possible to these persons, and to satisfy them with words as best you can. If the fathers of the poor say to you : " Such a thing must be done ; " and if the priests want you to do something else, oh ! you must carry out the wishes of the fathers.'

It was not without some hesitation that he referred to a man whom he venerated, the Bishop of Nantes. 'He says that you make vows. If he speaks to you about this, tell him that you are not religious.' His remark is brief but beneath these words one feels that if he were not talking of a prelate he would have developed the topic at greater length.[84] The chief source of division amongst the Sisters was one of themselves, Henrietta Gesseaume, whose great gifts were spoiled by some glaring defects : an intriguing

[83] The Governors of the Hospital.

[84] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 658 ff.

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type of mind, great independence of character and a far too ready tongue. Of this Saint Vincent was quite well aware for, in one of his letters, he says : ' The house will never be at peace so long as she remains there ; she is the sort of person who upsets everything, is always opposed to the Superioress and leads others to act in the same way.' Saint Vincent would have removed her long before only that he was too well aware of the determinations of the Board of Governors not to let her go. However, the time came when he decided that it was essential and she was recalled. The Governors were highly irritated and, if one were to believe them, the terms of the contract had been triply violated : notice had not been given of her recall ; they would have to pay for her return journey to Paris and finally, Sister Henrietta had received word to leave before the arrival of a substitute, whom they demanded should have the same ability and experience. This being so, they declared Sister Henrietta should not leave.

The Superiors in Paris were distressed by this attitude and began to ask themselves whether it might not be better to terminate the contract and recall all the Sisters. The question was put at a Council held on April 8, 1655, at which Mlle Le Gras defended herself against the complaints of the Governors. It was true that, by an oversight, Sister Henrietta had not received the money for her return, but these very gentlemen, two years previously, had sent back two Sisters to Paris without defraying the expenses of the journey, as they were bound to do by the terms of the contract. So that they were, as a matter of fact, still in debt. As for want of sufficient notification, she had nothing to reproach herself with on that score, as she had requested the spiritual director of the Sisters to acquaint the Governors with her intentions in regard to Sister Henrietta. When she had finished her explanation, each of those present expressed their views about the recall. Mlle Le Gras and Father Alméras were in favour of it ; the three Assistants and Father Portail preferred to make another trial of the Governors' goodwill by writing and suggesting another Sister to replace Sister Henrietta ; in case the Governors refused, then the Sisters should withdraw. Saint Vincent wound up the

debate : 'You are all in favour of recalling our Sisters, and so am I ; but, not to omit anything whatsoever in a matter of such importance, I think it would be well to recommend the whole affair to God. . . . I think, Mademoiselle, that it would be a good thing if you went to Holy Communion, and you too, Sisters, so that we may obtain from Our Lord the graces we stand in need of in this matter. We will also say Holy Mass with that intention and, furthermore, it would be well to make our morning prayer on it, and to reflect carefully if it be expedient for God's glory to recall our Sisters ; and at the next meeting, each of us will express our views.'[85]

This was, obviously, the wiser course and, although we have not an account of what happened at the next meeting, we do know that the spirit of conciliation prevailed. Mlle Le Gras sent Sisters and money ; the Governors allowed Sister Henrietta to leave and the Superioress, Mary Martha Trumeau, was replaced by Sister Nicolas Haran. This was the last crisis.[86] On May 22, Mlle Le Gras wrote : 'I have great hopes of our house at Nantes because persecution is one of the marks of the value of a work.' The persecution had lasted long enough and a new and lasting era of peace had begun.

The house at Nantes had been in existence for barely three months when another request for a foundation reached Saint Vincent ; two Sisters were required for the Charity at Fontainebleau, and it was Anne of Austria herself who had asked for them. Barbara Angiboust set off with Anne Scoliège, who was soon replaced by Sister Margaret ;[87] each of these had in turn taken charge of the school for girls whose number reached seventy on March 3, 1647.[88] The Queen, who was the foundress of this new establishment, only too often forgot that it could not subsist without her help ;[89] she gave nothing whatever from 1651 to 1653, and subsequently showed herself to be very stingy, if we may judge

[85] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 687 ff.
[86] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, pp. 709–710.
[87] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 17.
[88] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 355.
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 603.

from Mlle Le Gras' cry of distress in a letter dated, November 20, 1657.[90] This neglect explains why, instead of recommending her Daughters at Fontainebleau to shun the society of the great, she recommended them to see and beg from them on behalf of their poor, and even to regard themselves as fortunate because they could be admitted to the Queen's presence. ' If Her Majesty wishes to speak to you,' she wrote to the Sister Servant,[91] ' make no difficulty about doing so, though the respect you owe her person may render you timid about approaching her. Her virtue and charity inspire even the humblest with confidence to state their needs ; above all, do not fail to tell her of the needs of the poor in accordance with the truth. There is no need, my dear Sisters, for me to recommend you to be modest and reserved when dealing with these great folk ; I know you think highly of those virtues ; but all the same, do the best you can for your poor.'

It was also in response to the Queen's demands that a house was founded, in 1647, at Chantilly which was intended to relieve the poor of this locality and of three neighbouring villages.[92] Here, as in Fontainebleau, the Sisters had to live on privations. In 1653, out of their grant of 200 livres, they received only 77 ; on October 24, 1654, they had got only 61, instead of the 172 due since January 1. They had not been able to pay the rent of their very humble little cottage for four years ; their furniture had just been seized, and was about to be put up for sale.[93]

The Daughters of Charity moved still farther north, but it was, so it would seem, without overmuch enthusiasm that Saint Vincent agreed to send two of his Sisters, Anne Hardemont and Mary Lullen, to Montreuil-sur-Mer, at the request of the Governor himself, Count Charles de Lannoi, to assist the ' bashful poor ' and to look after the sick and orphans in an hospice.[94] The greatest source of his uneasiness was the character of the Count, who was a very affable

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 886. [91] *Ibid.*, p. 708.

[92] For the regulations for the Sisters of Charity, written out by Sister Hellot, see Arch. Nat.

[93] *Thoughts of Louise de Marillac*, p. 194.

[94] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 629.

and expansive sort of man ; he foresaw that the Count would see the Sisters frequently, talk with them quite frankly, put them at their ease by his friendliness and pleasant manner, and that the Sisters, attracted by his familiarity and easy ways, might gradually come to deal with him on the same terms, and keep him fully informed on the various petty incidents of their domestic life, including their coolnesses, disagreements and little quarrels. It would be impossible for the Count, after such inevitable familiarity, to preserve the same esteem and veneration for the Sisters as he previously had ; he would regard them simply as women, just the same as any others, liable to the same faults, stirred by the same passions and, at the first opportunity, would send them away. A second source of danger, against which the Sisters would need to be on their guard, was the jealousy of those whom they were about to train or help. The hospital at Montreuil had a staff of nurses, as well as orphans and their teachers, and the sight of the new arrivals was bound to promote gossip and criticism, for their self-love had been touched to the quick by the Count's invitation to the Sisters, whose position was rendered still more delicate by the fact that there was no intention of giving them any real authority over those with whom they were to work.[95]

Vincent de Paul had all this in mind when, on June 20, 1647, Anne Hardemont and Mary Lullen called on him to receive his advice. ' Sisters,' he said, referring to the Count de Lannoi, ' he will open out his whole heart to you and will tell you everything ; and what you have to do is to listen with the utmost respect and to keep him fully informed as to what happens in your establishment. But never complain to him about one another, and let him always see that a good understanding exists between you. . . . I cannot sufficiently recommend respect and discretion in his regard. . . . Great care should be taken to please and edify him, and you should listen to what he may tell you to do as if it came from God.' He then went on to speak of the schoolmistresses : ' They should be treated with the greatest graciousness and cordiality, and all things should be endured at their hands. . . . You should enter into their

[95] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 635 ff.

minds and feelings and reflect that, if they are not embittered, they are at any rate deeply hurt. Hence you should patiently endure whatever their grief and resentment may lead them to do or say about you. Wherever one goes, there is always a drop of bitterness in the cup and this must be swallowed, and we must make up our minds to face the fact.'

Anne Hardemont and her companion left Paris, on June 26, 1647, without receiving Saint Vincent's blessing, for he was then at Fréneville,[96] but they carried away with them the memory of his wise advice, and written instructions from Mlle Le Gras.[97]

Rooms had been prepared for them in the hospital at Montreuil, where they found a certain number of patients and orphans, as well as a staff of nurses and teachers, both jealous and uneasy, who were to be trained and supervised although the Sisters had not been given any authority over them. It was undoubtedly a difficult and unpleasant task, and was rendered all the more so when the Governors, thinking to remedy the state of disorder, appointed a Superioress of their own.[98] The Sisters humbly submitted to the woman placed over them, but freedom to apply their methods, follow their rules, and fulfil in a fitting manner the mission that had been entrusted to them, suffered from this measure. Their duties were not restricted to the sick and school-children ; they had also to take charge of the base-court and the stable ; it is probable that they soon managed to get rid of this latter duty. Teaching catechism was also one of their duties, and all the inmates of the hospital were bound to attend ; on Sundays, the grown girls of the town were also accustomed to assist.[99]

The consolations afforded the Sisters by their labours for the sick and the school-children helped to compensate for the annoyances they had to endure from other quarters. ' Our Sisters at Montreuil are working wonders,'[100] Mlle Le Gras wrote, ' and the Count is most pleased.' She put them on their guard, in her letters, against ' the applause of all the

[96] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 206, 208.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[98] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 1085.
[99] *Ibid.*, p. 1087. [100] *Ibid.*, p. 322.

people.' The situation in regard to the old staff of the hospital became so acute that it was necessary to withdraw the Sisters. On May 9, 1650, Saint Vincent wrote to Sister Anne to return to Paris with her companion : ' The very slight extent of harmony that has so far been established with the former Community of the hospital,' he says in the first few lines, ' gives us reason to fear lest you may not find sufficient peace there, and hence we have thought it expedient . . . to withdraw you.'[101]

The house at Chars, established, at the request of Madame de Herse, in the same year as that at Montreuil, lasted seven or eight years longer. When the Marchioness of O died, in 1651, Chars fell under the control of the Duke of Luynes, one of the most determined supporters of Port-Royal.[102] Under his influence, Jansenism was firmly implanted ; a Jansenist ecclesiastic was appointed parish priest and, shortly afterwards, the Oratorians of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, who were also attached to the doctrines of the party, established a house of residence in Chars. The Sisters had a good confessor, but the parish priest removed him and took his place. He did not pay the slightest attention to the Sisters' rules and recognised no other system of direction than that of ' the New Church ' : excessively detailed examination of conscience, repeated general Confessions, suppression of weekly Confession even when one of the great Church festivals fell on a weekday, prohibition to accuse oneself of sins already forgiven ; permission to the faithful in the state of grace to go to Holy Communion once a week whilst remaining away, for months at a time, from the Sacrament of Penance, on the pretext that it is superfluous to accuse oneself of venial sins ; and, along with all that, public penances, such as interdicting the faithful from entering the church, and the refusal of Holy Communion at the altar-rails. The Sisters were threatened with the first and had to submit to the second. The parish priest's demands were not confined to sacramental practices. He ordered the Sisters to flog a little girl aged eleven or twelve,

[101] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 1084.

[102] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 733 ff. ; *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, Appendix, Letters 527 (B) and 529 (B.)

which they refused to do, and to admit to the Hôtel-Dieu, where they lodged, and to provide with food, drink and sleeping accommodation all persons of either sex whom he might send there. The Oratorians went into the Sisters' apartments whenever they pleased, even during community exercises, and remained there as long as they liked. This resulted in vexatious discussions, and the sound of their voices could sometimes be heard out in the street. The Jansenistic rigidity of the clergy at Chars was confined, as we may see, to points of doctrine ; a more austere type of virtue and a more gracious form of charity would have been more to the point.

Saint Vincent showed the utmost possible patience. He selected, on July 15, 1651, as Superioress of the house at Chars, Juliana Loret, a gentle, firm and prudent Sister who had been Mademoiselle Le Gras' right hand at the Mother-House.[103] For nearly two years she proved able to deal with the parish priest, but others were not quite so successful. It is true that the arrival of the Oratorians had rendered the situation more delicate, and when one of the Fathers denounced Sister Mary in the middle of the street, she replied with a certain amount of vivacity.[104] Although most of the fault was on the other side, she begged his pardon, at the request of Mlle Le Gras.[105] In 1657, relations became still more strained and both parties realised that the time for parting had come. Saint Vincent was still hesitating, chiefly because he did not wish to hurt Madame de Herse, when he learned that the Duke of Luynes had decided to dismiss the Sisters and replace them in the Hôtel-Dieu by persons who would be entirely at the disposal of the local clergy.[106] Saint Vincent submitted the question of their recall at a Council held on July 21 and, after all present had expressed their views, he wound up : ' I think that, as long as those ecclesiastics remain, there is nothing to be hoped for, and it is to be feared lest they

[103] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 679.
[104] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, Appendix, Letter 527 (B).
[105] *Ibid.*, p. 854.
[106] *Ibid.*, Appendix, Letter 527 (B).

might induce some of our Sisters to accept their opinions. Hence we must be prepared to leave this place.'[107]

Mlle Le Gras undertook to inform both the parish priest of Chars and Madame de Herse of this decision, and did so in two closely reasoned letters as firm as they were respectful in tone.[108]

The Sisters at Valpuiseaux lead a much more tranquil existence than those at Chars. They went there in 1648; at any rate, that is the year when we first come across them at Valpuiseaux where they carried on the usual works of the Charities: visiting the sick and conducting a school for little girls.[109] Saint Vincent used to see them whenever he went to take a little rest at his farm in Fréneville; he wrote from there, on February 4, 1649, to Mlle Le Gras: 'Our dear Sisters seem to me to be more and more united, to love their vocation more dearly and to carry out its duties more efficiently, thanks be to God. They give us some of their brown bread, in which the farmer mixes barley with his corn; this is a proof of their charity and we, in return, give them wheat. They have also sent us apples given them by these good people.'[110] In 1652, fear inspired by the passage of the armies obliged them to leave their residence, but they made themselves useful by nursing the sick and wounded, and when peace was restored, returned home utterly exhausted. 'I beg you, Sisters,' wrote Saint Vincent to them,[111] 'to do everything in your power to keep in good health. Mademoiselle Le Gras is sending you, to that end, syrups and drugs, and I myself am asking the poor widow of the late Peter Charpentier to supply you with whatever money you need. I beg you to spare nothing that will contribute to your recovery. We would send a Sister to help you, but you know the state of the roads.'

Montmirail, like Valpuiseaux, had two Sisters whose quarters were in the hospital. In 1650, Joan Baptist and

[107] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 736.
[108] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 639, 640; *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, Appendix, Letters 527 (B) and 529 (B).
[109] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 397.
[110] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 405.
[111] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 409.

Nicolas Haran were sent there from Paris and, in all probability, were the first, as there is no mention of this establishment in any previous document.[112] The advice given them on this occasion by Saint Vincent was shared by two other groups of travellers: Martha Dauteuil, Frances Ménage and Louise Michel, who were going to Nantes, and Anne Hardemont and Genevieve Doinel, who had been selected for the hospital at Hennebont, in Brittany.

It was in response to an appeal from Louis Eudo de Kerlivio, the Vicar General of the diocese, that the two Sisters were setting out for Hennebont where there was, in fact, enough work for three and accordingly, they had to avail themselves of the services of a maid until April, when a Sister arrived from Paris.[113] In the course of the year 1653, Saint Vincent, seeing that the Sisters even then were overworked, requested Sister Joan Lepeintre, the Superioress at Nantes, to send a Sister to help those at Hennebont. The Governors had other ideas, and great was their displeasure when they learned that one of their best Sisters, Martha Dauteuil, had left for Hennebont without previously informing them. In order to have her back, all measures, even calumny, seemed lawful to them, and they wrote to the Governors of the hospital at Hennebont demanding the return of Sister Martha together with, as they said, all the various articles which she had concealed and carried away with her.

The authorities in Brittany were perturbed by these charges, and the Superioress had to appear before the Town Council to hear the letter from Nantes read; when invited to comment on it, she said with a smile: 'Gentlemen, Sister Martha is a good servant of God and of the poor; she did not even take a farthing with her, not even her little articles of clothing; her entire wealth consisted of some medicines which she left with the sick in Nantes. If you are as keen on your hospital as those gentlemen in Nantes are on theirs, you will be just as determined to keep her here as they are to have her back. She came here out of charity; do not send her away.' At these words, the Town Councillors perceived

[112] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 677.
[113] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 531.

the trick that was being played on them, and one of them said : ' Do not worry, Sister, these gentlemen shall have the answer they deserve.' Sister Martha remained, but if she was loved by the people, the doctors were not so enthusiastic for she deprived them of a number of their patients. When visiting the poor, if she met with a poor sick man or woman unable to walk, she used to carry them on her back to the hospital. One day she came across two men who were fighting and, at the risk of being beaten herself, interposed ; they followed her to a place where a statue of the Blessed Virgin stood, all three knelt down and, at Martha's request, the men asked each other's pardon and promised to live in future as good friends.[114]

When Father Berthe, a Vincentian, visited the house at Hennebont, in 1657, he was much struck by Martha's great qualities, and wrote to Paris to say :[115] ' She could not be sufficiently esteemed. She satisfies both those inside and outside the hospital to such a degree that she is the refuge of all the poor who need assistance. She is marvellously energetic, but what I esteem most in her is her charity, generosity and courage, her prudence, skill and her love for her vocation.'

In 1652, a house was also established at Brienne-le-Château, thanks to the generosity of the Countess of Brienne, who was a Lady of Charity.

Hitherto the Sisters had not gone beyond the confines of France, but the moment had now come when its frontiers opened to let them pass. Poland and Madagascar were calling out for them. Saint Vincent said to the Sisters, on July 14, 1650 : ' I do not know if it has ever happened that a single one of you refused to go where she was sent ; no, I certainly don't know that. . . . But I do know . . . my Daughters, that you are being asked for in a place six hundred leagues away from here, from which I have had letters ; yes, people are thinking about you more than six hundred leagues away ; and if Queens are asking for you there, I know of others, beyond the seas, who are also asking for you.'

[114] Obituary notice of Sister Martha Dauteuil in *Circulars of the Superiors General*, etc. Vol. II, p. 321.

[115] Arc. of the Sisters of Charity.

The Queen referred to was Louise Marie de Gonzague who wished to have near her, in Warsaw, Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity and Visitation Nuns. The Missionaries were the first to arrive, and reached Poland early in November, 1651. The Archbishop of Paris intervened to prevent the departure of the Visitandines, and indirectly that of the Daughters of Charity, but, at length, in the Autumn of 1652, all was ready for the departure of the Sisters. On September 5, Saint Vincent told Margaret Moreau, Magdalen Drugeon and Frances Douelle to hold themselves in readiness to leave on the following day. 'How very few women and maidens,'[116] he said, 'have received the mission to do good to body and soul, to which you have been called to-day! In former times, that was the mission of a Saint Francis Xavier. . . . Oh! what a great vocation is yours, my dear Daughters! To bring forth saints—both men and women—to Christ in this new Kingdom where the faith is in grave peril, but well protected beneath the shadow of a glorious throne which will cover you. You will only succeed if you have the spirit of self-denial, if you place the glory of God before everything else, and if you preserve perfect union amongst yourselves. . . . What a great grace is that of your vocation! Who can express it? Not angels; only God Himself. I beseech His loving kindness to give you those great blessings which extend not from East to West, but from time to eternity, which will make you advance from virtue to virtue. Hold fast to your rules, as the snail does to its shell for it dies if it abandons it.'

The departure had been fixed for the 6th,[117] but was put off for a day. The Sisters went to Poland via the Baltic and Germany, and were received by the Queen in Lowicz Castle, some hours' journey from Warsaw. The Sisters made an excellent impression on her, and she wrote to Saint Vincent: 'Two days ago, your Daughters of Charity arrived . . . and they seem to be extremely good and kind.'[118] She gave them some time to become acquainted with the language and then

[116] Autograph 1056 of Louise de Marillac Collection (Arch. Sisters of Charity).

[117] An uncompleted note of Mlle Le Gras (Arch. Sist. Char.).

[118] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 487.

sent for them : ' Sisters,' she said, ' there are three of you here ; I wish to have one of you with me always ; I mean you, Sister Margaret, and the other two will go to Cracow to serve the poor.' The idea of remaining at Court, separated from her companions, distressed Sister Margaret, who replied : ' Oh ! Madame, what are you saying ? There are only three of us here to serve the poor, and you have many persons in your Kingdom far more capable of serving Your Majesty than we are ! Grant us permission, Madame, to do here what God demands of us, just as we do elsewhere.' The Queen, who was not expecting such opposition, said : ' What ! Sister, you do not wish to serve me ! '—' Pardon me, Madame,' replied Margaret Moreau, ' but God has called us to serve the poor.'[119] The Queen kept two of the Sisters with her at Lowicz, and the third was sent to a place some eighty leagues distant to open a school. She found her pupils so well disposed that even then, in their simple ardour, they spoke of becoming Daughters of Charity.[120]

The Queen frequently saw the two Sisters who had remained behind at Lowicz, and even spent whole days in their society when they talked of Poland and France, of M. Vincent and Mlle Le Gras. The conversation on one occasion, turned on the Foundling Hospital, and the Queen remarked : ' You ought to be very pleased to have charge of that good work, because good Daughters of Charity may come from it.'[121] ' Pardon me, Madame,' said Sister Margaret quite spontaneously, ' our Company is not composed of such persons ; only virgins are admitted.'

When all danger from the plague was over, the Court returned to Warsaw, and the three Sisters followed. Their house, which was situated quite close to that of the Vincentian Fathers, became a refuge for all unfortunate persons sent there by the Queen or, rather, by Mlle de Villers, one of her Maids of Honour. They mention, in one of their letters, that they had seven lodgers : a mother and daughter, both very difficult to manage, who had been confined there by higher command with express orders not to leave the

[119] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 588.
[120] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 608.
[121] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IX, p. 589.

building unless accompanied by one of the Sisters; some little girls; two little boys, about five years old, one of whom was already well advanced in vice; a few persons suffering from ringworm; and lastly a few patients who were suffering from having indulged in the basest passions. There was no visitation of the sick, as there were no poor outside, so the Sisters were reduced to keeping watch and ward over this strange assortment of children, adults, sick and healthy, vicious and virtuous. They gradually began to grow very tired of it, and it was suggested to them that they should return to France. They preferred to lay the whole state of affairs before Saint Vincent, and to await his reply: 'Our greatest annoyance,' they wrote 'is that we have nothing whatever to do, and this gives us much reason for humbling ourselves and for often reflecting on the kind words you spoke to us when we were about to leave you chiefly on, humility, charity and union and, above all, amongst the three of us. . . . We may truthfully say that the union that exists amongst us three is such that the three are only one.'[122]

The Sisters, in this difficult situation, found no moral support, not even from the Queen. Instead of giving them a few words of encouragement, she only reprimanded them and took care that her criticisms should reach Paris. 'I confess,' she wrote to Saint Vincent,[123] 'that I am not perfectly satisfied with one of those who are here, not indeed that she is not a good child, but she is rather too blunt and quick-tempered. Those who live with her find it hard to put up with her, as she is so unyielding; and every proposal made to her, except that of admitting children, offends her on each occasion; and you know charity should not be narrow. . . . I have no other desire than to see the money I have expended well employed; otherwise, I cannot continue to spend it as I have been doing.' She wound up her letter by saying that, as soon as possible, some other Sisters should be sent from France and, amongst them, one fit to be a Superior, and of such a pliable disposition as to be able to remain on good terms with Mlle de Villers. 'This lady,' she goes on, 'has been at Court for the last four years; not a

[122] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 602. [123] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 163.

single person has ever complained of her, and all have had experience of her charity. She has as much humility as could be desired in anyone.'

As we may see, the Sisters in Poland were not completely sheltered from trials, but they bore them all generously, sustained by the union that reigned among them. This union, however, ultimately suffered some slight relaxation, and then they began to be discouraged. Saint Vincent immediately intervened : 'You are Daughters of Charity,' he wrote,[124] 'but you will no longer be so if you live in a state of misunderstanding, aversion from and mistrust of each other. God forbid that such a state of affairs should exist amongst you ! It is a state characteristic of worldly women, whose minds and hearts have been badly trained, but the duty of Our Lord's daughters who live and labour together and who have only one idea, namely, that of making themselves pleasing to God, is to cherish, bear with, respect and help one another. I beseech you, my dear Sisters, to act in this way, never complaining of or murmuring against one another, never contradicting or hurting one another for, alas ! if you cause pain to one another, it would be the greatest of pities. You have enough to bear with from outsiders and from your employments without making new crosses for yourselves at home, for such crosses are the most painful of all, and they would turn your house into a little purgatory whereas love will make it a little Paradise.'

However, consolations and exhortations were not enough : it was essential to apply remedies capable of eradicating the evil, and to do so as rapidly as possible. The Queen had asked for three more Sisters and that in fact, was the real and best solution. Saint Vincent hoped to be able to send them with three of his Missionaries but unforeseen difficulties delayed the execution of his plan. Their departure, first fixed for the year 1654, then deferred to the spring of the following year, had to be put off again until summer.[125] In August, news from Poland was more reassuring, and the two groups set out for Rouen, from which they were to embark. Father Berthe was accompanied by two lay-

[124] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 167.
[125] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 185.

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brothers, and Sister Margaret Chétif, who had been appointed Superioress, had Magdalen Raportebled and Joan Lemeret as her companions. Mlle Le Gras wrote the following letter of introduction for Margaret Chétif to Father Ozenne, the Superior of the Mission at Warsaw. 'It is a great pity that the Sister Servant has not a better appearance for, if she had, I think she would not be lacking in any respect; my sole cause for anxiety is that she has not been accustomed to the atmosphere of a Court, or, indeed, to the amenities of worldly society. She goes on quite straightforwardly in her own way, although she is not wanting either in intelligence or judgement; she has as much prudence as she needs, and she knows how to use it in such a manner as to seem to be acting only with the greatest simplicity.'[126]

She also wrote to the Sisters at Warsaw and gave them excellent advice: 'You have always told me that there was only one heart amongst the three of you. . . . I beg you to enlarge it and to admit your three Sisters to this cordial union, so that there will be no sign of who were the three first or the three last. . . . Never speak Polish amongst yourselves without letting our Sisters know what you are saying; that will help them to learn the language more easily, and prevent certain inconveniences. . . . Let there be no secrets amongst yourselves and let all that goes on in the house amongst you six be a secret to outsiders.'[127]

All was ready for the embarkation when Father Berthe received a letter from Paris with orders for himself and his travelling companions to return;[128] the invasion of Poland by hostile armies had cut the lines of communication. Muscovites and Cossacks were advancing on Warsaw; the Court had fled, and the Sisters had followed it, first to Cracow and then to Silesia. The year 1655 went by without any change in the situation; so did 1656, but at last, in 1657, Polish troops reconquered the capital. During the siege,[129] the Sisters nursed the wounded, and when they returned to Warsaw set to work with an ardour that was

[126] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, pp. 727, 729.
[127] Arch. Sist. Charity.
[128] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, pp. 412, 417.
[129] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 326.

rendered all the more keen by the sight of the wretchedness and misery that lay around them.

As far back as 1654, the Queen had expressed her intention to purchase a house for the Sisters and their orphans, and this project, delayed by the political situation, was carried out in 1659. Saint Vincent did not let the occasion pass without expressing his gratitude to the Queen and thanked her, to use his own words, ' for having bought a splendid mansion in which poor girls will be educated by the Daughters of Charity.'[130] This ' splendid mansion ' was a vast building in the form of a square, with a large central courtyard, which in the course of time became, with its garden, courts, grounds and outhouses, the Institute of Saint Casimir, the Central House of the great Polish province. Here, as in their former house, the Sisters were frequently visited by the Queen. ' I have been told,' said Saint Vincent at a conference on June 24, 1660,'[131] ' that our Sisters in Poland have a house in which there are a large number of girls being educated ; and they are doing so in such an edifying way that, on the return of the King and Queen from a long journey, they expressed a wish to spend one whole day in this house, they were so delighted with it.' The Queen used to work with the Sisters, ' spinning and winding,' in their company, the thread needed ' to sew linen for the poor and for themselves.'[132] The coolness which had existed at first passed away, perhaps, because Mlle de Villers, who had died in 1658, was no longer there to act as an intermediary between the Queen and the Sisters. The disappearance of the Maid of Honour was very near having serious consequences for the Sisters. The Queen felt the need of having a Frenchwoman near her, at least when she was travelling and, as she enjoyed the society of Sister Margaret, she selected her. The Sister was amazed and asked permission to consult Paris. ' I was completely surprised,' she wrote to Mlle Le Gras, ' when the Queen told me that she wished me to accompany her whenever she goes on a very long journey. I did not know what to say to Her

[130] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 92.
[131] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 732.
[132] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 93.

Majesty except that I thought that she would not be making such long journeys in future, and now there is talk of her making one of about a hundred leagues.' And that was not all. The humble habit of a Daughter of Charity was not suitable for the companion of a Queen, and so Sister Margaret was invited to put on a special head-dress, to wear a kerchief round her neck, and to have her dress made of material of a superior quality. She took fright at the suggestion and began to fear lest she might allow herself to be overcome by the spirit of the world and lose her vocation if she were to live in a Court and dress differently to the other Daughters of Charity. 'If I had my choice,' she wrote, 'I would very much prefer, if God permitted me, to fall gravely ill than to be placed in such a dangerous position.' Along with her letter she sent two patterns of camlet, the material selected by the Queen for her dress.

On March 23, 1659, Saint Vincent submitted Sister Margaret's enquiries to a Council in the Mother-House. They did not spend very much time in deliberating, for it was admitted that the Queen, in virtue of her absolute power, had a right to what she had demanded. Moreover, the coif and neckerchief were necessary in Poland both because they were needed and expected ; needed, on account of the severe cold in winter and the excessive heat in summer; expected, because in accordance with the customs of the country, it was considered unbecoming for a woman to have her head and neck exposed. Such being the state of affairs, there was nothing left to be done but to bow to the Queen's demands. The camlet, however, was judged much too fine, and it was decided that a pattern of a material similar to that worn by the Sisters, but not so heavy, should be sent to Poland.[133]

We have no information as to whether Sister Margaret followed Louise Marie de Gonzague in her journeys from place to place, but what is quite certain is that the Queen was in Danzig on February 28, 1660, and that Sister Frances Douelle was with her. It was certainly with no light heart that Sister Frances responded to the kind attentions of her illustrious mistress, as may be seen from a letter to Mlle Le Gras in which she tells of her distress of

[133] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 668 ; Vol. XIII, pp. 747, 750.

mind, weariness and discouragement.[134] Saint Vincent, in the meantime, was constantly turning over in his mind the suggestion to send three additional Sisters to Poland ; the works there were developing ; the number of Sisters must be increased and, during his last illness, he was deeply preoccupied with this whole question. The Sisters selected in 1655 were no longer available and, in their stead, Sisters Barbara Bailly, Catherine Baucher and Catharine Gouy were chosen. On September 15, they were still in ignorance of what was going to happen, and Father Dehorgny, the Director of the Mother-House of the Daughters of Charity, approached Saint Vincent and said : ' So far nothing has been said to the three Sisters who are to go to Poland ; when should they be told ? '—' It is high time,' replied the dying old man, ' tell them to-day. The poor children are marvels of submission and pliability ; they will do whatever they are told.' Father Dehorgny proceeded to fulfil his commission and, on his return, said : ' Those who were told to be ready for Poland are quite prepared, and are only waiting to be told when they are to leave.' This reply filled the Saint's heart with joy. ' Tell them it will be on next Friday. Blessed be God Who has so disposed the heart of those children ! In Poland, Sisters of Charity ! And there they are, quite ready ! I must speak to them, and tell them exactly how they will find things there and, above all, I must tell them how they are to behave towards the King and Queen, the Priests of the Mission, the poor, the Sisters. . . .'[135] The Sisters left on the 17th and Saint Vincent died on the 27th. On his death-bed, no doubt he followed in spirit his children on their journey to Poland, the land he had loved so dearly, where the ashes of Father Lambert, the Missionary whom he had most admired, rested in peace.

To return to France. The Daughters of Charity continued to spread and, in 1652, Madame de Varize obtained two for a house in Varize. In 1653, the Hospital of the Holy Name of Jesus, of which we shall speak later, was opened,[136]

[134] Arch. Sist. Charity.

[135] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 181, 588.

[136] The first letter to mention this establishment is dated 1652. (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 425.)

and in 1654 foundations were made at La Roche-Guyon, Bernay and Châteaudun.

Three Sisters were sent to La Roche-Guyon to take charge of a school, to visit the sick, and to conduct a club for young girls.[137]

At Bernay, Madame de Brou was only able to offer the Sisters a very small and a very poor house,[138] which they left, in 1656, to take over the management of a new, large and splendid hospital, at the request of the local authorities.[139] Mlle Le Gras was rather nervous, at the new state of affairs ; first, because she feared lest the Sisters' love of simplicity and humility might gradually suffer a change in their fine surroundings, and second, lest the house to house visiting might be interfered with. ' What will happen to the Ladies of Charity,' she wrote to Sister Barbara Angiboust, the Superioress, ' if their sick poor are forced to go into hospital ? You will see that the bashful poor will be completely deprived of the assistance which they have hitherto received in the way of food and medicines, and whatever little money may be given them will not be spent on what they need. We are bound, as far as we can do so, to prevent such a state of affairs from arising by humble and charitable remonstrances.'[140] The Ladies of Charity still continued to visit the sick, but as the funds on which they had to draw came from the same source as those of the hospital, some friction arose between them and the Sisters. Mlle Le Gras had anticipated this vexatious result of defective organisation.[141] ' I am not surprised,' she wrote, ' at all your difficulties with the Ladies ; this is what usually occurs ; wherever hospitals are united with parish Confraternities of Charity there are disputes, without any fault on either side because each feels obliged to procure the advantage of those of whom they have charge.'

On June 11, 1654, Saint Vincent held a Council at which the three Sisters intended for the Hospital of Saint Nicholas at Châteaudun were to be elected.[142] When he had enumer-

[137] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, pp. 694, 704, 975.
[138] *Ibid.*, pp. 690, 769.
[139] *Ibid.*, pp. 779–780.
[140] *Ibid.*, p. 805.
[141] *Ibid.*, p. 903.
[142] *Special regulations for the Sisters at Châteaudun* and *Hints for Sisters at Châteaudun* will be found in the Arch. Nat., S. 6,164.

ated the qualities required in Sisters chosen for new foundations, Mlle Le Gras remarked that it would be difficult to find anyone so perfect. Her remark elicited the following charming reply : ' When Solomon had the Temple built, he had precious stones, emeralds, rubies, topazes and precious metals laid as a foundation. Now, Sisters, why were these beautiful stones not placed in the middle, or in the front, so that they could be seen ? Ah ! it is because when one wishes to erect a beautiful building, one must use the best stones. And so, Mademoiselle, it should always be regarded as a maxim that virtuous Sisters should be sent to new houses.' The majority voted in favour of Joan Lepeintre, who was present, and Saint Vincent then turned towards her and said : ' So it is you, Sister, who with the other two who have been appointed, have also been chosen by divine Providence, for you received the greatest number of votes. For that is the way, Sisters, we have been accustomed to act ; those who have most votes are selected. Very well, then ! Sister, will you be a precious stone ? Will you be a ruby or an emerald ? '

' Father,' she answered, ' I don't know what I shall be ; I am very much afraid I shall only be mud.'[143] She proved to be much better than that, though her conduct at Châteaudun was not absolutely blameless. Saint Vincent reproached her for having gone to Orleans without permission, to make some purchases, and for having nursed M. de Franqueville, in his last illness, contrary to the rules of the Company commanding Sisters to serve only the poor.[144]

Most of her troubles arose from the fact that the dormitory and the rooms assigned to the Sisters for meals and community exercises were most unsuitable. Anyone who liked was able to walk in, and the Sisters had to be constantly on their guard against insolent and unmannerly individuals who tried to force an entrance. The Governors of the Hospital promised to provide greater privacy, but seemed to be in no hurry to keep their promise. Sister Joan did not prove herself able to keep out interlopers and that, perhaps, is the reason of her recall. Sister Barbara Angiboust

[143] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 682 ff.
[144] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, pp. 675–677.

arrived from Brienne in her stead, and turned out to be a great success. No matter what the position of an intruder, she would take him by the arm and put him outside the door. To a priest, who showed some resistance, she said, quite moved : ' Oh ! Sir, do you really wish to enter a place where there are only girls ! ' One of the city fathers experienced the same treatment, but when one of the boys who served the priests of the hospital pushed in the door to light his candle and was put out by the Sister, he turned round and beat her.

Barbara's somewhat forcible methods at first produced a certain amount of surprise and even gossip, but criticism quickly gave place to admiration. The day on which she died was one of general mourning for the whole town. ' After her death,' one of her companions writes, ' the people came in crowds the whole day long to sprinkle holy water on her remains, and she looked so lovely that some persons asked me if she had been painted. All the gentlemen and the members of the Board were present at her funeral together with a great crowd of people, and they even touched her corpse with their rosary beads.'[145] Her account is moving in its simplicity. Sister Barbara had, indeed, fully earned all this regret and respectful veneration for, wherever she had been, the people preserved the most grateful recollections of her kindness and charity. One of the other places she had been was a house called Saint Mary of the Mount, at Bernay, in Normandy, founded in 1655, by the Duchess of Ventadour. The Sisters there lived as if they were in a desert. No posts or messengers passed anywhere near ; letters from or to Paris frequently went astray, and even when they did arrive it was only after a long delay, sometimes lasting as much as three months. Thanks to Sister Barbara's efforts,[146] the difficulties of communication were diminished, and this was all to the good as the Sisters at Saint Mary's were badly in need of encouragement. ' Their work seems to be most difficult,' wrote Mlle Le Gras. ' It is by works of this sort that one can show forth the fidelity one owes to God, and it seems to me that they have begun really well.'[147]

[145] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, pp. 675–677.
[146] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 720.
[147] *Ibid.*, Appendix, Letter 463 (B).

Following the chronological order, we next come to the 'Little Houses' at Paris (1665), the Hospital of La Fère (1656) and the Confraternity of Charity at Arras (1656). We shall deal with the first two houses later, and pause for a moment at the third.

A devout girl, sent by the Bishop of Arras and other distinguished personages of that city, arrived one day in Paris to lay before the officials of the Confraternity of the Hôtel-Dieu the wretched state of her fellow citizens, subject as they were to the depredations of the soldiery. Madame d'Aiguillon and the other Ladies were deeply touched, and communicated their emotion to Saint Vincent;[148] it was decided between them that two Sisters should be sent to Arras. Margaret Chétif and Radegonda Lenfantin received orders to prepare for the journey and, in conformity with custom, presented themselves before Saint Vincent for his blessing and advice before setting out. 'You have been asked to go there,' he told them, 'for a year, or six months, or perhaps for ever.' The people whom you will meet 'serve God faithfully, are very charitable . . . and are really kind and good.' Proposals would be set before them to establish a charity, either one for the whole city or, what is better, one for each parish. The first method was adopted in Beauvais; it did not succeed; the second was tried, and all went well. 'You will see what they propose, and you will tell them how you have been accustomed to work in other places.' If it is to be one for each 'parish, you should select the best one to begin with, on the advice of the Bishop, and then go on to another, just as you see how things go. Do not undertake the care of too many sick people at the same time and all together; eight or ten will be quite enough. You will act in all matters as you have been accustomed to act here.' Should any young girls wish to visit the poor with you, be satisfied with two: 'one for each Sister is quite enough.' They should not be admitted to your room whilst you are at prayer and your spiritual exercises. Be faithful to your rules unless called to serve the poor, for then: 'You are leaving God to find God.' After a few words on choosing a

[148] Notice on Sister Margaret Chétif in *Circulars of the Superiors General*, Vol. II, p. 473.

confessor, on Father Delville, a Vincentian Father residing in Arras, he went on to tell them that the road to success lay through charity and humility. ' Love the contempt . . . with which you may be treated. . . . If people say to you that you are taking the money of the poor, or that you do not give away all you receive for the poor, humble yourselves, for, if you were to wear a pearl necklace, there are some who would say that it was at the expense of the poor.'[149]

Cheered by this advice and also by the wise counsels given by Mlle Le Gras,[150] Sisters Margaret and Radegonda set out, on August 31, accompanied by the girl from Arras,[151] who was badly able to endure the hardships of the road, fell ill of a fever and reached Amiens with the greatest difficulty. They had to rest there and, after a fortnight, the girl died. The Sisters, now left entirely to themselves, felt much embarrassed when they reached their destination, for they had no idea where they were to be lodged. A charitable woman put them up for a fortnight but, in the following weeks, they had to go from door to door begging for food and a night's lodging. ' We found,' Sister Radegonda relates, ' a great number of poor, abandoned by all, and suffering from contagious diseases and vermin. Sister Chétif, without sparing herself or manifesting the slightest repugnance, cleaned up all the filth and dirt of these poor folk, the mere sight of whom would make one sick. . . . And yet she was of a most sensitive disposition. . . . I have frequently seen her vomit whilst dressing the leg of a girl which was in such an advanced stage of decay that worms came from it.'[152] It would have been quite easy for her to have sent her companion, but she preferred to do the work herself.

Whilst the citizens of Arras admired the charity of the Sisters, they were surprised and even shocked at their peculiar costume. Sister Margaret, who was shy and afraid

[149] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 224.

[150] *Thoughts of Louise de Marillac*, p. 219 ; Arch. Nat., S. 6, 160.

[151] The text of their ' obedience ' is published in Vol. XIII, p. 577, *Saint Vincent de Paul.*

[152] Notice on Sister Margaret Chétif in *Circulars of the Superiors General*, etc., Vol. II, pp. 473–474.

of being laughed at, tried to obtain permission to wear a serge head-dress in accordance with local usage. Saint Vincent had no difficulty in proving to her that uniformity in dress is a very important matter in a community, and that what appears strange at first attracts no attention after a little while.[153] Some time later, Sister Margaret passed through a prolonged spiritual crisis, accompanied by distaste for her vocation and her rule, but the encouragement she received from her Superiors in Paris helped her through this passing, if severe, trial.[154]

Two new foundations were made in 1657 : the '*Salpêtrière*' of which we shall speak later, and Saint-Fargeau. On March 29, 1657, Mlle Le Gras wrote to Saint Vincent : 'I beg you to reflect before God on the reply we should make to Mademoiselle who is asking for two of our Sisters for her hospital at Saint-Fargeau. She has been asking for them for quite a long time . . . and it is said that this district badly needs spiritual and temporal aid and assistance.'[155] Nothing could be refused to the Duchess of Montpensier, and so the Sisters departed ; a few months later, the Superioress announced that she had quite a large number of scholars and two boarders. Saint Vincent was not satisfied with this information and wrote back :[156] 'I beg you to let me know if you have any sick in your hospital and, if so, how many ; if you look after the sick poor of the town and its suburbs ; if there are many or few ; what are your principal occupations and why do you require a third Sister ?' She had committed a serious fault by receiving boarders as that was against the custom of the Company, and she was censured for having done so.

Another Duchess, the Duchess of Ventadour, had an idea of setting up a seminary of Sisters at Ussel, but when she mentioned the matter to Saint Vincent he pointed out the difficulties : there were not enough Sisters qualified to train newcomers ; there was no house of the Congregation of the Mission in the neighbourhood, and the spiritual direction would be left to priests who would know nothing of the spirit

[153] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 113.
[154] *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 190.
[155] *Ibid.*, p. 263.
[156] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 50–51.

of the Daughters of Charity. The Duchess had to abandon her design and instead suggested a hospital, which was accepted by the Saint. He saw Sisters Anne Hardemont and Avoie Vigneron on the eve of their departure, in the month of May, 1658, and told them they would find in Ussel : ' people very kind, easily managed and strongly inclined to all that is good, but in a state of the greatest ignorance that could be expressed ; and that,' he added, ' will be your special task, I mean, you must do your very best to make them know and love God.'[157] Things did not go too well in the beginning of this foundation ; the Sisters did not agree amongst themselves ; they were disconcerted by local usages and their stomachs could not stand the food of the country, or their ears its language. Hence, annoyance, disgust, sharp discontent with Superiors and, in particular, with Mlle Le Gras, disrespectful and even insolent letters, murmurings within the house and without, and repeated requests to be brought back to Paris.[158] Sister Anne's chief cause of complaint was that she had been sent to Ussel as a punishment, and Saint Vincent had the greatest difficulty in soothing their embittered minds. He consoled, encouraged, scolded ; ' You have at times lost the respect you owe Mademoiselle,' he wrote to one of them,[159] . . . ' you have spoken much too freely. . . . Write to her humbly and cordially.' And to the other : ' Mademoiselle Le Gras is your mother and has a perfect right to give you whatever instructions she thinks fitting. . . . And yet, you are so annoyed with her that, as you say, you do not want to write to her. Take care, Sisters ; that is the resolution of a proud and mutinous spirit.'[160] In the next letter he had the same reproach to make. ' Do not behave like a refactory child, by refusing to write to Mademoiselle Le Gras.'[161] Next, in regard to the place, why should they not try and adapt themselves to it ? ' Nobody likes strange places, and yet people go and reside in them. How many girls are there not who have

[157] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 475.

[158] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 232 ; pp. 429–430 ; *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 923.

[159] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 429.

[160] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 433.

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 453.

married far away from home, and are dissatisfied both with their house and their husband. And yet, for all that, they do not go home to their father's. They must, whether they like it or not, mortify their inclination.'[162] However, in the end, matters turned out all right; the two Sisters recovered peace of mind, calm and union, and when, in 1660, Sister Anne was recalled to Paris, Sister Avoie was heart-broken.[163]

After Limousin comes Lorraine. Anne of Austria was deeply interested in the progress of the Catholic religion in the city of Metz. Immediately after the great mission preached there so successfully in obedience to her command, by the priests of the Tuesday conferences, she appealed again to Saint Vincent: 'Monsieur Vincent,' she said, 'what shall we do for Metz? You know in what a pitiful state it is; it must be helped. What shall we do for Metz?'

It was decided to send four sisters and, on August 26, 1658, the eve of their departure, Sister Magdalen Raportebled and her three travelling companions went to Saint-Lazare to bid good-bye to Saint Vincent and to listen to his good advice. 'As a matter of fact,' he said to them, 'the Lorrainers are not bad but there is a sort of denseness in the minds of those poor people in regard to things divine . . . acquired by associating with Huguenots and Jews,' of whom the city is full and this spiritual obtuseness is an obstacle to devotion. 'When they see that God . . . has created a Company of persons who devote themselves to the service of the poor—a thing unknown to their religious sects—they will be compelled to admit that God is a kind and loving Father.' The Lorrainers have another fault: avarice. 'Even the priests lend out money at interest not, like the rest of the people, directly,' but through intermediaries, so that they may not appear. 'You will combat this vice also by your example and when they see girls working like good Daughters of Charity, for their neighbour, without hoping or seeking for any other recompense than God, they will see how blind they are in thinking so highly of the goods of this world.' At the end of his little discourse, he gave them

[162] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, p. 431.
[163] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 410–411.

some practical hints about their journey. At Toul, ' you will pay your very humble respects, on our behalf, to the First President, and I feel certain you must stay with him, for word has been sent me that people went out two leagues beyond Toul to wait for you when they heard that you were on the way there.' Mlle Le Gras here interrupted him : ' Would it not be well, Father, if our Sisters did all in their power to excuse themselves, at least from sleeping in this charitable gentleman's house.'—' Since such persons, Mademoiselle, are very fond of the Company, it would mortify them too severely.'

' The President, Father, may invite them perhaps to have a meal ; should they accept ? '

' If the President offers them the hospitality of his house for the night, and if they arrive very late, it would be better for them to accept ; if not, let them make their excuses, for it is not customary for poor girls to dine with the great.'[164]

From Lorraine we shall now proceed south. Amongst the Bishops here Saint Vincent counted two great friends : Alain de Solminihac, Bishop of Cahors, and Francis Fouquet, Archbishop of Narbonne. Both of them asked for Sisters for their respective cities.

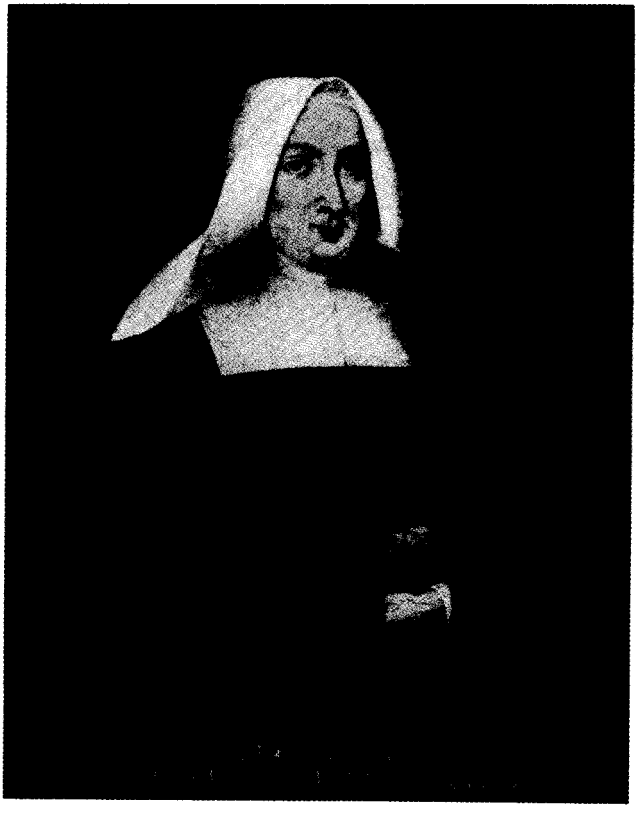
The Bishop of Cahors had to wait four years ; he offered an hospital and an orphanage, but the latter only was accepted.[165] In April, 1657, everything seemed ready for their departure : Mlle Le Gras had selected an accomplished Sister who was in the Foundling Hospital to accompany the new Superioress when,[166] at the last moment, one of them taking fright at the idea of going so far away, disappeared and never returned.[167] This regrettable incident delayed the realisation of the Bishop's hopes for another year, and it was reserved for Sisters Adrienne Plouvier and Louise Boucher to make the new foundation. On November 4, 1658, the eve of their departure, Saint Vincent pointed out the difficulties against which they would have to contend ; and of these the first sprang from the character of the people

[164] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 556 ff. [165] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 363.
[166] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 271–272.
[167] *Louise de Marillac, widow of M. Le Gras, Her life, virtues, and spirit.* Vol. I, p. 239.

of Cahors. 'You are going to wage war against the demon of that province, which is pride; the demon who reigns over all that district is a demon of pride, anger, passion and self-sufficiency. . . . You will meet people there who are almost always in a rage, who fall into a fit of passion at the least thing. . . . They are a self-sufficient lot of people, very fond of talking.' Next, there was the rather brusque character of the Bishop of Cahors to be considered: 'You will also need to be mortified, in case His Lordship of Cahors may not think you are carrying out your duties properly . . . so as to be able to accept with humility his admonitions and reprimands, because the great austerity with which he treats himself, may render him a little bit severe. His Lordship is a man who would examine his conscience before saying a gracious word.'[168] As the work was new, it needed a new set of regulations which Saint Vincent had prepared and which the Sisters brought with them, and of which we shall speak later. On their arrival, they found that they had far too much work to do because, apart from managing an orphanage, they were also expected to visit the poor in their homes.[169] Hence they could not carry out their rules properly, and Saint Vincent, realising that they must have extra help, sent Mary Martha Trumeau, in 1659, to act as Superioress.[170]

Francis Fouquet, Archbishop of Narbonne, had also to wait for the Sisters who had been promised him. As far back as 1656 or even earlier, whilst he was yet Bishop of Agde, he had asked for Sisters, and the time had at length come when his wishes were to be gratified.[171] Frances Carcireux, Anne Denoual and Mary Chesse were selected and, on September 11, 1659, called, as usual, on Saint Vincent, before leaving. What were they to do in Narbonne? He did not quite know himself, and he wondered if the Archbishop of Narbonne were any the wiser. Perhaps the prelate 'will establish a hospital; I also think he may have a

[168] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 665.
[169] Letter of M. Fournier to Mlle Le Gras, December 21, 1659 (Sisters of Charity Archives).
[170] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 665.
[171] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 751.



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Confraternity of Charity.' Nothing was certain except that they were to labour for the glory of God and the good of their neighbours, and that they would have difficulties to contend with, for the people of Narbonne had faults, and grave faults at that. ' Don't think you will only have roses ; there will also be thorns. They are a witty, subtle, refined sort of people, and you must expect to be laughed at. They are good, but all their inclinations tend towards evil. Above all other vices, the chief vice there is, impurity. . . . Be most modest and reserved then, both in looks and words, and never, either in looks or words, let the slightest trace of affectation appear, for that is very dangerous.'[172] The difficulties were even greater than he had foreseen. During the first years in Narbonne, the Sisters had to reside in a house of detention for women of evil life, and had to endure all that could be endured : filthy insults, harsh treatment, blows and even an attempt at assassination. Things were[173] worse for Sister Mary, the youngest, when Sister Anne was employed in another part of the town and Sister Frances,[174] at the Archbishop's command, had gone to the diocese of Alet. She was left quite alone, deprived of the consolation of the presence of her companions so that it is no wonder she was delighted when they returned. We learn from a passing remark of Saint Vincent's that their modesty and other virtues had impressed the people for, speaking on July 9, 1660,[175] he said : ' People have written to me from Narbonne quite recently, and have been telling me wonderful things about our Sisters. Sister Frances has been to a town at a great distance away, to which she was sent by the Bishop of Narbonne to learn an excellent method that is carried on there for the education of youth. She learned it, and is now applying the method to the great edification of all.'

Madame Fouquet, a Lady of Charity, whose influence had had something to do with the foundation at Narbonne, was also interested in two other houses established on the

[172] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 665 ff.

[173] Notice on Sister Mary Chesse in *Circulars of the Superiors General*, etc., Vol. II, p. 509.

[174] *Letters of Louise de Marillac*, Appendix, Letter 647 (B).

[175] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 315.

estates of her son, Nicholas Fouquet, the celebrated Minister of Finance, one at Vaux-le-Vicomte, where the Sisters arrived in September, 1659, and the other at Belle-Île-en-Mer.[176] Sister Mathurine Guérin was sent to Belle-Île in the month of May, 1660, and was entrusted with the care of a hospital in an advanced stage of decay.[177] She found the clergy on the island were without either learning or morals. The priests scarcely went to the trouble of asking for faculties to hear confessions and may, possibly not have known that they were necessary.[178] On August 20, 1660, she wrote : ' There is only one priest on the island with a good reputation," and he lived two leagues away. When the Minister of Finance was disgraced, his commercial affairs were tottering to a fall, and the people began to leave Belle-Île. Sister Mathurine, deprived of her only protector, realised that the Sisters also would have to go. She went to bid good-bye to the King's Lieutenant of the Fort, M. de Chevigny, who begged her to remain. ' Rely on me,' he said, ' to procure all you need to restore and maintain the hospital.' He kept his word, and not only was it possible to effect the necessary repairs but also to build a chapel dedicated to Our Lady. Sister Mathurine herself worked like a labouring man, carrying stones and other building materials. Later on, de Chevigny became an Oratorian, and used to declare that his conversion was due to the edification given him by Sister Mathurine's angelic modesty. He always retained the highest esteem of the virtue of her whom he called his spiritual mother, and used to visit and consult her in Paris in his old age.[179]

In this list of places where the Daughters of Charity were carrying on their various employments, we have said nothing of houses to which they were called during the wars to provide for passing needs, such as the orphanage at Etampes, the Charities at Bazoches and Mouzon, the civil hospitals of Rethel and Saint Etienne-à-Arnes, and the military hospital of Châlons, Sainte-Menehould, Sedan, Stenay, Montmédy

[176] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 310.
[177] *Ibid.*, p. 286. [178] *Ibid.*, p. 384.
[179] Notice on Sister Mathurine Guérin in *Circulars of the Superiors General*, Vol. II, p. 563.

and Calais. This subject will find a more suitable place for treatment when we come to deal with the troubled days of the Fronde.

If the number of its subjects had not imposed a limit to the number of its establishments, the Company would have spread much more widely.[180] In 1656, speaking to his Daughters, Saint Vincent said : ' You are being asked for in all quarters, and I have great difficulty in putting off people to whom you cannot be sent as promptly as they desire.' The persons referred to were the Bishops of Saint-Malo, Tréguier, Toulouse, who would gladly have received them ; the Bishop of Angers who offered them a hospital ; the Bishop of Agde,[181] who was hoping that they would go to Agde and Pézenas and, finally, his own sons in Madagascar.

' In Madagascar,' said Saint Vincent at a conference on September 29, 1655,[182] ' our confrères are begging us to send them some Daughters of Charity to help them to win souls to God. Fathers Mousnier and Bourdaise tell me that they believe it would be the best and truest way of leading the people of that country to receive the faith, and that a hospital could be built for the sick and a seminary to educate the girls. . . .[183] That is why you should be prepared to go. . . . It is 4,500 leagues away, and it takes six months to reach there. . . . Dispose yourselves then, my Daughters, and give yourselves to God to go wherever He may please.' And then a touching dialogue ensued. ' Are you all resolved to go everywhere without exception ? '—' Yes, Father.'—' Do all you feel really prepared to go ? If so, tell me.' All the Sisters rose spontaneously and again declared that they were ready to serve God everywhere in His poor.

God was content with their goodwill, for the time had not yet come for them to cross the seas to help their brethren

[180] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, p. 222.

[181] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 631–632, 640 ; Vol. VI, p. 122 ; Vol. X, pp. 195, 222.

[182] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 117.

[183] The word ' seminary ' then, as now, in countries apart from France, was applied to any house in which ecclesiastics or others were trained.

at their apostolic labours. The great African island did not see the Sisters until many years had passed, but they are there now and their charity is multiplied as it is brought into contact with more and more forms of human misery.

CHAPTER XX

DEATH OF MADEMOISELLE LE GRAS

WE paused, in our list of foundations, at the year 1660, for it marks the end of Saint Vincent's earthly life; in the same year, and at a few months' interval, Father Portail, the Director, and Mlle Le Gras, the Superioress of the Sisters, had gone before him. Louise de Marillac had always been delicate and of a sickly constitution; in 1647, Saint Vincent wrote :[1] 'I regard her as naturally dead for the last ten years; to look at her, one would say she had just come from the grave, so pale is her countenance, so weak her body, but God alone knows her strength of soul. . . . Were it not for her frequent illnesses and her respect for obedience, she would often go travelling about to visit and work with her Daughters, although she has no life save that which she receives from divine grace.' The same held true up to 1660.[2] A number of dispensations in regard to food, clothing and even spiritual exercises had to be imposed on her.[3] Juliana Loret, as her obituary notice tells us, 'ruled the whole Community,[4] over which she frequently presided, as Mademoiselle was ill, and placed great confidence in her wise government.'

On reading over Mlle Le Gras' correspondence, one would come to the conclusion that her habitual state of weakness and frequent indispositions were due to stomach trouble, and that this was the source of her headaches, recurrent fits of fever, and distaste for all food.[5] In 1652

[1] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 256.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 324; Vol. X, p. 374.
[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 176; Vol. III, p. 263; Vol. IV, p. 274; Vol. IX, p. 169; Vol. X, p. 374, 722; Vol. XIII, pp. 659, 694.
[4] *Notice on Sister Juliana Loret* in *Circulars of the Superiors General*, Vol. II, p. 525.
[5] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 334.

it was feared that she would die ;[6] in 1656, she had a bad fall and suffered intolerable pains from it for a very long time ; in 1657, she had another severe attack of illness.[7] From 1658 onwards her letters show that the thought of death never left her mind. In 1659, her strength rapidly declined, and it was frequently impossible for her to assist at Mass.

Now more than ever, she would have wished to see her spiritual guide and tell him of all that was troubling her conscience, but Saint Vincent, confined to his room by his infirmities, was unable to meet her. It was a severe blow, and was accepted with her usual resignation.[8] ' My powerlessness to do any good,' she wrote, ' prevents me from having anything pleasing to offer Our Lord . . . except the loss of the only consolation His goodness has granted me for the last thirty-eight years, and this I accept, for love of Him and in the manner ordained by His Providence.' All she had to fall back on was correspondence, and she awaited his replies to her letters with a certain amount of impatience so that when there was no answer she suffered deeply from the disappointment. In this way, her soul came to be purified completely, and her will attached entirely to the Will of God, to Whom she abandoned herself utterly whilst awaiting the hour of supreme self-abandonment.

On February 4, 1660, her left arm was found to be in a state of acute inflammation, and a violent attack of fever ensued. She grew worse so rapidly that it was thought advisable she should receive the Last Sacraments and when Nicholas de Lestocq, the parish priest, arrived with the Holy Oils he found her room filled with her double family, her spiritual children and the three Le Gras, her son, her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. When the ceremony was over, she addressed a few words to her children : ' I pray the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, by the power God has given fathers and mothers to bless their children, to bless you, detach you from all earthly things, and unite you to Himself. Live like good Christians.' Then, turning to the Sisters, she blessed them also, recommending them to love their vocation and to serve the poor faithfully.

[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 195.
[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 404. [8] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 207.

The Sisters had not given up all hope ; human means, indeed, had proved worthless, but they relied much more confidently on supernatural assistance. A stole of Saint Charles Borromeo's and a fragment of the heart of Saint Francis de Sales, contained in a reliquary, were sent for and applied to the affected arm. The Sisters' faith was rewarded ; the fever diminished and the inflammation decreased. On March 3, Saint Vincent wrote the following lines, in which both fear and hope may be observed : ' Thanks be to God, Mademoiselle is better. Three incisions of the left arm were required. . . . She is suffering greatly, as you may imagine, and although no longer feverish, she is not, for all that, out of danger, on account of her age and feebleness. Everything that can be done is being done to preserve her, but that lies with God, Who, having preserved her for twenty years contrary to all human expectations, will continue to preserve her in so far as it may be expedient for his glory.'[9] The disease, although they did not perceive it, was continuing its work of destruction ; on March 9, she had another attack of fever, and the nature of her complaint, which was senile gangrene, became evident.

On the 12th, she sent word to the parish priest of Saint Lawrence's to ask if he would be so kind as to bring her Holy Communion on the following morning. When she was told that her wish would be fulfilled, her heart overflowed with joy and gratitude. ' Praise be to God ! Praise be to God ! ' she repeated several times and, during the night, she repeated again : ' What a happiness, O my God ! If I live, I shall receive Thee to-morrow.'[10] She received Holy Communion with such sentiments of devotion that the bystanders were moved to tears and, at the request of the parish priest, she consented to bless her Daughters once more. ' My dear Sisters,' she said to them, ' I will continue to ask God's blessing for you, and I beseech Him to grant you the grace to persevere in your vocation so that you may serve Him in the way He asks of you. Take great care to serve the poor faithfully and, above all, endeavour to live happily together, in great union and cordiality, loving one

[9] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 255. [10] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 716.

another in imitation of the union and life of Our Lord, and pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin to be your only Mother. I die thinking most highly of our vocation and, were I to live for a hundred years, I would not ask anything else of you but to remain faithful to it.'

After she had given this advice to her Daughters, her mind turned to the father of her soul, and she requested him to send her a few lines of consolation, written in his own hand. Saint Vincent preferred to impose a new sacrifice on her, no doubt the better to prepare her for the great journey. He told the messenger to tell her from him : ' You are the first to set out ; if God forgives me my sins, I hope soon to rejoin you in Heaven.' This purely verbal message, through an intermediary, was not what she had expected, but she resigned herself and never let the least sign of regret appear. Several Ladies of Charity afterwards entered her room, and one of them said to her : ' Are you not happy to be going to Heaven ? ' ' Ah ! ' she replied, ' it cannot be expressed, but I am not worthy of it.' The Duchess de Ventadour remained beside her bed part of the night of 14th–15th, together with Sisters Juliana, Barbara and Frances of Paula. About six o'clock in the morning, she asked them to withdraw, promising to let them know when the time had come. She never ceased to pray, and the words of Job were constantly on her lips : *Miseremini mei quia manus Domini tetigit me* ; and also the cry of David : *Respice in me et miserere mei, quia unicus et pauper sum ego.* For a moment, her soul was troubled and she was heard to murmur : ' Take me hence.' The Missionary—it was probably Father Dehorgny—who was assisting her, showed her a crucifix and said : ' Jesus Christ did not ask to come down from His Cross.' ' Oh no,' she replied, ' He remained there.' And a few moments later : ' Let us go, since Our Lord has come to seek me.' Feelings of fear and confidence alternated in accordance with the nature of the ideas that came before her mind. She was terrified at the thought of judgement : ' O my God,' she said, ' I must appear before my Judge ! ' The priest reminded her of the verse of the Psalm : *Ad te levavi animam, Deus meus, in te confido,* and then she herself added : *Non erubescam.*

The Sisters in Paris were informed that the end was at hand. Those in the Foundling Hospital hastened to her early in the morning, to see her for the last time and to kneel by her bedside. She begged them to rise, bade them good-bye, and recommended them to take great care of their poor little ones. At eleven o'clock, she had the curtains drawn to let her Daughters know that the moment for setting out on the last great journey had arrived. During her agony, which lasted about half an hour, her eyes remained raised towards Heaven. The priest read the prayers for a departing soul, in presence of the Duchess de Ventadour who was holding the blessed candle ; then the dying woman, summoning all her strength, gave a final blessing to her kneeling Daughters. The priest suggested that he would impart the Apostolic Benediction for the hour of death, but she murmured in a low tone of voice : ' It is not yet time.' Some minutes went by and, on being asked again, she said : ' Yes,' beating her breast three times. It was the last word she uttered. On Passion Sunday, between eleven o'clock and midday, she rendered up her soul to God in the presence of the parish priest of Saint Lawrence, who exclaimed : ' Oh ! what a noble and beautiful soul ! She has departed this life bearing with her the grace of Baptism.'

Several visitors arrived, on that and the following day, to pray beside her remains and, on Wednesday, she was buried very quietly, for she had requested in her will that : ' She should not be treated differently in any respect from her Daughters, for if that were done it would be a declaration that she was not a true Daughter of Charity and Servant of the members of Jesus Christ.' Close to the Church of Saint-Lazare was a small courtyard, once used as a cemetery, and it was here she wished to be laid, subject to Saint Vincent's approval, but he and the parish priest of Saint Lawrence's preferred the crypt of the parish church. Her body was buried in the Chapel of the Visitation where she was accustomed to go and pray. Outside the chapel wall were the graves of the Sisters who had died in the parish, and a cross bearing the inscription *Spes unica* was fixed on the outer wall to serve as a motto for all who rested in this little plot of ground.

Her first biographer says that ' from time to time an odour like that of violets and lilies proceeded from her grave ' and that, on more than one occasion, Sisters who had gone there to pray, on their return, carried the perfume to the sick in the infirmary. Whatever be the nature of this odour, Gobillon adds, ' a wholly spiritual perfume emanates from the example of her life . . . which is a miraculous work of grace, and the most certain mark of holiness.'

On the 3rd and 24th of July, when Saint Vincent gathered the Sisters around him to be edified by a recital of their mother's virtues, we may safely say they were able to inhale this spiritual perfume with the utmost ease. The first Sister questioned was so overcome with emotion that she burst into a flood of tears, was unable to reply, and he had to pass on to another. Their combined testimony supplies us with a new form of funeral oration, touching and eloquent in its simplicity. Saint Vincent never grew tired of listening to the Sisters, and he spoke at even greater length when they had finished. ' What did you observe during the thirty-eight years you have known her? ' he asked himself, and replied, ' Some little trace of imperfection, but mortal sin, never, oh ! never ! The slightest movement of the flesh was insupportable to her : she was a soul pure in all things ; pure in her youth, pure in her married life, pure in her widowhood. She used to examine herself minutely so as to confess all her sins and imaginations ; she used to make her Confession with the greatest clearness, and I have never seen any who accused themselves with so much purity. She used to weep in such a way that it was very hard to pacify her.'

The Church has officially recognised the truth of this eulogy for, on May 9, 1920,[11] after thirty-four years of canonical enquiries and processes, the name of Louise de Marillac, Mademoiselle Le Gras, was inscribed in the Catalogue of the Blessed.

[11] This chapter is primarily based on Gobillon, *op. cit.*, p. 169 ff.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION AND ITS ORGANISATION

WHILST the Daughters of Charity were thus moving about among the poor comforting them in their miseries, the Priests of the Mission were setting out to awaken the faith of the country people by preaching the Gospel, to sanctify souls by means of spiritual retreats, and to renew the ecclesiastical state by their work for ordinands and seminaries.

The Congregation of Saint-Lazare was organised slowly, for Saint Vincent de Paul's policy was so to act as to gain time. Experience, as he knew so well, is the great school for men of action ; and hence he subjected all his undertakings to the test of Time, modifying, altering and adapting in accordance with its lessons. The preliminary regulations adopted in all his institutions were, in his eyes, just a stage of the journey ; and he deferred definite sets of rules as long as he possibly could so that he might be certain of greater perfection and solidity.[1] The Congregation of the Mission had been ten years in existence when, put out of action by a severe illness, he thought to himself : ' If I knew my life were about to end, what would cause me most distress ? ' And the answer was : ' I should regret not having given rules to my missionaries.'[2] When he recovered his health, he set to work, ably supported by his faithful disciple, Father Portail,[3] and in 1642, was able to present the assembled Superiors of the Company with a first draft, which was read and discussed for more than thirteen hours in the course of several meetings. On the fourth day, as the members of the Assembly saw that they could not arrive at any definite

[1] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVI, sect. 1, p. 252.
[2] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 291.
[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 137.

conclusions, they handed over the work of revision to a committee of four who resided in Paris. Fathers Portail, Dehorgny, du Coudray, and Lambert were selected, and Father Alméras was appointed to act in case one of them was absent.[4]

The labours of the Committee were prolonged. Saint Vincent, in accordance with prescription, was bound to apply to the Archbishop of Paris, the Commissary delegated by the Holy See, for the approbation of the rules,[5] but the hope that matters would be terminated more speedily in Rome led him to turn his eyes in that direction.[6] In 1643, he forwarded the Common Rules and, in 1644, the Rules for office-holders, to the Eternal City and wrote, on August 12, 1644, to the Superior of the house in Rome :[7] 'Urge on the confirmation of our rules and the withdrawal of the power granted to His Grace of Paris,' but his request was not heard, and again he had to wait for the longed-for approbation from the Chancery of the Archbishop of Paris.[8] The prelate was in no hurry and may perhaps have requested certain alterations which the founder was unwilling to accept. In 1646, there was a momentary expectation that the approbation would soon be granted. John Francis de Gondi was compelled to leave Paris for a considerable period and he delegated his powers to the Coadjutor who was believed to be more active and also more obliging. Unfortunately, Father Portail had set out on a round of visitations of the houses in France and Italy. Saint Vincent urged him to send back, as soon as possible, whatever comments he had to make,[9] and if it is true, as one of his letters would seem to suggest,[10] that the Coadjutor had shown signs of yielding to

[4] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 291, etc.

[5] In the Bull of Foundation, Urban VIII delegated, in perpetuity, the Archbishop of Paris to approve and confirm, in the name of the Holy See (*auctoritate nostra*) the rules and constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission and thus confer on them the strength of inviolable apostolic solidity (*inviolabilis apostolicae firmatatis robur*). (Cf. *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 264.)

[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 362.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 475.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 488.

[9] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 8 and 73.

[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 26.

the Saint's entreaties, fresh difficulties however had arisen which rendered further alterations and a new approbation essential. In 1647 Father Portail arrived in Rome, where he found Fathers Alméras and Dehorgny, so all three took advantage of the meeting to examine the rules together.[11] The Holy See was again petitioned, but refused to move.[12]

Saint Vincent realised that the matter must be definitely settled and accordingly, in the course of the year 1651, gathered all the Superiors around him to give the final touches to the text of the Common and Special Rules. When this was done, he handed all the members of the Assembly, for their signatures, a petition to the Archbishop of Paris begging him to be good enough to establish the rules on the inviolable basis of apostolic authority by granting them his approbation.[13] This step was successful and the holy founder, now quite overjoyed, was able to send the manuscript to the printers.[14] In the month of March, 1655, the rules were at length printed and we may imagine the pleasure of their author when he received the first copies, but his joy was short-lived, for the typographical errors were so numerous that he could not well distribute the book and accordingly the printing was stopped.[15] As Providence had presented him with a further opportunity, instead of merely contenting himself with the rectification of printer's errors, he resolved to proceed to a thorough examination of the text. Between the approbation and the printing of the rules, an important event had occurred ; on March 21, 1654, the Archbishop of Paris died, and if we bear in mind the long delay in the granting of the episcopal approbation we may reasonably suppose that, for some of the rules, Saint Vincent had had to fall in with the prelate's views. As he was now dead, the Saint was free to follow out his own ideas. On April 22, 1656, he wrote to Father Cruoly :[16] ' The rules are not yet in such a state as to be made public ; we are at work on them owing to an opportunity which has arisen and which has compelled us to retouch them ; as soon as they

[11] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 236. [12] *Ibid.*, p. 381.
[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 329, 357.
[14] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 323 ; Vol. VIII, pp. 329, 357.
[15] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 337. [16] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 600.

are quite ready you will be amongst the first to whom they will be sent.' Father Portail devoted all his time to the task of revision, and Father Jolly, in Rome, read and re-read the rules, asking advice from all those around him and forwarding his comments either to Father Portail or to the Founder.[17]

Saint Vincent, in the meantime, was uneasy as to how he might obtain the requisite approbation for the new alterations. Cardinal de Retz, the Archbishop of Paris, was far from France, wandering from place to place and hiding as well as he could from Mazarin's emissaries who were on his track. The question again arose of submitting the rules to the Holy See,[18] but this procedure would produce a certain amount of inconvenience. Father Jolly suggested that the Vicars General of Paris should be approached, and Saint Vincent replied on September 7, 1657 : ' As for the approbation of the changes to be made in our Rules, we have several reasons, that I cannot set down in writing, which prevent us from applying to the persons you suggest. God has given us an opportunity of having recourse to the master himself, and we shall try to avail ourselves of it.'[19] The master was Cardinal de Retz, whose name he carefully omitted to mention.

However, everything was settled at last, and, on May 17, 1658, the holy Founder had the happiness of distributing to his confrères the precious little book which would supply them with the means of sanctifying themselves and their fellow-men. After a discourse on the observance of rule, before he began to distribute the books, he raised his eyes to Heaven and said : ' O Lord, Who hast bestowed so great blessings on certain books . . . that souls who are well prepared derive notable advantages from them by ridding themselves of their sins and advancing in perfection, grant, O Lord, Thy blessing to this book, and be pleased to accompany it with the unction of Thy Spirit, that it may produce, in the souls of all those who may read it, avoidance of sin, detachment from the world with all its vanities, and union

[17] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, pp. 344, 364, 366, 391, 582.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 327.
[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 440 ; see also p. 507.

with Thyself.' When he had finished this prayer, he begged to be excused for not giving a copy to all present as there was not a sufficient number. The students would receive theirs on the following day ; the seminarists would have one or two placed at their disposal and, as the lay-brothers could not read Latin, a French edition would be specially printed for them. The venerable old man would have greatly desired to go amongst the priests and distribute them in person so as not to disturb them, but his limbs were too feeble. Taking one of the copies that lay before him, he called Father Portail : ' Come, come, you who have borne with my weaknesses so patiently,' and then, handing him the book, he added : ' May God bless you ! ' Each of the priests came in turn, knelt down, kissed the book and the Saint's hand, then kissed the ground and received the same greeting : ' May God bless you ! '

When the distribution was over, Father Alméras, who was next in rank in the house to the Superior General, asked the Founder, in the name of the kneeling Company, to give them his blessing. Saint Vincent, falling on his knees, once more addressed the King of Heaven : ' O Lord, Who art Eternal Law and Immutable Reason, Who dost govern by Thy Infinite Wisdom the entire Universe, Thou from Whom all the government of creatures and all the laws of the good life have emanated as from their living source, bless, if Thou be pleased, those to whom Thou has given these rules and who have received them as coming from Thee ; grant them, O Lord, the grace necessary to observe them always and inviolably even until death. Relying on Thee and on Thy holy Name, I, a wretched sinner, now pronounce the words of benediction.' All those present filled with an emotion that many of them could not restrain, then made the sign of the Cross whilst their venerated Father raised his hand in blessing.[20]

The French edition was ready before October and soon every priest, student, and lay-brother had a copy.[21]

Cardinal de Retz was not forgotten.[22] He had a right to a copy not only as Archbishop of Paris and benefactor of the

[20] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, pp. 11 ff. [21] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 281.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 480.

Company, but also because the holy Founder wished to ask for his approbation of the modifications of the rules that had been made since his previous approbation. ' We have been obliged,'[23] Saint Vincent wrote to him on July 15, 1659, ' to modify some, because of certain errors that glided into the document and because we had made some regulations which experience has taught us are difficult to observe. However that may be, My Lord, we have altered nothing essential in our rules, nor any other matter of importance and I assure Your Eminence of this, in the sight of God.' There is no trace of the Cardinal's reply.

The Rules are divided into twelve chapters : the End of the Company, the Gospel maxims, Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, the Sick, Modesty, Relations with Externs, Exercises of Piety, Missions and other employments, and the Means of carrying out one's duties well. Each chapter opens with the example of Jesus Christ, the Missionary *par excellence*, who has marked out the road for all other missionaries. Saint Vincent largely utilised the Rules of the Jesuit Fathers and in many instances he has reproduced even their phraseology. All Saint Ignatius' Regulations on correspondence, reading at table, silence, uniformity, detachment from relatives, conversation, modesty, cleanliness in one's room, punctuality, permissions, visits, relations with externs and confrères, communications with superiors, and community property may be found in this little book for Missionaries. Despite all the precautions he had taken, there was a misprint in the third section of the second chapter ; instead of the words *quae nec sunt grata nec ingrata* the text ran, *aequaliter vel grata vel non grata.* Saint Vincent directed the attention of his confrères to the point during one of his conferences in order to have the error repaired and this was done in all subsequent editions.[24]

The book does not speak of vows because the holy Founder remarks : ' no Company treats of them in its common rules.'[25] Most of the customary practices of the Company were not mentioned, either because it was much better to compress the rules within the pages of a small, brief book

[23] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 26.
[24] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 151. [25] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

that can be easily carried or because in an Institute whose members are engaged in a variety of works and called to labour in many lands, several rules applicable in some places, such as the hours of rising and retiring, are unsuitable for others, and hence are out of place in a work entitled : ' Common Rules or Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission.'

Saint Vincent was not satisfied with merely distributing or sending the book of rules to his confrères, he also made up his mind to explain them. Hence a series of conferences was held from December 6, 1658, to December 9, 1659, in which he dealt at length, point by point, with the first five chapters. His inability to walk, which confined him to his room from the end of 1659 onwards, unfortunately interrupted this splendid commentary which is well calculated to inspire every Missionary with a love of his vocation and to encourage him in the discharge of his daily duties.

It was only fitting that special regulations adapted to the various categories of the Congregation should be added to the Common Rules or Constitutions. Father Alméras, who was elected Superior General after the death of Saint Vincent, at once drew up constitutions for the Superior General and the administration of the Company, which the General Assemblies of 1642 and 1651 had already under consideration. His work was approved on August 17, 1665, by the Archbishop of Paris and, after some alterations, was officially accepted by the General Assembly of September 1, 1668, and once more submitted to the Archbishop who, acting in virtue of his apostolic delegation, accepted the modifications of the first version.[26] Father Alméras did more ; he selected and grouped together the most important rules of these Constitutions and submitted them to the Holy See for examination and approbation. The work of revision

[23] The Bull *Salvatoris Nostri* was submitted to the prelate so that he might see for himself that the Archbishop of Paris was the permanent delegate of the Holy See in all that concerned the approbation of the Rules and Constitutions. He approved, citing the apostolic authority with which he was invested : *Nos igitur, praefata auctoritate apostolica freti . . . hujusmodi Constitutiones sic explicatas et immutatas . . . . approbamus et confirmamus.* (Cf. *Constitutiones*, p. 124.)

was undertaken by five prelates of the Court of Rome and resulted in the *Constitutiones Selectæ* which were sanctioned, on June 2, 1670, by the Brief *Ex injuncto Nobis* granted by Pope Clement X, and hence have the authority of acts proceeding directly from the Sovereign Pontiff. In the course of time, the Constitutions needed explanations and additions. The decisions of the General Assemblies and the Pontifical documents which complete or explain the primitive text were inserted as a supplement to the 1847 edition which is still current. This book is a guide for those placed at the head of the Congregation.

The Assembly of 1688 also came to the assistance of Missionaries called to discharge less important functions, for it examined and laid down rules for local Superiors, assistants, sub-assistants, consultors, admonitors and bursars ; it also drew up a directory for missions in eighteen sections, and one for seminaries in twenty-five. In principle, the General Assembly, in which supreme authority resides, should meet every twelve years and, in case the Superior General dies in the meantime, more frequently. After the meeting of the General Assembly, a sexennial Assembly is held six years later which does not contain as many members as the General Assembly and has only one really important matter to decide, namely, whether circumstances render urgent the convocation of a General Assembly. The Superior General is elected for life and resides in Paris. To assist him in the general administration of the Company, he is provided with four Assistants elected by the General Assembly and also a Secretary General and Procurator General chosen by himself. Each house had its own Superior, Assistant and Bursar and several houses, placed under the authority of a Visitor, constitute a province.

A young man must have finished his classical studies before being admitted to the Congregation of the Mission as a cleric. A period of two years, from the time of entry to the taking of vows, is prescribed. This period, known in religious communities as a ' novitiate ' is called ' the internal seminary ' or period of trial, probation or formation. After the ' internal seminary ' comes the study of the ecclesiastical sciences for those who have not terminated, before entrance,

their course of philosophy and theology; then comes ordination and appointment to a particular house. Those who leave of their own accord or who are dismissed have no claim for services rendered whilst members of the Congregation: this point was decided, in 1670, by the Royal Council, in answer to a petition made by three lay-brothers who had returned home. After a man has taken his vows, he is never dismissed on account of bad health, but only for grave, moral reasons. Those who are ill or infirm receive within the Community all the care and attention their state requires.

Missionaries rise at four o'clock in the morning and retire to rest at nine, except in countries where, on account of the conditions of the climate, another custom is established. Choral Office and extraordinary acts of mortification are not prescribed. One hour of mental prayer in the morning, a quarter of an hour's visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the afternoon, two 'particular examens,' a general examination of conscience at the end of the day, spiritual reading, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament before each of the principal exercises, 'repetition of prayer' and a spiritual conference every week, Chapter on Fridays, a monthly or three-monthly communication with one's spiritual guide and an eight days' retreat, are prescribed. Most of these practices, it may be observed, are carried out by every fervent and devout priest of the pastoral clergy. The Missionary has the additional advantage of community life and is consequently enabled to avail himself of the graces promised to those who are gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ.

Every year, on New Year's Day, after the repetition of prayer, an Act of Protestation to God and of fidelity in His service is read before the whole community. This custom established in Saint-Lazare, about 1645, by Saint Vincent himself was enjoined on all the houses of the Company by his immediate successor, Father Alméras, who also introduced the custom of reading an Act of Consecration to the Blessed Virgin during morning prayer, on August 15, the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption.

After a year's hard work there is nothing more useful, either to avoid falling back in the way of perfection or to regain lost time, than eight days of prayer and recollection.

Saint Vincent had also thought of another practice, from which he expected good results, namely, a period of renovation in the 'internal seminary.' The Assembly of 1642 made a regulation that, whilst leaving the Superior General free to apply this measure as circumstances required, Missionaries should spend a further year of probation six or seven years after they had left the internal seminary.[27] During the holy founder's lifetime, Superiors and even one of his Assistants were to be seen mingling with and living the life of the young seminarists of Saint Lazare.[28] Such cases were, however, exceptional. As a matter of fact, the decision of 1642 remained almost a dead letter. The General Assembly of 1668 again took up the matter and urged Father Alméras to make a beginning as soon as numbers would permit and, in order to render the application of the practice more easy, reduced the period of probation to six months. The requirements of the houses, which were constantly increasing, spoke more eloquently than the members of the General Assembly, and nothing was done.

The maintenance of uniformity even in externals was one of the preoccupations of Superiors General, for Saint Vincent had no love for eccentricities. After he had founded his Congregation, he made no change in his dress and neither did his priests, and if he adopted the custom of wearing a rosary at his girdle it was, in all probability, because devout priests at that time had set the example.[29] This custom, which he recommended to his community and to which his two successors[30] remained faithful, gradually died out ; even as late as 1731, it was followed by several Missionaries, but has long since been abandoned. The tendency of all communities to hold fast to old usages, when all around them is changing, invariably leads to singularities. Hence the folded collar of the first Missionaries ended by marking them off from the rest of the clergy. On one occasion, the Duke of Orleans called the attention of Louis XIV to the collar of Father Durand, who was parish priest of Fontainebleau and

[27] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 295.
[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 79, 102, 322, 534.
[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 383 ; Vol. V, p. 621.
[30] Lacour, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, 18, N° 112.

a member of the Congregation of the Mission. ' No doubt, it was badly measured,' said the King, but the Duke, who was better informed, said : ' Sire, I rather think it is their custom.'[31] It was also a custom, up to the end of the eighteenth century, to wear a small beard on the chin, and hence the name ' barbichets ' by which the irreverent Duc de Saint-Simon is accustomed to refer to them in his *Mémoires*.

The preservation of the primitive spirit is of far more importance than the maintenance of external usages. The Company, without excluding a wise evolution and growth, is bound to remain loyal to what it was in the days of its Founder, attached to the same principles, engaged in the same labours, having its eyes fixed on the same end, and hence Superiors are bound to be vigilant to prevent deviations. They are the guardians of the rules and customs and thereby obliged to wage war against abuses, for liberty always seeks to break down the barriers that impede it. Superiors General, in their annual circular letter of January 1, after giving news of the Congregation, do not fail to call attention to infractions of rules and other faults that tend to arise in the Company. They do so unceasingly, for the battle between nature and grace will never end.

In order to facilitate the victory of grace over nature, Saint Vincent thought of establishing simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in his Congregation. Despite the objections of well-known theologians, such as Saint-Cyran[32] and Brisacier,[33] he became more and more convinced that vows were essential. He saw no more efficacious means ' of remedying the natural inconstancy of man,'[34] an inconstancy all the more to be dreaded amongst Missionaries as their employments were various, important, difficult and carried out in distant places.'[35] When any of his priests left him, his heart bled and his resolution to obtain from Rome a bond such as is afforded by vows became more intense. On May

[31] *Journal d'Antoine Durand*, publié par M. Estournet, Fontainebleau, 1900, p. 36.

[32] Barcos, *Défense de feu M. Vincent*, 1668, p. 19.

[33] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 382.

[34] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 134.

[35] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 379 ; cf. Vol. IV, p. 578 and Vol. V, p. 317.

5, 1639, he wrote to Father Lebreton :[36] ' I think we must strive for complete unification for reasons I shall mention, of which this is one of the most urgent : I have just seen a member of the Company, one of the very best men in it, one of the hardest working and most gentle-minded, who, nevertheless, has absolutely made up his mind, in the course of the last eight days, to leave it, without giving me any particular reason, and in spite of everything I pointed out and urged, and the acts of humility I performed. And what is strangest of all, his vocation certainly seems to have come from God ; he is a splendid exemplar for the whole Company, and has made his position in it more secure by the same means as several others, longer in it than himself, have employed, namely, by vows. After such an example, I know not on whom to rely.'

The fact of the matter was that the life of a Missionary offered nothing pleasing to the natural man. Ever on foot, except during vacation, they went from village to village, badly fed, badly housed, with wretched sleeping accommodation, and always in contact with a brutal and ignorant populace. Beyond present difficulties, Saint Vincent foresaw other and more painful ones. What were the privations experienced in France in comparison with those to be endured later by Missionaries sent to Ireland and Scotland, where they were reduced ' to live on oaten-bread,' or in Barbary, where they were imprisoned and bastinadoed, or in Madagascar, where a broiling sun and an unhealthy climate were to ruin their health and shorten their lives.[37]

Yet, however great was Saint Vincent's desire to introduce vows amongst his disciples, whatever his personal attraction for the religious state, he would have established a Congregation without vows if vows would have entailed the transformation of his society of priests into a religious body. Here he had to take into account opposition from without and aversion from within. At this period, there was a very pronounced current of opposition to religious Congregations, and the Pope, the Court of Rome and the

[36] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 550.
[37] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 379–380.

Bishops made no attempt to conceal their hostility.[38] The same frame of mind was prevalent even in Paris.[39] On February 28, 1640, Saint Vincent wrote to Father Lebreton : 'Everybody here has such an aversion from this state as is quite lamentable!' and a few months later : 'Dislike of the religious state is common.'[40] He could not have induced his confrères to adopt a mode of life which they disliked, and he had the wisdom to realise it. Simple vows would give his disciples the religious spirit and with that he was content.[41] Furthermore, observing the evolution of other communities, he requested, lest his own should in the course of time become a religious Order, that this clause should be formally expressed in the pontifical decree.[42]

It is of the greatest interest to observe the fluctuations of his mind before it was fully made up, the opposition he met with, and the means by which, with skill and tenacity, he attained his goal.

Scarcely had Saint Vincent established his Congregation than he began to think of how best to secure the perseverance of his disciples. In the third or fourth year of its existence, his priests, a dozen in number, made, of their own accord, and acting on his advice and example, and without reference to any ecclesiastical authority, the three simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and also bound themselves more closely to their vocation by a vow of stability. They renewed these engagements for two or three years in succession.[43] In Saint Vincent's eyes, the bond thus created was not enough, for all that was needed to obtain a dispensation was to have recourse to a bishop, or even, in certain cases, to one's confessor. Furthermore, as the Community increased in numbers, more than one of its members preferred to retain full liberty of action. Excellent Missionaries left after they had completed their ecclesiastical studies and been ordained priests, at the expense of the Society, and after they had given, by their first labours, the brightest hopes for the future. The remedy for this was

[38] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 246, 379 ; Vol. IV, p. 579.
[39] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 28.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[42] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 134.
[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 457–458.

henceforward to oblige all those who proposed to join the Community to take vows, after a certain period of probation, from which they could only be dispensed by the Pope and the Superior General. And as a Congregation thus constituted would present every appearance of a religious Congregation and so arouse the distrust of the Bishops, it was essential that Rome should expressly declare that it formed part of the secular clergy and approve a fifth vow, namely, one of obedience to the Ordinaries of those places in which the Company exercised its functions.

Such was the mission entrusted by the Saint to Father Lebreton on sending him to Rome,[44] and it was certainly most delicate when we remember the state of mind of the Roman Congregations where the Founder's delegate encountered the most determined opposition. From Paris, Saint Vincent wrote on October 12, 1639,[45] to encourage Lebreton : ' Let us hold fast to what has been proposed,' and he added that if the theologians in Rome thought that every effort was bound to be unsuccessful, the doctors of theology in Paris on the contrary, were quite confident as to the successful results of the negotiations. The most important point was to be on the alert and to select good agents, but Father Lebreton, unfortunately, showed no skill as a diplomat. ' I do not know,' the Saint wrote again, ' if it would not have been better if you had first approached His Eminence Cardinal Antonio,[46] or whether the person you know is not anxious to make a milch cow out of the business so as to obtain more money or equivalent services. Would to God that you had some other person at hand to settle the matter ! This is also the opinion of M. de Cordes, provided it can be done without ruining everything. But in case you see any danger in changing the agent, *in nomine Domini*, keep the one you have.' In a letter dated November 15, he sent fresh instructions and suggests that the Missionaries should be allowed to make ' a firm resolution ' after their first year's probation. They would then make a promise ' to live and die in the Company, in poverty, chastity and obedience to the Bishops, *circa missiones*, and to the Superior General,

[44] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 563.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 592. [46] Anthony Barberini.

circa disciplinam et directionem Societatis.' Those bound by this promise could not ' leave or be sent away until after the spiritual exercises.' After a second year in the seminary, union with the Company would be rendered closer by taking four simple vows, and this union would not be dissolved by the authority of the Pope or the General until ' every imaginable means ' had been brought into play.[47]

Whilst Father Lebreton was thus negotiating in Rome, Saint Vincent kept turning matters over in his mind. It was pointed out to him that, if the Congregation made the three vows known as ' the vows of religion ' it would become by that very fact a religious Order, and hence he asked himself if it would not be better to abandon the vows and replace them by some other means. Only the vow of stability remained. ' I find myself in a state of perplexity,' he wrote to Father Lebreton,[48] ' on account of the doubts that occur to me, and as to what resolution should be taken about the last method you proposed : whether it will be quite sufficient to make a vow of stability and, in regard to the observance of poverty and obedience, publish a solemn excommunication, on one fixed day in the year, during Chapter (at which each individual will be bound to be present and hand over all he possesses to the Superior), against those who have money in their own keeping, or in that of others, as the Carthusians do ; and the same thing could be done for those who were disobedient ; or whether, indeed, if instead of excommunication, a solemn oath should be taken every year to observe the rule of poverty, chastity and obedience.' Again, did not the vow of stability suffice of itself to constitute the religious state ? The holy founder asked Father Lebreton to sound the French Assistant of the Jesuits on this point, and his answer was in the negative. However, this solution did not bring Saint Vincent peace of mind. He was struck by the fact that the Carthusians and the Benedictines made only two vows : those of stability and ' conversion of manners ' and nevertheless, they were religious. Was it the second vow that made them so ?[49] In a letter dated October 9, he answers this question with a ' Perhaps,' but this ' Perhaps '

[47] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 600.
[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 28.
[49] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 124.

must have seemed to him highly improbable. Nevertheless, he persevered in his idea of retaining the vow of stability, and even thought of making it solemn. If, he asked himself, any one individual, or even several, can make such or such a vow without, on that account, becoming a religious, why not a whole body ?[50]

His letter of August 9[51] harks back to the ' firm promise ' at the end of the first year's seminary, simple vows at the end of the second, and he adds a ' solemn vow to end one's days in the Company, long years after one has entered it.' On November 14, he was still toying with this plan, as we may see from a letter to Father Lebreton : ' I think we should be satisfied with making a firm promise to live and die in the Mission, after one year's seminary ; with a simple vow of stability at the end of the second year's seminary, and make this vow solemn after eight or ten years, according as the Superior General may decide. This would be, in a way, equivalent to the power of expelling incorrigible members. Some precautions must be discovered in regard to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, such as issuing an excommunication every year against proprietors. It seems that the greater number of our friends go as far as that.'[52]

Whilst the question was being discussed in Rome, Saint Vincent also approached the Archbishop of Paris on the matter, and here he had not to wait so long for a solution. After three years study and hesitation, John Francis de Gondi,[53] acting on the advice of his Council,[54] ended by yielding to the Saint's wishes. The plan that was approved does not contain either the solemn vow of stability or the excommunication against proprietors.[55] On October 19, 1641, the prelate wrote : ' You have judged it expedient and have laid it down as a rule that henceforth whoever may enter the Congregation of the Mission shall spend two years' probation in the seminary ; he shall, at the end of the first, in presence of the Superior, make a firm promise to observe all his life, in the bosom of the said Congregation,

[50] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 248.
[51] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 90.
[52] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 137.
[53] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 355.
[54] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 336.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 283 ff.

poverty, chastity and obedience ; and, at the end of the second, shall pronounce, during Mass celebrated by the Superior, who shall hear, but not receive, vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and stability, binding himself by the last to labour for the salvation of poor, country people, for the remainder of his life, in the said Congregation, subject to its Rules and Constitutions ; simple vows from which only the Sovereign Pontiff, yourself or whosoever may be Superior General, can dispense. You have also arranged that those who are already members of the said Congregation may be admitted to the same vows, should they so desire, by you or by your successors and that, notwithstanding these vows, the said Congregation shall remain part of the secular clergy, and shall not be numbered amongst the religious Orders.' At the end of this commentary, the prelate added that he approved and confirmed, without the alteration of a single word, the essentials of the petition. The Archbishop's document only obliged future Missionaries to take vows ; it left those who were already members of the Congregation perfectly free either to adopt the same procedure or to remain as they were. Saint Vincent de Paul received de Gondi's communication with joy ; he gathered together his disciples and, addressing all present, even those who had already made vows and who were in the majority, asked them to bind themselves to the Congregation by this new form.[56] At a later period, he wrote : ' We made them (i.e. the vows) together,'[57] but this ' we ' does not mean ' all,' because this ceremony of taking vows was not done without provoking resistance and producing complaints. This discontent passed from within the community to outsiders, and it was alleged that the Archbishop of Paris had outstepped his powers.

To put an end to these discussions, Saint Vincent held a meeting of the principal Doctors of Theology in Paris—Charton, the Canon Penitentiary, Duval, Péreyret, Cornet and Coqueret and, in October 1642, another meeting of the Superiors of the houses and some of the oldest members. In vain did both those assemblies approve of the line of action that had been adopted ; the opposition party did not lay

[56] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 563 ; Vol. V, p. 458.
[57] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 458.

down their arms. Vincent de Paul thereupon asked for a written opinion from the theologians whom he had consulted as well as from three learned Jesuits,[58] all of whom decided in his favour. The authority of these theologians, however, did not bring peace of mind to all ; at the end of the October retreat in the year 1647 when, in accordance with the annual custom, the Community were proceeding to renew their vows, some of the Missionaries hesitated and said they regarded the vows as invalid. They were only allowed to take them after expressing their repentance, and the holy Founder took occasion of the incident to eulogise, in presence of his Community, the practice of taking vows. Referring to the means he had adopted, he wrote to Father Portail,[59] who was then in Rome : ' I just made two remarks ; first, I begged those who did not feel inclined to persevere in the Company to leave it ; and second, that a sign of one's having this grace was a fixed determination never to speak against this holy action, and to defend it, on occasion, when attacked by others.' He then went on to examine in turn the objections that had been raised. The first referred to the reservation of dispensation to the Pope, and to this he replied : ' Each individual is free to renounce his right of recourse to the Ordinary, and may apply to His Holiness for a dispensation.' It was objected that every Congregation, from the moment its members made vows, was a religious Congregation, and to this he replied : ' yes,' in the case of solemn vows ; ' no,' in the case of simple.[60] He then observed that,

[58] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 458.

[59] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 245.

[60] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 320. In the seventeenth century, there were no religious Congregations as distinct from religious Orders. Religious and regulars were then synonymous terms. The Jesuits alone, by a special privilege, granted by Gregory XIII (the Bull *Ascendente Domino*) were entitled to be called religious by the mere fact of pronouncing simple vows. More recent Canonists, whose terminology has entered into the new Code of Canon Law, style institutes whose members pronounce simple, public vows—that is, vows accepted by the Church—Religious Congregations. To this category belong Fathers of Christian Doctrine, Redemptorists, Oblates of Mary Immaculate who are at one and the same time religious and members of the secular as contradistinguished from the regular clergy.

as the Church forbade the establishment of new religious Orders which did not profess one of the four rules that she had approved, or that were expressly authorised by the Pope, such as the Jesuits, his Company could not be regarded as a religious Order, as it had not fulfilled either of these conditions, nay more, it was, by the desire of the Holy See, a Company 'of secular clerics,' and definitely intended to remain so.

However sound these arguments may have seemed to Saint Vincent, he judged it wiser, in face of the opposition that had arisen, to have recourse to Rome, and Father René Alméras, the Superior of the Missionaries in that city, was charged with the negotiations. From Paris, Vincent wrote to point out the line of action to be taken and from time to time endeavoured to restore his colleague's waning courage. On October 23, 1648, he wrote: 'The Pope, it is said, does not like religious Orders, well, that cannot be helped. But perhaps, considering that our vows do not constitute us religious, he may approve them . . . and it would be well if he were told that it will be difficult to keep the Company alive, bearing in mind its varied, important, toilsome and widely scattered activities.' At the end of the letter, he felt the need of adding another few words on the matter: 'M. Brisacier has an aversion to vows and on former occasions has told me so; yet, he was satisfied when I told him that we did not mean to enter the religious state. He told me that he might be employed on the King's affairs in Rome and, if he is, it will be necessary to deal cautiously with him. You might tell him something about the matter as coming from yourself. The whole effort should be directed towards this question of vows in the Congregation. It is quite sufficient if you marshal your main forces on that point, and work through His Excellency the Ambassador to His Holiness. A new pamphlet from the opposition party has already appeared against us. If His Excellency the Ambassador is not acceptable to His Holiness, it will be quite sufficient if he mentions the matter on one occasion; but, do you make your own private petitions, not so much by way of argument as suggestion, to their Lordships, as far as you can, in regard to us Frenchmen. *Mitte sapientiam et nihil deerit.*'[61]

[61] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 379.

René Alméras had not the pious tenacity of Saint Vincent because, as we shall see in a moment, he neither shared the latter's views or his optimism. In his own house, one of the Missionaries had refused to take part in the renewal of vows ;[62] the Pope and the Roman Congregations seemed inflexible, and the agents employed had not sufficient influence to command success. On June 18, 1649, the Saint wrote to revive his confrère's courage : ' I have seen from two of your letters what is the state of affairs there. One must not be at all disheartened by the slight indications of our succeeding in this affair. It is just a cloud that will pass away. A day will come when the Company will have more credit and more support, and when those who can help it will have greater charity for it than they have just now. The Jesuits, at first, were just as strongly opposed, during the pontificate of Paul IV, who made them wear a cowl—which indeed they did during his lifetime—but after his death they laid it aside, as the new Pope was more favourable. Let us submit to Providence ; It will settle our affairs in Its own way and Its own time.'[63] But the hour for the intervention of Providence was far off. On January 3, 1651, he wrote : ' If this affair cannot succeed in the way proposed, then it will be necessary to present another petition, at another time, and in some other form.'[64]

Some months later, René Alméras was summoned to Paris, as were also the Superiors of Mans, Crécy, Saint-Méen, Cahors, Agen and Genoa, to discuss amongst themselves and with the Superiors in Paris—Father Bécu, Portail, Dehorgny Gilles and Duchesne—under the presidency of Saint Vincent, questions relative to the organisation of the Company. As this matter of vows was the most important, it was discussed first of all.[65] On Saturday, July 1, Saint Vincent set out the arguments in favour of, and against, taking vows. In favour: Our Lord took vows, according to Father de Condren ; it is

[62] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 379. In 1652, Achille Le Vazeux, the Assistant of the House in Rome, went so far as to write to Saint Vincent himself that his vows were null and void and that he had committed a ' mortal sin in taking and renewing them.'

[63] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 453.

[64] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 133.

[65] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 326 ff.

a holy action long in vigour in the Church, and recommended by the Sacred Scriptures ; by making them, one offers a most pleasing holocaust to God ; vows render other actions more meritorious, strengthen Missionaries in their vocation and allow the Superior General to dispose of his subjects with greater liberty. On the other hand : the Pope has refused them ; saying : *videbimus* ; some theologians have declared them null and void ; some Missionaries find a difficulty in taking them ; several communities, such as the Oratorians, Sulpicians, Nicolaites, are flourishing without vows ; one will live in greater liberty and therefore with greater merit. ' We shall be in closer conformity with the clergy, of whom we are members, and to whom we belong ; ecclesiastics will have more confidence in us ; Bishops will have no reason for taking umbrage, and all difficulties will disappear.' After this statement, he concluded thus : ' It seems that we should eliminate whatever is objectionable, namely, the reservation of power to dispense from them (i.e. the vows) to the Pope and the General, and to leave the Bishops their rights, although it seems that His Grace of Paris was free to do what he actually did ; that is the opinion of his Council and of some doctors of theology. Nevertheless, a man should be sent expressly to Rome to petition in person for this, and not for anything else, for the late Commander de Sillery used to say that with time and patience one can gain one's end in Rome. . . . These difficulties will end in time, because this resolution has been taken, acting on advice, and after many years.'[66]

On the following day the discussion was resumed, and at once it became evident that there were wide differences of opinion. Fathers Grimal and Thibault said, in substance, that they would prefer solemn vows rather than no vows at all. Father Gilles defended the taking of vows with a force of conviction and an abundance of arguments that must have delighted Saint Vincent. ' Everyone should be compelled to take a vow at the end of two years ; older members should not be urged to renew them, *si male non loquuntur de illis* ; *sin minus, ligantur aut cruciantur.* If anyone speaks against the

[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 335–336.

vows, this should be remedied immediately by removing the individual from a house in which he might do harm, such as a small house, and by keeping an eye on him in a large one . . . ; those who do not wish to make vows should not be admitted, except in Italy, on account of the opposition of that people to our vows.' Father Blatiron, the Superior of the House at Genoa, knew better than any member of the Assembly the repugnance of Italians towards vows, and their tendency to believe that a Congregation became religious from the fact that the three vows of religion, as they are called, were imposed on its members. Hence he asked that everyone should be free either to make vows or not, just as he wished. Father Dehorgny knew, as he had learnt in Rome itself, from a reliable source, that the Pope had never intended to reserve dispensation from vows made in the Company to the Holy See. He declared himself in favour of vows, but without this reservation, and asked that the matter should be negotiated in Rome by a special envoy, and with this view Father Portail agreed. On July 3, Father Alméras spoke and attacked the validity of the vows. He reminded his hearers that Popes Urban VIII and Innocent X had refused to recognise them, that the Company had accepted them unwillingly, that some theologians regarded them as null and void, and he then went on to say that he would not dare to advise their continuance. ' They offend insiders and outsiders ; they prevent persons from joining, and they put us on the road to becoming religious.' He then took up one by one the arguments advanced by Saint Vincent in favour of vows, and proceeded to refute them. Vows, it is said, are necessary for a Congregation engaged in painful employments ; to this he replied : ' have we not seen Congregations with vows getting rid of painful employments, and Congregations without them taking them up ? ' Everything in reality depended on the firmness of Superiors. Again, but this would entail a change : ' Well, where is the inconvenience in changing when the change is for the better ? Has not M. Vincent himself changed in the question of ceremonies, and has he not said that everything under Heaven is subject to change ? ' Finally, it is said that the state of vows is more perfect. Granted ; so too is the

religious state, and if one wished to be logical, one should become a religious.

Father Duchesne did not go so far ; he was quite content to throw doubt on the validity of the vows, and to ask that everyone should be at liberty to take them ; if they were to be imposed on all, or at any rate on future Missionaries, then recourse to the Pope seemed essential. Next, Father Lambert did not seem to be favourably impressed with the method employed in the Congregation. ' It is necessary,' he said, ' to alter the manner of taking vows, because one does not know how to explain them,' and even ' to suppress them entirely, inasmuch as the practice is inimical to the original design of the Congregation . . . ; however, a vow of obedience to the General would be required.' Father Bécu, then declared that ' all sorts of vows should be allowed,' provided they were not religious ; Father Guissot declared against vows, whilst acknowledging that some bond was needed to unite the Missionaries with the Congregation. Father Le Gros considered that vows were necessary. Saint Vincent wound up the meeting by requesting all present to pray to God for light on such a grave matter, from which both the consolidation of the Company and the harmony of its members depended ; and he added that the question would come up again for discussion ' until greater uniformity of opinion ' was arrived at.

The meeting on July 4 began with an address from the Saint that lasted an hour, in which he developed three ideas : vows do not constitute the religious state ; they are not a constraint ; it would be dangerous to go back on a practice already established. He then asked if the Company should continue to make vows as it had been accustomed to do before the Archbishop of Paris' regulation, that is to say, without reservation of dispensation to the Pope and to the General. Each of those present then spoke in turn. Fathers Thibault and Bécu were against the proposal ; the latter's reason was that the vows ' tend towards a religious Order '; Fathers Grimal and Gilles were in favour of the proposal, and the official report of the meeting states that Father Guissot was nonplussed. Father Blatiron maintained his previous attitude, and for the same reasons, namely, the

hostility of Italians and the Bishops, and added : ' There is just as much advantage in making them as in not making them . . . . One can consolidate by permitting those to make vows who ask to do so, and by obtaining for them indispensability from the Holy See : which would be easy.' Neither had Father Dehorgny modified his previous view that the vows were null ; ' an envoy should be sent to Rome as soon as possible and, in the meantime, let things go on as quietly as possible.' Fathers Alméras, Portail, and Lucas were of the same opinion, and although Father Lambert believed that the vows were valid, yet he too asked that the matters should be referred to Rome.

After all had expressed their views, Saint Vincent eulogised vows and ended by saying : ' It is Our Lord's will that vows should be taken ' ; and although he did not consider the intervention of the Holy See necessary, nevertheless, he promised to send a delegate to Rome to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.[67] It seemed that, if the Saint was in favour of maintaining vows, he had renounced the reservation of dispensation to the Pope and the General. A meeting held on July 20 showed that he was intent on securing this reservation, and hence he recommended Father Berthe, whom he appointed delegate to the Holy See, not to forget it in his petition.[68]

Father Berthe was entrusted with an extremely difficult mission, for vows gave the Institute the appearance of a religious Congregation, and at this period opposition to religious Congregations, both in France and Italy, was so strong that it seemed mere foolishness to try to add to their number. Despite the difficulties of his task, Father Berthe hoped to bring it to a successful conclusion when an unexpected incident led to his return to France. Early in 1655, Mazarin, annoyed at Father Berthe having afforded hospitality to Cardinal de Retz in the House of the Congregation in Rome, sent him word that he must leave the Eternal City. Saint Vincent sent Father Blatiron to replace Father Berthe for the time being. ' As far as I can see,' he wrote to Father Blatiron on July 9, ' difficulties are still cropping up,

[67] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 335 ff.
[68] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 579.

but it cannot be otherwise, considering you have such a Cardinal and such a powerful body leading the opposition.[69] But this will not prevent me, even if they plucked out my eyes, from esteeming and loving them dearly. . . . Let us wait patiently, but also let us act and hasten slowly so to say, in negotiating one of the most important matters with which the Congregation will ever have to deal.'

The death of Innocent X had removed the main obstacle to the success of the project, and Edmund Jolly's diplomatic skill—he had been sent to Rome to replace Father Berthe—soon overcame the last obstacles. The document presented to the Congregation of the Council for its approbation is still extant. The author sets out to show that the taking of simple vows does not prevent a Congregation from remaining secular ; in order to become a religious, it states, vows must be made in a religious Congregation recognised as such by the Church. This condition is absent in the case of the oblates of Saint Mary of Montserrat, and hence they are not religious, although simple vows are usual in that Congregation. On the other hand, the Jesuits, bound by the same vows, are religious, because the Church has so ordained. The canonical situation of the Congregation of the Mission is on a par with that of the oblates of Montserrat. They do not desire, they do not ask for, nay more, they reject the status of religious. They are not, like religious, incapable of owning, or of entering into contracts. Those who leave are not regarded as ' apostates,' in the canonical sense of the term. Not only are their vows taken without any solemnity, for there is neither ceremony, blessing nor consecration, but also they are not accepted by the Superior either in the name of God, or in that of the Congregation. Simple vows taken under such conditions cannot be the vows of religious, according to Suarez.[70]

[69] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 395 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, sect. VII, p. 172.

[70] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 365. In the case of Redemptorist Fathers, who are classed by their Bull of establishment as members of the secular clergy, the profession of vows is made with solemnity, and the vows are accepted by the Superior. The Holy See, though urgently solicited to do so, has declined to transfer them to the ranks of the regular clergy. The Superior

On September 22, 1655, Alexander VII granted the favour that had been so long and so ardently desired. ' Taking into consideration the petition humbly submitted to us,' he said in the Brief *Ex Commissa Nobis*, ' on the advice of Our Venerable Brethren the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, interpreters of the Sacred Council of Trent, to whom we have referred the matter for examination, by Our Apostolic Authority and by the tenor of these presents, we confirm and approve the said Congregation of the Mission, already begun and approved in the manner we have stated, with the taking of simple vows, which should be done after two years' probation, of chastity, poverty and obedience, as also of stability in the said Congregation, with the object of devoting oneself all one's life to the salvation of poor country folk, and whilst these vows are being pronounced no one shall assist with the purpose of accepting them in the name of the Congregation, or of Ourselves, or the Sovereign Pontiff for the time being, and only the Sovereign Pontiff, as well as the Superior General of the said Congregation, shall have power to dissolve the said holy vows when dismissing anyone from the said Congregation ; and no other person, even in virtue of any Jubilee or Bull of Crusade or other Indult, Constitution or Concession whatsoever, shall have

General had petitioned the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to declare *eosdem professos esse ac proprie dictos religiosos, ita ut ea congregatio in statu vere religioso constituta habeatur ejusque professi sint de clero regulari, quamvis vota solemnia non emittant ; aut* (*quemadmodum Gregorius XIII in Bulla* Ascendente Domino *pro alumnis Societatis Jesu, qui vota tantum simplicia emittunt, declaravit*) *Sanctitas Vestra edicere dignetur alumnos nostrae congregationis esse vere religiosos.* The Superior General's reasons were : certain expressions to be found in Pontifical Documents, the non-necessity of solemn vows to constitute the religious state, the solemnity of the profession and the acceptance of the vows by the Superior. The S. C. formulated the question in these terms : *An et quomodo conveniat declarare congregationem presbyterorum saecularium SS. Redemptoris qualitate vere regulari gaudere, aut saltem id ex gratia concedendum sit in casu ?* The following reply was given on September 16, 1864 : *Ad primam partem, non esse regularem ; ad secundam partem, non expedire.* As a matter of fact, the Redemptorists may claim the title of religious but not that of regulars.

power to dissolve, commute or dispense from them, if there be not special mention in them of the said vows made in the said Congregation.'[71]

The Brief of Alexander VII repeats, as may be seen, the Archiepiscopal Charge of 1641 : vows are to be made after two years' probation ; no one has a right to receive them ; they do not give Missionaries the status of religious, and only the Pope and the Superior General can dispense from them. In 1659, Saint Vincent said : ' Now, let us see what is the state to which God has called us ; is it a religious Order ? No, it is that of secular priests who place themselves in that state which Our Lord chose for Himself, by renouncing goods, honours and pleasures. . . . I tell you it is not a religious Order, and we are not religious.'[72]

To forestall any ambiguity, Alexander VII added that the Congregation of the Mission, notwithstanding its character of a secular Congregation, was exempt from the jurisdiction of Ordinaries in all save its external functions. Hence all that concerns the spiritual and domestic affairs of its members are the concern of the Superior General, and not of the Bishops ; hence it is for him to appoint and to remove them, to entrust and to relieve them of certain duties, to impose regulations and to modify them ; and even it is he who gives jurisdiction to priests to hear the Confessions of their confrères. Saint Vincent did not, however, consider that the Brief allowed him to grant dismissorial letters to his clerics for the reception of Holy Orders ; later on, he thought of asking this power from the Holy See but long hesitated to do so from fear of offending the Bishops.[73]

The reception of the Brief *Ex Commissa Nobis* filled Saint Vincent's heart with joy and gratitude, as may be seen from a letter sent to Father Jolly to acknowledge its arrival. ' We have received the Brief, containing the approbation of our vows, thanks be to God. It is to Him we are primarily indebted, for it is true that, without a special guidance on

[71] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 380. The French translation of the Brief was specially prepared for Saint Vincent to be read to the Brothers of Saint Lazare.

[72] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 372.

[73] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 343 ; Vol. VIII, p. 31.

His part, it would have been impossible to surmount the obstacles. It is He, Who by His grace, has disposed their Eminences the Cardinals, the theologians and others who have contributed to the success of this affair, and even the Pope himself, to support this plan for the consolidation of the Company. It is He, too, Who chose you to be the promoter and the soul as it were of these proceedings ; it was He Who gave you the inclination to do so, when you were here, and He blessed your efforts there, in an almost wonderful way, for they even surpassed your hopes. May the divine Goodness thereby be ever glorified ! May It be your recompense for all the trouble you have taken, and may It enable you to realise my gratitude ! '[74] On October 22, the day on which this letter was written, he assembled the whole community of Saint-Lazare, and after relating the story of the vows in the Company and pointing out the difficulties that had to be surmounted from the very beginning, he read the Brief in Latin and French and then asked if each of those present was prepared to receive it. All agreed ; and he then drew up a document containing the substance of the discourse he had just pronounced, and a copy of the Brief, asked those present to sign and had their signature officially witnessed by two notaries, ' in order,' as he said, ' that posterity might see that it had been carried out juridically, and in the best possible manner.'[75] Those who were unable to be present on that occasion were invited to accept the Brief as soon as possible. The example of Saint-Lazare was followed by all the other houses, and to give more solemnity to the proceedings, and to see that the essential formalities were observed, Saint Vincent sent Father Portail to Montmirail and Father Berthe to most of the establishments in France. The house in Rome was the last to sign, on July 1, 1656.[76]

The ceremony of taking the vows at Saint-Lazare was fixed for January 25, the anniversary of Saint Vincent's first idea of establishing the Company. On that day, the Register

[74] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 453.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 496.

[76] These documents are preserved in the Mother-House of the Congregation.

was begun in which, even to the present day, all those who make their vows in the Mother-House inscribe their names and sign the usual formulary ; it is a book venerable at once for its antiquity and for the great names inscribed in it. It opens with a copy of the Brief *Ex Commissa Nobis*, certified as authentic by two notaries and by Nicolo Guidi, the Nuncio in Paris. Next comes an attestation of Saint Vincent in regard to the proceeding on January 25, the formula to be used in taking the vows, an explanation of the conditions of the vow of poverty, and finally the signatures of all those who took vows on that day. It would be difficult to say whether or not there were any cases of abstention in Saint-Lazare, for we are ignorant of the personnel of the house. Elsewhere, the number of abstentions was small. James de la Fosse and James Tholard refused to follow their confrères' example and Saint Vincent wrote, in 1658, to induce them to do so, but there is no evidence as to whether or not he succeeded.[77] Both died within the Congregation, and Father Tholard was even the head of a province. Fathers Boucher, Brin, Grimal, Jeandé, Perraud, Bajoue and Demonchy only made their vows several months after the others had done so, and Father Lhuillier did not make his until 1659. Fathers Caset, Feydin, Baliano, Daisne and a dozen other priests and a certain number of lay-brothers probably never took vows ; at least their names are not to be found either in the list of those who accepted Alexander VII's Brief or in the catalogue of the vows.

The Brief *Ex Commissa Nobis* brought an end to controversy or rather, if controversy still continued, it was concerned with another point, namely, the interpretation of the vow of poverty. Vincent de Paul, to put an end to all doubts, again had recourse to Rome. At his request, Alexander VII, on August 12, 1659, declared that Missionaries still retained ownership of their immovable goods and simple benefices, which they had a right to acquire, and the duty of applying accruing revenues, with the permission of Superiors either to works of piety or to the relief of such of their parents or relations as were in want.[78] It was very quickly observed that this solution did not cover every case,

[77] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 291 ff.
[78] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 406.

for the Brief made no mention of movable goods and was silent as to the power of disposing of immovable goods, either during one's lifetime or by will ; moreover, there was no indication given as to where money should be deposited, or as to how money acquired, not from immovable goods, but from other sources such as gifts and heritages, was to be employed. And again, in the case of gifts, two categories had to be considered : those made to the Missionary as a private individual, and those received by him as a member of the Congregation, to which they should go by right. How was one sort of gift to be distinguished from the other ? The General Assembly of 1745 considered all these matters at great length, provided solutions in accordance with the holy Founder's mind and the customs of the Congregation, and set out what may be called a ' code of the vow of poverty ' under twenty headings.

Another important point, namely, the indissolubility of the vows gave rise in course of time to controversies which necessitated intervention on the part of Rome. Alexander VII, in his Brief *Ex Commissa Nobis*, had declared that, apart from the Sovereign Pontiff and the Superior General, no one could dispense from the vows, even during a Jubilee and that, apart from express mention, this regulation should remain valid notwithstanding any constitution or concession whatsoever.[79] Yet, in spite of such a clear statement, some Missionaries contended that indispensability ceased during Jubilees.[80] On June 23, 1670, Clement X decided against this interpretation. The controversy was resumed some years later and Father Jolly submitted the question to the Sorbonne. That distinguished Society, in a statement signed by seventeen Doctors of Theology, showed that the Pontifical decision was based on law. The document was printed and sent to all the houses of the Company,[81] but still met with a certain amount of opposition which probably increased in the course of time for, half a century later, Benedict XIV had to remind the Congregation of his predecessor's Brief.[82]

[79] *Acta Apostolica in favorem Congregationis Missionis*, p. 17.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 38 ; *Recueil des principales circulaires*, Vol. I, p. 180.
[81] *Recueil des principales circulaires*, Vol. I, pp. 198 ff.
[82] *Acta Apostolica*, p. 140.

After these Pontifical decisions, the juridical status of the Company was clearly defined, and we find no trace of any further doubts until 1917. The publication of the new Code of Canon Law opened up a new era of controversy. Certain expressions seemed to indicate that the Code, by extending the meaning of the word ' religious ' beyond its ancient limits, applied it to all Communities in which the custom of the three vows of religion, as they are called, was established with the approbation of Rome. The Code groups, as a matter of fact, communities into two classes : religious communities and communities without vows and declares,[83] moreover, that the Canons relating to religious are applicable to Institutes that call themselves religious Congregations, or simply Congregations.[84]

Now the Congregation of the Mission, and that is undoubtedly its official name, cannot be reckoned amongst communities without vows. Its vows, approved by the Church which has determined the conditions of their validity and liceity, are made aloud in the presence of the Superior or his representative, after the individual has received permission to do so, and are then inscribed in a special Register ; no one can dispense from them except the Pope and the Superior General ; they render the individual who has made them a member of the Company and, furthermore, Rome has declared that a person who made a vow to enter the religious state fulfils his obligation by joining the Congregation of the Mission.

These arguments did not impress the General Assembly of 1919, before which the question was raised and debated. It decided almost unanimously that the Congregation of the Mission is not comprised within the class of religious Congregations, and even declined to refer this decision to the Holy See for approbation, as it considered such a proceeding unnecessary, as indeed it is, seeing that the canonical status of the Congregation is quite clear.

It called itself ' Congregation of the Mission ' from the very beginning, even before the custom of taking simple vows was introduced and when, in the opinion of all, it was certainly not a Religious Congregation, and this name,

[83] Article XVII. [84] Canon 488, 2°.

consecrated by the Bull of Establishment, has been retained to the present day in its wide, usual and primitive sense, and not in the strictly canonical one. As for the vows themselves, there is one quality wanting to them which is essential for the vows of religion. They are private vows ; no one is delegated to accept them, either on the part of the Church or of the Congregation. The priest who hears them does not interrupt the Sacrifice of the Mass, nor does he turn round or listen to them ; he goes on with the liturgical prayers and is deaf, as far as he can be, to all that is read or said in his presence. This rite, which has been in use from the beginning and was approved by Alexander VII, clearly shows that the vows are private, and was selected, not without design, to indicate their character. Now, such vows are not the vows of religion ; the vows of religion mean public vows, officially accepted in the name of the Church, by the lawful Superior. The following remark of the holy Founder is as true to-day as it was in the past : ' It is said that religious are in a state of perfection ; we are not religious, but we may say that we are in a state of charity, because we are constantly employed in the actual practice of love or in a disposition to be so.'[85]

The Rules, Constitutions and Vows affected the Company in the most intimate and essential element of its existence, and hence it was natural that the entire body, in the person of its representatives, should have been summoned to meet and deliberate on these three points. Two Assemblies were held in Paris, one in 1642, lasting from the 13th to the 23rd of October, and the other in 1651, from July 1 to August 11. There were twelve members present at the first, and forty at the second, Assembly ; the latter was chiefly concerned with the vows but, in both, the text of the Common Rules as well as those of particular offices and the special rules relating to the election of a Superior General were carefully scrutinised.

Fathers Portail and Dehorgny were nominated by the Assembly of 1642 to act as Assistants to Saint Vincent. Four Provinces were also established : Paris, including Crécy ; Champagne, with Toul and Troyes ; Touraine,

[85] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 275.

with Richelieu, Luçon, Saintes and La Rose, and Italy, with Annecy and Rome. It was proposed that the members of the Congregation should bind themselves by vow not to use secret influence to obtain benefices or ecclesiastical charges, to cease from their ordinary labours for a year (which was to be spent in following out the exercises of 'the internal seminary'), and to hold a triennial meeting of Provincial Procurators in Paris, and of the Superiors of each Province in the Visitor's own house.[86] On October 22, Saint Vincent, after endeavouring to convince his confrères that he had not the necessary qualities to rule the Congregation, begged them to elect another Superior General. When he had finished his address, he left the room and hid in a little chapel, from which he could see the Church, and there on his knees and with his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle gave himself up to prayer. The members of the Assembly, taken by surprise at such a decision, decided that there was no need to deliberate on the matter and sent a delegation to beg him to alter his decision. They spent a long time looking for him but it was impossible to induce him to change his mind. 'I am deposed,' he declared, 'put somebody else in my place.' The entire Assembly had in fact to come in a body and implore him to continue his services to the Company. 'We have chosen you as our Superior General,' they said, 'and as long as God preserves you on earth, we want no other.' Before such a manifestation of God's will, he bowed his head and resumed the burden.[87]

The Assembly of 1651 again took up the question of finding means to prevent the secret employment of influence to acquire benefices and appointments. Missions were also discussed at length; the order and time-table of the exercises, and the length of sermons were debated; it was asked whether it would not be better to wait until restitution had been made before imparting Absolution, and whether it would not be well to establish, in each Province, two or three perpetual Missionaries, and to withdraw from the Missions priests who had reached a certain age and give them other employments. The training of the clerics at Saint Lazare

[86] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XIII, sect. I, p. 212.
[87] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 287 ff.

was another important matter in the eyes of the Assembly. It was decided that the Superior General and his Assistants should note carefully the progress of the clerics in learning and virtue, that the students should have a spiritual guide of their own, and should no longer take part at recreation with the elder priests. Other resolutions were taken in regard to the hour for High Mass on Sundays and Festivals, the hour for the weekly Conference, and for spiritual discourses to the clerics and brothers ; a catalogue of faults was drawn up and a list of penances to be imposed for certain failings ; regulations were also made regarding the property of individuals and duties towards benefactors. Amongst other matters debated attention may be called to the following : whether a closer union should be established between the Congregation and the Tuesday Conferences ; how lay-brothers should be treated, and the means of fostering charity and union in the Company.[88] This Assembly had not time to elaborate a complete Code, and the work was carried on by the General Assembly of 1668. However, the essentials were settled, and the Constitutions pointed out the road to be followed in providing the Institute with a Superior General and Assistants. This was of the utmost importance for Saint Vincent was now beginning to feel the weight of years and increasing infirmities, but Death might now claim him, for a bridge had been established for the passage of his Generalship to that of a successor.

The Company, as established by him, possessed all the guarantees of stability, for there was none who had in the same degree the gifts of mind, heart and will so essential for good government : he knew how to command, control, correct, stimulate, administer, and how withal to be patient and loving. He loved all men sincerely, but his children had a special place in his heart. The door of his room stood ever open for them ; he welcomed them affably, listened attentively to what they had to say, and sent them away quite happy even when their petitions had not been granted. Those about to leave Saint-Lazare to preach a Mission, or who returned from one, always went to ask his blessing ; he

[88] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 326 ff.

then knelt down and embraced them with the utmost tenderness. He embraced even still more tenderly those who, resenting something he had done, frankly told him of their annoyance or even their aversion. 'If I had not already given you my heart,' he said to such a one, 'I would give it to you on the spot.' His heart, indeed, belonged to all his Missionaries, whether at Saint-Lazare or elsewhere. One of his priests who had gone to the relief of the poor in Champagne drew up and sent back to Paris a list of articles that were, if not absolutely necessary, at least useful and amongst them was a skull-cap. Search was made for one, but all in vain, for there was not one to be found in the house. 'Take mine,' he said, 'and send it with the rest; the dear man may need it badly.'

Those in distress could have found no better consoler; he sympathised with all such in their troubles, and could, moreover, manifest his sympathy; he asked them to come and see him, or went to visit them, so as to give them an opportunity to tell him the cause of their sadness. If their sorrow was occasioned by family troubles or misfortunes, he was accustomed to ask the prayers of the whole Community; from his priests, an intention in their Masses, or from the clerics, a Holy Communion. If it arose from an act of injustice or harsh treatment, he saw that it was remedied as rapidly as possible. A Brother who had been insulted by one of the domestics complained to the Saint of his tormentor and the latter, although very useful in Saint-Lazare, was sent away provided with a good testimonial that would help him to procure another situation easily. To another Brother, who had been treated harshly by one of the officials of the Community, and who was still quite upset, Saint Vincent said: 'You did quite right to let me know about it; always come to me, Brother, for you know well how I love you.' He showed similar sympathy with the sick, and frequently paid a visit to the Infirmary to see, amuse and give advice to the patients as to the best means of recovering quickly, and he never failed to recommend the Brother Infirmarian to look after his patients well. The sick, he often used to say, 'bring a blessing on the Company and the house,' and he was prepared to sell, if need were, even the Sacred Vessels of

the Church.[89] He never forgets to mention the sick in his letters to Superiors. He accepted postulants whose health was by no means good in the hope that special care and attention would bring them round, and he never sent persons away from the 'Internal Seminary' until it became painfully evident that there was no hope of their ever being fit for the employments of the Congregation. Several persons of delicate health became quite strong and, in the course of time, turned out to be excellent members of the Company.

Some of the lay-brothers had very little aptitude for work, and others were of such uncommon dullness of mind that the same order had to be repeated to them five or six times. Saint Vincent took pleasure in exercising such acts of patience; what would have exasperated another man seemed only to increase his gentleness and tranquillity. He would have been slow to send away those who by their want of intelligence afforded him opportunities of becoming more holy. His patience was also tried by the scrupulous. He was never heard to complain of those unfortunate persons, and Heaven alone knows what he had to suffer from their importunities. Some of them used to visit him three or four times an hour without ever troubling the serenity of his countenance or peacefulness of mind. If he were in company, he would withdraw to a place apart in order to listen, and he was accustomed to take the trouble of putting down in writing a few words of advice in order to assist the memory of these poor, tormented victims.

He showed similar kindness to those whom he used to call 'the froward.' All his Missionaries did not give good example, and there were several who by their criticisms, slanders, irregularities and other faults were an element of disorder in the Community. 'It would,' he admitted, 'be simply an act of justice to the Company to cut off its gangrened members, and even prudence itself seems to call for it.' But he aimed at imitating the wise physician who, before abandoning all hope of his patient's cure, exhausts every remedy, and hence he employed every means in his power: prayers, admonitions and warnings. He used to recall that this was the method Our Lord used with the

[89] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, Ch. XI, sect. VI, pp. 161–167.

Apostles. 'Our Saviour did not cast off Saint Peter for having denied Him thrice, nor even Judas, though He foresaw he would die in his sin ; hence I think it will be pleasing to His divine goodness if the Company extends its charity towards the froward, and omits and spares nothing which may bring them back to God. It is only in the last resort that one should have recourse to dismissal, in case they do not improve.'[90] He remained for nearly two hours at the feet of one of his priests, with tears in his eyes, begging him not to yield to a temptation. 'No,' he said, 'I will not stand up until you grant me what I ask you for your own good ; I intend in dealing with you to be at least as strong as the devil.'[91] The dismissal of a Missionary was extremely painful, as one may judge by the forcible expressions used by him in his grief when he had to proceed to such a measure. 'It is tearing out my heart, it is rending my vitals to pieces, to have to do so. . . . When I see someone who must be sent away, I fear doing so far more strongly than three attacks of fever ; but it has to be done ; we must be firm ; he is not a skilful surgeon who only knows how to apply a plaster ; he should know how to cut and how to remove a limb when the others are threatened with injury.'[92]

Saint Vincent suffered even still more when a Missionary told him that he intended to leave the Congregation and, in order to retain him, the Saint appealed to the intellect, the emotions and the ideas inspired by Faith.[93] Some alleged the state of their health as a primary motive, and to such he was wont to reply : 'Do not have the slightest fear of being in any way a burthen on the Company on account of your illnesses . . . ; as a matter of fact, it has not very many sick members ; on the contrary, it is a blessing to have them.' Brother Rivet, for instance, was of a restless and changeable disposition, and was never satisfied wherever he happened to be ; he thought he could only be happy if he left the Congregation, but an affectionate letter from the Saint was effective, at least for a time. He must surely have been

[90] *Ibid.*, Bk. III, Ch. XII, sect. I, pp. 188–191.
[91] *Ibid.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, sect. VI, p. 162.
[92] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 662.
[93] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XII, sect. I, p. 188.

touched when he read the following lines : ' Choose any one of the three houses nearest to where you now are, and rest assured you will be welcome everywhere. The goodness of your heart has won all the affection of mine, which has no other object than the glory of God and your sanctification.' Saint Vincent adopted different methods of dealing with individuals according to their temperament and with some he was humorous. One day, after listening to a priest who said that he was fully determined to leave, the Saint asked with a smile on his lips and a look full of tenderness : ' When are you leaving, Sir ? And do you intend to go on foot or on horseback ? ' The poor man, quite nonplussed by these questions, thought no more of his project.[94]

Saint Vincent always preferred persuasion to command and never gave an order unless compelled to do so by circumstances. He never sent his Missionaries to foreign countries unless they were perfectly willing to go. One of them relates that before he was selected for Rome, he had to undergo a little cross-examination : ' Are you a man ready to take a long journey to serve God ? '—' I am quite prepared to do so.'—' But the place is far away from this Kingdom.'—' That does not matter.'—' But you must cross the sea.'—' It is all the same to me whether I go by sea or land.'—' But it is three thousand leagues away.'—' Oh ! the distance does not frighten me.'

It was always painful to Saint Vincent's sensitive heart to have to refuse a permission, and when he could not avoid doing so it was quite clear to the suppliant, whilst listening to the Saint, that he felt the pain acutely, and hence the bitterness of disappointment was greatly diminished. Sometimes he used to put the petitioner off, saying : ' Pray remind me of the matter later '; and if a Missionary showed only too plainly that he was annoyed, then some special little act of kindness or compensation restored him to happiness ; at times, a permission refused in the evening was accorded the following morning, without the petitioner having to ask for it a second time.[95]

Yet however great was his kindness, it never prevented

[94] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. XI, sect. VI, pp. 164–165.
[95] *Ibid.*, Bk. III, Ch. XXIV, pp. 339–341.

him from insisting on the observance of the Rule, and to ensure this he employed every means in his power : example, vigilance, advice and reproof. He fully realised that a weak and easy-going Superior leads a Community to destruction. His presence at all the exercises had a twofold advantage, he was seen and he saw for himself. The sight of him edified and stimulated others ; and he, for his part, was able to see who were absent and late and to form an opinion of how things were moving. Of course, everything was not perfect, and he had at times to reprimand, but no one knew better than he how to make a reproof acceptable. When silence and patience sufficed of themselves to teach a lesson, he said nothing, except in cases of formal disobedience or where there was a danger of evil results. It was a fixed principle of his never to reprimand on the spot or when under the influence of emotion, but always to wait for a suitable opportunity and to ask God, in prayer, to help him to find the appropriate words. In specially delicate circumstances, he made his prayer for several days in succession on the manner in which he should proceed. A surgeon, before operating, puts the patient to sleep to deaden the pain, and Saint Vincent also did everything in his power to reduce pain to a minimum. He used the greatest moderation in his reproofs. ' Sir,' he used to say, ' if you had done that in the way I told you, God would have given it His blessing,' or, ' It seems to me, Sir, that I see in your dilatoriness just the shadow of disobedience,' or, before administering a reproof, ' Would you mind, Sir, if I give you an admonition ? '[96] Indirect reproofs were frequently employed because, as they are not apparently admonitions, they do not wound self-love so severely. One of his Missionaries had the double fault of wasting time and hectoring the people in his sermons. Saint Vincent merely sent him a letter of which the most important piece of news was the great zeal everywhere manifested for the works of the mission, and the successes obtained by charity and gentleness.[97] The Bursar of the house at Mans was niggardly about food, and the pupils' health suffered. This became known in Paris and the Bursar

[96] *Ibid.*, Bk. III, Ch. XXIV, sect. I, pp. 343–345.
[97] *Ibid.*, Ch. XII, pp. 182–183.

received a note stating : ' I have heard that in one of our houses the bad food supplied there had injured both minds and bodies and, if the individual who is in charge of the accounts and who, thinking to practise frugality, is proceeding to such excesses in domestic economy does not provide a better table after the admonition I am giving and the letter I am writing to him, I shall be compelled to put some one else in his place who will provide reasonable fare for the family, as is done at Saint-Lazare and elsewhere ; for, through not having done so, several persons are indisposed. I am telling you this, Sir, because you hold a similar position, and in order that you may take care, if you please, to avoid such inconveniences, endeavouring to supply good bread, good meat, and not to sell the best wines in order to provide the worst, or to expose the community to complaints of stinginess. I have been so much upset by the complaints made to me from the house of which I speak that I am very much afraid others may give me a similar reason for distress. I trust that you may not be the cause and beg you to pay attention to this matter.'[98]

Of course, he had at times to put the matter plainly but, in these circumstances, he multiplied precautions. Praise, acts of humility and multiplied tokens of affection were mingled with blame. ' You see, Sir, you and I allow ourselves to be carried away by our opinions.'[99] ' Remember that you and I are subject to a thousand impulses of nature '[100] —' You will, if you please, correct your readiness to settle and carry out affairs, and I will endeavour to correct my easy-going ways.'[101]—' Observe the great number of things of which I have written to you ! '[102] he once concluded a letter, ' but to whom can I speak simply and with entire confidence if not to you who are my other self, and whom I love more tenderly than I do myself ! Oh ! I will certainly always open my heart to you and never keep anything back for I know the depth of your heart and the charity Our Lord has given you for me.'—' I beseech you, Sir,' he added at the end of another reproof, ' to bear with the simplicity with

[98] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 504.
[99] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 235.
[100] *Ibid.*, p. 246.
[101] *Ibid.*, p. 207.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

which I address you, and pray do not be grieved, but act like those brave pilots who, when caught in a great storm, redouble their courage, and turn the prow of their vessels towards the most furious waves of the sea that seems as if about to swallow them up.'

If, after a first warning, the individual again fell into the same fault, the tone of the reproof become more grave ; after a third lapse, it was severe and, in case another reprimand became necessary, a threat of punishment was added. In case of a repeated, public fault, followed by scandal, the reproof was given in public, and the priests themselves were humiliated in presence of the students and lay-brothers. He never referred again to a man's faults if, after a warning, he had profited by the correction ; and he never permitted the delinquent to know the source from which the information of his fault had come.[103]

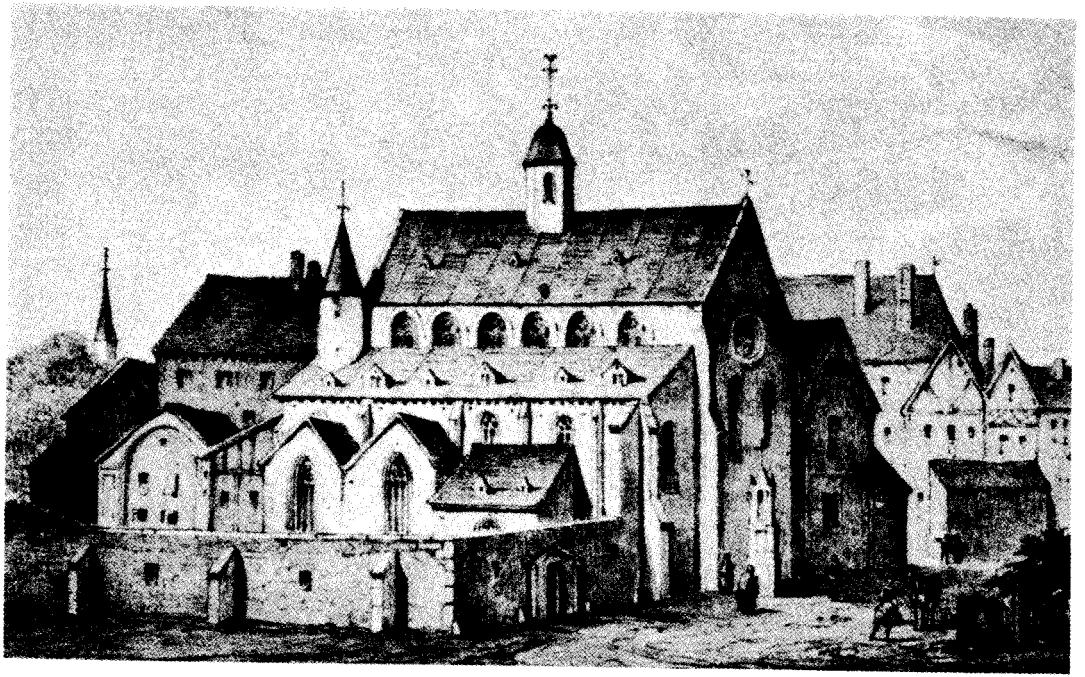
A Superior is not merely placed in charge of individuals whom he is bound to guide, but also of property which he has to administer. Saint Vincent attentively supervised the administration of all his subordinates. Every evening the Procurator of Saint-Lazare supplied him with an account of the day's transactions and received instructions for the morrow. Nothing important was settled without him, and those who, despite his words of warning, took too much on themselves were removed from their posts. He had an eye on everything, even the trees and the fruit in the garden, even on the cattle in the farm-yard, and he was accustomed to examine the Brothers' account-books. He frequently visited the outlying farms belonging to Saint-Lazare, to see what the harvests had yielded, and that the farm labourers had nothing to complain of.

If he was lavish with his alms, he was very careful about domestic expenses : food and clothing were simple and plain. In hard times when the cost of living rose, the portions of meat and wine supplied at meals were diminished. All who held office had strict orders to avoid waste. Foodstuffs and cloth were secured at a cheaper rate by being purchased at the most suitable times. Only indispensable buildings were erected, and then mere embellishments and pictures

[103] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XXIV, sect. I, pp. 343–345.

were eliminated ; unnecessary furniture was also dispensed with. If anyone suggested something merely useful or ornamental, Saint Vincent would reply : ' God has bound Himself to supply only what is necessary ; why then should I look for superfluities ? ' The same spirit of economy was observable in regard to travelling,[104] and hence his opposition to such of his Missionaries as wished to change their place of residence, if there were not a sound reason for complying with their desires. Such was the spirit of prudence and wisdom he displayed in the government of his Congregation and to it was due its rapid extension.

[104] Abelly, *Op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XXIV, sect. II, pp. 354–359.



THE CHURCH OF SAINT-LAZARE

CHAPTER XXII

THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN PARIS

THE external development of the Company proceeded on a par with its internal ; the supply of novices for the ' Internal Seminary ' was constant, and foundations multiplied. From France the Missionaries proceeded to Italy, Ireland, Scotland, Poland and Barbary and even reached as far as Madagascar.

Paris was, as we have seen, the cradle of the Congregation of the Mission which had its origin in the Collège des Bons-Enfants. In 1632, the College lost its title of ' Mother-House,' which passed to Saint-Lazare ; Saint Vincent and some members of the staff moved to their new quarters and the priests who remained behind devoted themselves to evangelising the country districts. In 1636, or thereabouts, the venerable old building became a Seminary, and admitted children to begin their studies.[1] Scarcely had six years elapsed before a second Seminary, consisting of priests, was established within the college and, in order to afford room for development, the twenty or thirty young scholars who occupied the first Seminary were transferred, in 1645, to Little Saint-Lazare, of which we shall speak later.[2] The number of ecclesiastics in residence rapidly increased to sixty,[3] and even reached sixty-five ; and if the number was never greater, this was due to the fact that the College could not accommodate more.[4] The fees, fixed at 250 livres, covered only one-third of the expenses.[5] Saint Vincent sent

[1] See Chapter XIII.

[2] In 1644, there were fourteen pupils (cf. *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 459, 489).

[3] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 167.

[4] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 139, 238 ; Vol. VII, p. 17.

[5] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 602 ; Vol. III, p. 233.

his clerics to the college to follow the lectures in theology,[6] and allowed his newly ordained priests to remain there for some months to enable them to complete their period of training.[7] The Collège des Bons-Enfants, like Saint-Lazare, had retreats for Ordinands, retreats for private individuals,[8] and even the Tuesday Conferences were sometimes held there.[9] Ecclesiastics from the provinces who had come to Paris to complete their studies,[10] or for any other reason, were gladly admitted for longer or shorter periods provided they promised to abide by the rules of the College.[11] Up to 1640, there were nine or ten students attending the University, but subsequently only two ; all these students were scholars on the Pluyette Foundation.

If the union of the Collège des Bons-Enfants with the Congregation of the Mission had raised no difficulties, the same was not true of the latter's union with the Priory of Saint-Lazare ; the monks of Saint-Victor, the monks of Saint-Genevieve, and, later, the knights of Saint-Lazare asserted that their rights had been violated. After Saint Vincent had won his suit against the monks of Saint-Genevieve, knowing their tenacity and fearful lest the question might be raised again, he multiplied precautions to preserve the property for his sons. Although the collation of the benefice depended solely on the Archbishop of Paris, he had recourse to the Holy See to obtain its approbation of the deed of union.[12] The Bulls were ready on March 15, 1635, but the opposition party prevented their despatch.[13] The Pontificate of Urban VIII and that of Innocent X passed by without any further progress in the matter, but the election of Alexander VII aroused new hopes. Edmund Jolly, who was the Congregation's agent in Rome, succeeded in obtaining new Bulls on April 18, 1655 ;[14] but the same

[6] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 539 ; Vol. IV, p. 518.
[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 231.
[8] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 92, 106, 527–528 ; Vol. XI, p. 211.
[9] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 308.
[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 564 ; Vol. VII, p. 398.
[11] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 28 ; Vol. VIII, pp. 53, 110.
[12] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 255.
[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 486 ; Vol. XIII, p. 397.
[14] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 372.

adversaries again appeared and, once more, the document was not despatched. In the meanwhile, an Augustinian monk declared, in the course of a private conversation, that the Superior General of Saint-Genevieve had never abandoned his rights to the Priory and that, if he had made no move, he had acted so in the hope of succeeding more easily after M. Vincent's death. As soon as the Saint heard this, he wrote to Father Jolly begging him ' to have the Bulls released no matter at what cost, and in the best possible manner.'[15] The letter is dated August 30, 1658 and, in March, 1659, the long-expected Bulls at length reached Paris. The Official to whom they were sent by Rome was charged to fulminate them in the name of the Holy See. The procedure for fulmination entailed a series of formalities: a petition from Saint Vincent to the Official, a triple placarding at the Official's Court and at Saint-Lazare, an enquiry *de commodo et incommodo* carried out by a close inspection of Saint-Lazare and the evidence of certain witnesses. Only then did the Official formally declare that the Holy See confirmed the union formerly effected by John Francis de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, ' of the house hospital and lazar-house of Saint Lazare-les-Paris with the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission.'[16] Everything passed off quietly without the slightest sign of opposition ; the Official pronounced sentence on July 21, 1659, and on August 7, Saint Vincent took possession in the name of his Congregation.[17] All that now remained to be done was to procure the King's Letters-Patent which were issued in the following March and registered by the Parlement on May 15, 1662.[18]

In this way the Founder, before his death, had the consolation of seeing the union of Saint-Lazare, if not fully achieved, at least so far advanced as not to cause any further fear of the claims of those who thought they had a right to the Priory. If the monks of Saint-Genevieve were tempted to over-estimate the value of their claims, their

[15] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 248. [16] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 395.

[17] See the Nat. Arch. M. 212, No. 7, for the dossier of documents relative to the fulmination of the Bull.

[18] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 412.

ardour was probably cooled by a deed by which the King,[19] with a stroke of the pen, levied a revenue of 16,000 livres on Saint-Lazare. In point of fact, there was no further opposition save from the Knights of Saint-Lazare and this had no other result than the securing of new Letters-Patent in favour of the Congregation of the Mission.[20] The value of the coveted Priory amounted, however, to very little,[21] and that little was reduced to nothing when, as in 1636 and 1649, the house, requisitioned by troops, acting on the orders of the higher powers,[22] was pillaged, or, again,[23] when the City of Paris gave orders that cattle and sheep destined for the slaughter-house, should be let loose and free to graze on land that was sown with wheat, oats and grass, or planted with fruit trees.[24]

The walls were very old and the costs of repairs and maintenance were very high. Saint Vincent refers ruefully in his letters to the burdens that weigh upon the house.[25] Workmen were constantly employed on repairing and consolidating the buildings, and the development of the works of the Congregation necessitated considerable extensions. In 1645, the whole property was walled-in ;[26] in the same year, a new building intended for Ordinands was erected,[27] and at the end of the enclosure, facing the high road from Paris to Saint-Denis, the Seminary of Saint-Charles was built for the young students from the Bons-Enfants. Those whom Saint Vincent used to call the ' guests ' of Saint-Lazare, that is to say the feeble-minded and vicious entrusted to his care by their families, were badly housed or in too close proximity to the Community, and hence, in 1659, he purchased a house close to the stables, to which they were transferred.[28]

All this building and extensions were absolutely necessary, and he would have reproached himself for spending money

[19] *Recueil des principales circulaires des supérieurs généraux*, Vol. I, p. 72. [20] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
[21] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 466, 573 ; Vol. III, pp. 403, 503 ; Vol. IV, pp. 16, 324.
[22] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 340. [23] See p. 676.
[24] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV., p. 572.
[25] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 468 ; Vol. X, p. 41.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 536, 539, 555.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 535. [28] Arch. Nat., S. 6,595, N° 10.

for no other motive than to secure a finer or more pleasant abode. The King's Lieutenant frequently rallied him on the decayed and dilapidated state of the pavilion, and Saint Vincent cheerfully joined in the laugh, though he never admitted that if he left it in such a condition he did so in order to inspire a love of humility and poverty in the members of his Company.[29] He was also restrained by another reason : he feared lest his priests, after living in Saint-Lazare, might find it hard to accommodate themselves to other places. In 1657, he wrote to a Superior : ' I have always been afraid lest those who have been reared too delicately may find it difficult to grow accustomed to living in a badly-built house, in which the food is coarse and nature finds no pleasure. Hence I have always been unwilling to tolerate fine buildings, beautiful alleys and other such pleasant amenities, and, if I had been able to retrench in other matters that are not in truth superfluities for those who make a good use of them, I would have done so, in order that there should be no more reason for being attached to this house than to any other.'[30]

Even the church itself, its furniture and fittings were affected by this love of poverty. Vestments, except those used on great festivals, were made of ordinary camlet. He would not give permission to erect a small balustrade, made in the Community carpenter's shop and intended to separate a side-chapel from the nave, because the workmen had ornamented it too highly. Several years went by before, yielding to necessity, he agreed to remove the ban.[31] Saint Vincent, however, never pushed the spirit of economy to stinginess ; he fully intended that his confrères should be properly treated. Food was good and plentiful, the gardens pleasant and the grounds extensive and well-kept ;[32] the sick in the Infirmary were carefully looked after and the farm of Rougemont, at Sevran, offered convalescents and the overworked an ideal spot for a rest cure.[33] A custom was estab-

[29] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 716.
[30] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 516.
[31] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVIII, p. 274.
[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 516 ; Vol. XI, p. 247.
[33] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 106.

lished that, every week, a lay-brother, a cleric and a priest, each acting for his own category, should find out the needs of every member of the House, write down in a note-book what had been asked for, and present their lists to the Superior or his Assistant. The officers of the house frequently met to concert on the measures that should be taken in the interests of the Community, and the older members were sometimes invited to attend these meetings.[34]

A large part of Saint-Lazare's means of subsistence was derived from a farm situated at Orsigny, a hamlet in the commune of Saclay in the Department of Seine-et-Oise.[35] In 1644, Saint Vincent had accepted it (much against his inclination and after two years' hesitation, in order to please the Prior, Adrian Lebon) from Monsieur and Mademoiselle Norais, on condition of the payment of a heavy life annuity. On the death of the donors, the annuity expired, but the heirs claimed the property in the Law Courts.[36]

Saint Vincent's right was indisputable, as eight famous Paris lawyers assured him ;[37] relying on their legal knowledge and in spite of his own horror of lawsuits, he briefed a lawyer in his defence. The case was tried, and thirteen out of the twenty-two judges decided against him, some because he had fought Jansenism too strenuously, and others because they were opposed on principle to the extension of ecclesiastical property.[38] Saint Vincent, who happened to be absent from Paris at the time, heard the verdict from his secretary, Brother Louis Robineau, just when, dinner being over, he was moving towards the church. 'Blessed be God,' he repeated several times and his visit to the Blessed Sacrament lasted longer than usual.[39] His resignation was admirable as may be seen from the letter he then sent to Saint-Lazare, and from the address he gave

[34] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. X, pp. 286, 300 ; Vol. XI, p. 160 ; Vol. XII, pp. 393–394.

[35] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 327.

[36] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 486 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XIV, p. 235 ; Ch. XVIII, p. 280.

[37] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. XXI, p. 310 ; Brother Robineau's MS.

[38] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 405 ; Brother Robineau's MS.

[39] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Ch. XXI, p. 310 ; Brother Robineau's MS.

the Community on his return.[40] 'All that God does,' he wrote, 'He does for the best; and hence we are bound to hope that this loss will be profitable to us, since it comes from God. . . . It is undoubtedly heavy, but His adorable Wisdom can make it turn to our profit in ways unknown to us at present, but which you will one day see.'[41] Such expressions of faith and confidence came naturally to him in his own trials and in those of others. Nevertheless, the lawyers who had urged him to defend his claims did not consider the battle lost; they maintained that, if an appeal were lodged, the judges could reverse the decision. He did not agree with them, as may be seen from a letter he wrote to M. Desbordes, Councillor to the Parlement. As his right had not been admitted in the first instance, he asked how could it be certain that it would in the second, since the Judges were the same and they were bound to decide according to the same principles. Again, ecclesiastics are often taunted with being too much attached to earthly goods, and would he not strengthen this prejudice by appealing? Moreover, would it not be a sign of want of confidence in God, Who, according to the Gospel, will not suffer us to want for anything if we seek His Kingdom?' Would it not be disobeying Our Lord Who forbade His disciples to go to law? 'In case we should fail a second time,' he added, 'it would be for us a note of infamy which might prejudice the service and edification we owe the public.' His final argument was: 'As one of our practices during the Missions is to reconcile those who are at variance, it is to be feared that if the Company were to insist on a new trial by such an Appeal, which is the refuge of the greatest pettifoggers, then God would deprive us of the grace of working for reconciliations.'[42]

His confidence was rewarded, for, shortly afterwards, a Councillor of the Great Chamber bequeathed him a property fully as valuable as the Orsigny farm which, indeed, was restored to the Congregation some years after Saint Vincent's death.[43]

[40] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XXII, p. 321; Ch. XVIII, p. 281.

[41] *Ibid.*, Ch. III, p. 14.

[42] *Ibid.*, Ch. XIV, p. 235; Ch. XVIII, p. 283. *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, pp. 404–407.

[43] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 406.

If he had no desire for the goods of this life for their own sake, he was, however, pleased to possess them as means for helping the poor and unfortunate. There was no house in Paris belonging to a religious Order that showed the same charitable activities as Saint-Lazare which contained a lazar-house, empty, it is true, as a general rule, a lunatic asylum, a house of correction and an orphanage.[44] There was a considerable amount of assistance given to the poor : shrouds in which to bury the dead, cassocks and breviaries for priests in need, clothing, money and food. The Confraternity of Charity of Saint Lawrence received, for the Sisters and their poor, an annual grant of 200 livres. Every Friday two Missionaries visited all the sick of the parish. Saint-Lazare daily supplied with food a number of poor families in the district who used to send some of their members to collect the food that was left for them at the gate-house. Itinerant beggars always received bread or money and, in addition, three times a week, all poor persons who cared to come (some hundreds as a rule and even at times six hundred), were provided with excellent soup. Alms for the body were always accompanied by alms for the soul, such as a few words of religious instruction or moral exhortation.[45]

Saint-Lazare was also a centre for Retreats : retreats preparatory to Ordination or retreats for private individuals or groups who wished to excite their devotion and fervour by some days spent in prayer and meditation. It was at Saint-Lazare, too, as a general rule, that the Ladies of Charity and the members of the Tuesday Conferences met. The voice of Bossuet and of other great orators was to be heard within its walls ; and the most famous doctors of Theology of the Sorbonne and the College of Navarre assembled there, under Saint Vincent's guidance, to concert measures to resist Jansenism. Many eminent bishops of the Church of France resided at Saint-Lazare when they visited Paris. Neo-converts, Turks, Moors, Jews and heretics were to be found within its walls ; they had come there to be instructed and strengthened in their new religion, and were

[44] Claude de Chandenier's evidence (Arch. Nat., M. 212, liasse 7).

[45] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, sect. III, pp. 131–133.

gratuitously boarded and lodged for years before returning to the world.

Saint Vincent's disciples, stimulated by the zeal of their Master, zealously carried out the duties they had undertaken. Some were chaplains to the Daughters of Charity at the Foundling Hospital and the Hospice of the Holy Name ; others, as directors or professors, devoted their time and attention to the seminarists and students or, to employ a less exact but clearer terminology, the novices and scholastics. And, in addition, there were the Missionaries ; 550 Missions were preached between 1632 and 1660.[46]

Saint Vincent chiefly insisted on maintaining order and regularity so as to create an atmosphere favourable to the formation of his young disciples, but that was not his sole motive. The ' Mother-House ' signified in his eyes the model house. He was thinking of the relaxation that might creep into other houses of the Company if the rule was neglected in the Mother-House, and also of the bad impression that might be produced on the hundreds of persons who went to Saint-Lazare to be edified and to have an opportunity for prayer and recollection. It may have been with a view to avoiding occasions for irregularity[47] that (apart from those who came to make a retreat, bishops, neo-converts and a few benefactors such as M. de Vincy and the brothers Louis and Claude de Chandenier), he did not admit externs to Saint-Lazare, save in exceptional circumstances,[48] as in the troubled days of 1652 when homeless priests were gladly welcomed under his roof.[49] It is true that outsiders from time to time managed to obtain admission to the refectory at meal-times without being noticed,[50] for suspicion was scarcely likely to be aroused by the sight of a new face in a place where large numbers of strangers appeared daily.

Saint Vincent was particularly watchful as to the manner

[46] Deposition of Brother Cholier at the Process of Beatification of Saint Vincent. The witness based his evidence on the Register of Missions preserved in Saint-Lazare.

[47] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XI, p. 206.

[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 28, 597 ; Vol. VIII, pp. 53, 110.

[49] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 407.

[50] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 111.

in which the laws of the Liturgy were carried out during divine service. Saint-Lazare was famous all over Paris for the beauty of its ceremonies and the perfection of its chant. The church was very much frequented by the faithful, and many Bishops had expressed a wish to be consecrated there, amongst others, James Desclaux, Bishop of Dax ; Nicholas Pavillon, Bishop of Alet ; Charles Brulart de Genlis, Archbishop of Embrun ; Arnold Francis de Maytie, Bishop of Oloron, and John de Maupeou, Bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône.[51] Some laymen of rank, such as John Baptist de Budes, Count of Guébriant, Marshal of France, and Anthony Hennequin, Lord of the Manor of Vincy,[52] asked as a favour to be buried in the crypt which contained the mortal remains of the former religious of Saint-Lazare and the members of his own Community who died there.[53]

Saint Vincent wished that good order should be maintained not only in the church which he loved, but throughout the whole house. When Saint-Lazare was moving along the right road no man was happier than he :[54] 'Never,' he wrote in 1644, ' has there been so much regularity, union and cordiality as there is here at present. It seems a little Paradise.' He recalled with a certain amount of complacency that, at Saint-Lazare,[55] persons saluted one another on meeting and addressed each other hat in hand ;[56] that no complaints were to be heard ;[57] that it was customary not to discuss affairs of State or worldly matters or even controversial religious questions ;[58] that the lay-brothers and even the domestics were faithful to the practice of the particular examen.[59] Nor was professional training neglected even in the case of Missionaries of age and experience. Lectures on sacred eloquence, catechetical instruction, controversy, casuistry, moral theology, and the administra-

[51] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 157 ; Vol. VIII, p. 289.
[52] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 534 ; Vol. III, p. 34.
[53] The Custom-Book of old Saint-Lazare (Arch. Mother-House).
[54] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 445.
[55] *Ibid.*,Vol. IX, p. 150.
[56] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 299.
[57] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 34.
[58] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 328.
[59] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, p. 605.

tion of the sacraments were given to all priests, and conferences were held on the Sacred Scriptures.[60]

At Saint-Lazare, as elsewhere, the Superior had to contend against man's tendency to follow his natural inclinations ; at times fidelity to the community exercises left something to be desired, rising at four o'clock in the morning was very painful, and assistance at the Divine Office onerous. When Saint Vincent noticed any negligence he at once called attention to it ; sometimes mentioning the matter in private, and sometimes in public, in the course of a spiritual conference, address or repetition of prayer. If a person fell into the same fault repeatedly, he might expect a penance such as an act of humiliation, a privation or even, in the gravest cases, confinement to his room.[61] The dignitaries of the house were not spared. On one occasion, Father Lambert had to work far into the night on urgent business and, although he had been told to repose on the following morning, he walked into the chapel at half-past four with his confrères. When prayer was over, Saint Vincent rebuked him before the whole Community for his imprudent fervour whilst praising him for his zeal and sense of duty. He reminded his hearers of Saul and Jonathan and related an incident from the history of France to show the importance of the vow of obedience. Father Lambert listened to the rebuke on his knees, and seldom was a morning prayer more edifying and fruitful.[62] He also employed another means—canonical visitation—to maintain or re-establish regularity in the house and, in 1641 and 1642, he had recourse to Father Lambert, then Superior at Richelieu, to carry out the visitation.[63] This fidelity to rule brought down God's blessing on Saint-Lazare. Its numbers increased and Saint

[60] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 304 ; Vol. II, pp. 212, 608 ; Vol. VIII, pp. 79, 80, 82 ; Vol. XI, pp. 256, 292 ; Vol. XII, pp. 288, 289, 292, 295–297.

[61] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 210 ; Vol. XI, p. 60.

[62] We insert the name relying on the authority of Father Lambert's biographer (cf. *Notices sur les prêtres, clercs et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 1re série, Vol. II, p. 20). Abelly merely says ' one of the oldest and most observant priests.' (*Op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XIX, p. 236.)

[63] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 86, 102, 110, 112, 208.

Vincent was soon ready to accept foundations outside Paris. All the clerics trained in the Internal Seminary did not complete their period of probation. Some left and a number of them died ; of the former class, we may mention Stephen Meyster, a native of Ath in Belgium. When he arrived, at the end of 1634, he was in Sub-Deacon's orders ; in 1635, he received the other two Holy Orders and, in the following year, left Saint-Lazare to join M. Olier and put himself under Father de Condren's direction.[64] He was a wonderfully gifted Missionary who preached many missions all of which were marvellously successful. The mission at Amiens was one of the most remarkable. His ascendancy over the people was so great that he might, if he had so wished,[65] have surrendered the city to the Spaniards. He was, according to M. du Ferrier, ' the first man in the world for missions ' and according to Father de Condren ' a man fit to oppose Anti-Christ.'[66] The celebrated Oratorian wrote to M. Olier on one occasion : ' We are bound to venerate him and to humble ourselves because we are not worthy of the grace which God bestows on him. . . . I recognise, so it seems to me, and honour in him something of the grace of the Apostles and I beg Our Lord to grant us a share in it.'[67] He added, quite rightly : ' But he must not be regarded as a model for others.' Stephen Meyster did not in fact tread the beaten track.[68] Father Rapin, S.J., wrote : ' He had not much sense and was a great visionary.' One day, when preaching at Metz under a burning sun, he began to babble incoherently ;[69] he had suddenly lost his mind and died shortly afterwards. Another of the ' internal seminarists ' was the devout Madame de Gondi's brother-in-law, Charles d'Augennes, Count de la Rochepot and Lord of Fargis, formerly Marshal of the Camp of the King's Armies, Coun-

[64] Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier*, 4th ed. Paris, 1873, 3 vols. oct. Vol. I, p. 204.
[65] *Op. cit.*, p. 235.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 178.
[68] *Mémoires*, ed. Aubinault, Lyon, 3 vols. oct. Vol. I, p. 50.
[69] See Faillon, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 178, 201, 204–205, 233, 235, 258 ff, 296–298, 319, 360, 418 ; Vol. III, pp. 187–188, 222–224, 314 ; Grandet, *Les Saints prêtres français du XVII*e *siècle*, 2 vols. oct. Angers, 1897, Vol. I, pp. 78–81 ; *Récit véritable de la mort de M. Meyster*, Bibl. Nat. f. f. 22, 445, f° 161.

cillor of State and French Ambassador to Spain. One of his most remarkable diplomatic missions was concerned with the Treaty of Monzon which dealt with the question of the Valteline. The 'Père Joseph' had sent him instructions which the Spanish Government refused to accept. As the negotiations were dragging on the King sent word to d'Augennes, through his wife, a Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen-Mother, to conclude them at any cost. This instruction amounted to a command to give way on the most contentious points, which he did, and signatures were interchanged on January 26, 1626. Richelieu was annoyed and refused to signed the Treaty ; negotiations were accordingly begun all over again and a definite agreement was reached on March 6. The Ambassador's official correspondence with the King and his Ministers, Sillery, Puisieux and Richelieu, fills four large volumes and stretches over a period of ten years (1618–1628).[70] As is well known, the Queen-Mother disapproved of Richelieu's influence over the King and lent her support to the opponents of the policy of the first Minister. This hostility was shared by all the Queen's circle and Madame du Fargis played an active part in the opposition ; she was condemned to be beheaded in 1631, fled to Belgium and died there in exile. Her husband was compromised by her political intrigues and imprisoned in the Bastille on February 14, 1635. They had three children : Charles, killed at the siege of Arras on June 2, 1640, aged twenty-seven years ; Mary, who died young, and Henrietta, in religion Mary of Saint-Magdalen, one of the pillars of the Monastery of Port-Royal, of which she became Prioress in 1660 and Abbess on July 29, 1669. M. du Fargis would have preferred Henrietta to marry, and her resolute opposition to his wishes was one of the hardest trials of his life. Filled with disgust for the world, he entered the novitiate at Saint-Lazare on December 31, 1647, edified his fellow-novices for a year and died on December 19, 1648, in sentiments of the deepest piety. 'Whilst we had the happiness of having him amongst us,' Saint Vincent wrote,[71] 'he was a wonderful example, and I have never seen him commit a single venial sin.'

[70] Arch. of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain, 12, 13, 14, 15.

[71] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 401.

René Alméras, père, some years later followed in the footsteps of M. du Fargis. He was born in Paris on November 12, 1575, in the parish of Saint-Merry and had held brilliant positions in the world: Secretary to the King, Treasurer of France in Paris (January 19, 1608), Secretary to Marie de Médicis, Master of Accounts (May 30, 1632–1656), Secretary to Queen Henrietta Marie, wife of Charles I, whom he accompanied to England, Postmaster General (1629–1632) and Private Secretary to Anne of Austria. His first wife, Margaret Fayet, a sister of Madame de Goussault's, died on August 15, 1622. The second, Mary Leclerc, daughter of the Lord of the Manor of Viviers, bore him five children: René, the future Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission; John, the King's Almoner; Mary, Superioress of the Visitation Order in Amiens; Magdalen, a nun in the Royal Monastery of Longchamp; Peter, a Captain of the Guard, and Margaret. No better proof of the faith of this admirable Christian can be given than the following letter addressed by him to Saint Vincent about his son René: 'For the last ten years I have not asked him to pay me a visit, or for any of the other duties that children owe their parents; . . . I have never spoken to him about his vocation save to approve of it, and to express my joy at seeing him so strongly attached to it. . . . I have no fault to find with the designs you have on the person of my son, with the duties and employments you entrust to him, or with the journeys on which you send him, even if they were to the Indies. . . . Having once placed the paternal authority which I had over him in the hands of God and in yours to make you absolute master of it, I cannot and may not revoke the offering I have so voluntarily made.'[72] Not merely did he not revoke the gift, but he added himself as a further oblation. When he was eighty-two years old, he begged the favour of entering the novitiate at Saint-Lazare and was admitted on March 2, 1657. The months which he spent there were, as it were, a prolonged retreat for death. On January 4, 1658, he died after an illness of three days.[73]

Death was also at work in the ranks of the scholastics and priests. Saint Vincent announced, in a circular letter, the

[72] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 77. [73] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 40.

death of Martin Jamain, a young cleric twenty-five years old who had ceased to study Scholastic Theology to learn in an instant 'the Theology of Heaven,'[74] and also that of John Pillé, who was, in the Saint's eyes, the type of a perfect Missionary. When still quite young, John Pillé made up his mind to study in preparation for the priesthood, but was met with opposition from all around him. One day, seeing his father about to set out for Paris to sell a load of hay, he hid himself beneath it and, when he reached the city, took measures to realise his childhood's dreams. The first parish to which he was attached was Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet; he was subsequently appointed curate to Our Lady of Virtues by the parish priest, Gallemant. On the death of his uncle, who was the parish priest of his native village, Ferrières (Loret), he went home but his love for the missions proving too strong, he returned to Paris and joined Saint Vincent's first companions in October, 1631. He was Superior of the Collège des Bons-Enfants from 1635 to 1638, but returned to Saint-Lazare where he died on October 7, 1642. 'I regarded him,' wrote Saint Vincent to his confrères, 'as a source of happiness and blessing to the Congregation,'[75] which expresses much in a few words.

Though the Saint welcomed passing guests, such as bishops, at Saint-Lazare, he did not care to have permanent ones; there were, however, three exceptions, men of merit and benefactors of the Company: Anthony Hennequin, Lord of the Manor of Vincy, a priest and a brother of Mlle du Fay's; two nephews of Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, Louis de Rochechouart de Chandenier, Abbé de Tournus and his brother Claude, Abbé de Moutiers-Saint-Jean. De Vincy took part in missionary work; he died early in July, 1645; of him Saint Vincent writes: 'He departed from this world not only peacefully but with joy. He desired to be received into the Company four hours before his death and told me that he had received an inspiration to do so.'[76] Louis de Chandenier, after his uncle's death, withdrew to Saint-Sulpice, which he left for Saint-Lazare in 1653. He had valets and domestics

[74] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 514. [75] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 326.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 534.

and might have lived at his ease in Court. Several bishoprics were offered him but his ambitions did not soar so high. He had frequently begged Saint Vincent to be admitted to the novitiate, but the Saint always turned the conversation aside, as he did not think the Company sufficiently distinguished for a priest of such noble rank. The Abbé de Tournus consoled himself by living as far as possible like a Missionary, taking part in the meetings and following the regulations of the Tuesday Conferences as well as sharing in the apostolic labours of that Society. He was in charge of the great mission preached at Metz of which we shall speak later, and was also interested in the Carmelite nuns, of whom he was Visitor. His virtue was manifested, in particular, by his humility, great mortification and by the time he devoted to daily mental prayer. He died at Chambéry, on May 2, 1660, whilst returning from Rome, in the presence of his brother and two Priests of the Mission, one of whom, Father Berthe, received him into the Congregation at his request. The news of his death grieved Saint Vincent : ' It is only our house in Heaven,' he wrote a few days later, ' which merited the grace to possess him as a Priest of the Mission ; our houses on earth have simply inherited the example of his holy life, which is as much to be admired as imitated. I do not know what he saw in our poor Company that could have given him this devotion to wish to appear before God clad in our rags, under the name, and in the dress, of a priest of the Congregation of the Mission.'[77]

Claude de Chandenier, Abbé de Moutiers-Saint-Jean, never became a priest. From 1650 to 1660 his life is entwined with that of his brother whom he followed to Saint-Sulpice, Alet, Saint-Lazare and Rome. Their affection was so strong that they could not bear separation. Both refused bishoprics ; and both loved Saint Vincent and his Congregation with an undying affection. Claude survived Louis for fifty years ; he died on May 18, 1710, and Francis Watel, then Superior General, recommended him, in a circular letter, to the prayers and suffrages of the entire Congregation. Collet gives the long and beautiful epitaph on his tomb at Moutiers-Saint-Jean. The memory of these two brothers deserves to

[77] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 312.

be recalled in these pages on Saint-Lazare, which they edified for years by their angelic piety. Their example contributed to the training of the young clerics in the novitiate and scholasticate who were preparing for the priesthood and the works of the Company.[78]

Within the grounds of Saint-Lazare, at the north-east corner close to the high road to Saint-Denis, stood another centre of preparation for the sacerdotal life ; this was Little Saint-Lazare or the Seminary of Saint-Charles to which the pupils of the Seminary at the Bons-Enfants were transferred in 1645.[79] The number of pupils gradually increased until 1652, a year of war and famine, after which the numbers declined to their previous level. Saint-Charles lay in the track of the armies of the Fronde and was invaded and pillaged on July 1 ;[80] on the following day it was evacuated as a precautionary measure and the pupils sent home, except six who continued their studies at Saint-Lazare.[81] When the danger was over, normal life in the Seminary was resumed, but the number of pupils was greatly diminished.[82] On February 6, 1654, there were only fifteen students but, later on, the number increased and ultimately reached a satisfactory level.[83]

Saint-Charles had a plentiful supply of excellent professors but none of them rivalled James de la Fosse who was born in Paris on November 25, 1621, admitted to Saint-Lazare on October 8, 1640, and ordained priest eight years later. He taught there from 1648 to 1656 and his pupils acted, before large audiences, tragedies composed by himself, elevated in sentiment and vigorous in style, which were loudly applauded.

Having heard one day that a tragedy was being played at the Collège de Clermont he went there and, in order to

[78] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 584–588.

[79] A plan and a drawing in perspective of the Seminary may be seen in the Arch. Nat. (N^3 Seine 385, N^3 Seine 340).

[80] See page 691.

[81] Letters from Father Alméras to Father Lambert, of May 8 and July 19, 1652. (Originals in Cracow at the house of the Congregation.)

[82] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 69.

[83] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 139, 238.

have a good view, took one of the best seats. Scarcely had he sat down than a servant arrived, sent by the Principal, with a suggestion to move elsewhere. 'I am quite comfortable where I am,' he replied in Latin, 'I shan't move.'— 'He talks Latin,' thought the Principal, 'he must be an Irishman,' and a young professor was sent to renew the suggestion in Latin. Father de la Fosse pretended not to understand and spoke in Greek. The professor went off to report: 'He must surely be an ecclesiastic just arrived from Lebanon,' and the Principal, turning to a professor of Rhetoric, said: 'Go and speak to him in Greek; he may, perhaps, in the end understand the request.'[84] The result was the same for Father de la Fosse, after replying in Hebrew, remained where he was. All this coming and going had attracted attention; all eyes were turned on de la Fosse who was recognised by one of the Fathers and the comedy was at an end. He was offered a good place which he gratefully accepted. On returning to Saint-Lazare, he told the story to his confrères, all of whom enjoyed it except Saint Vincent when at last he came to hear of it. Father de la Fosse was summoned, chided for having yielded to pride and vanity, and told to return and apologise on his knees to the Principal and masters whom he might have disedified. The learned polyglot did so with a good grace, but history does not tell us whether he used as many languages when making his apology as he had done when committing his offence.[85]

Father de la Fosse had a most generous heart but a capricious will. He was equally prompt to fits of enthusiasm and depression, and Saint Vincent's fatherly encouragement was needed on more than one occasion to prevent him from leaving the Congregation. He wrote many books and his works, all in Latin, have earned him a position in the ranks of seventeenth-century Latin scholars. Most of his works still remain in manuscript and are to be found in the National,[86] Mazarin[87] and Arsenal[88] Libraries. He wrote

[84] Collet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 326.
[85] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 278.
[86] MS. 10,331, 11,365.
[87] MS. 3,910–3,919, 4,312; Imp. 10,877.
[88] MS. 1,137, 1,138.

hymns, odes and poems but he has also set out, clearly and with elegance, the rules of politeness in a little treatise which was formerly used in many Seminaries.[89] De la Fosse, says Collet, is at one and the same time 'an orator, philosopher and theologian; he was so great a poet that Santeuil regarded him as a rival and sometimes as his master.'[90] Dom Calmet adds: 'In general, there is much fire in M. de la Fosse's poetry, and many noble and elevated ideas; but his taste for mythology, which makes itself evident even in his sacred poems, occasionally renders them obscure owing to the peculiar terms employed and the too frequent recourse to Fable.' The society he frequented in Paris inclined him towards Jansenism, or rather rendered him favourable to the 'new opinions,' and hence he was sent to Marseilles where he remained for two years. From Marseilles he went to Troyes and then to Sedan, where he spent the last years of his life; he died there on April 30, 1674.[91]

Marseilles, Troyes and Sedan were not the only provincial cities in which the Priests of the Mission were established in the lifetime of their holy Founder. They spread all over France, summoned by various bishops to preach Missions, train ecclesiastics, create Retreat-Centres and, at times, to carry out all these works together.

[89] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 277.

[90] *Bibliothèque Lorraine*, Nancy, 1751, in fº. p. 376.

[91] See (Rosset) *Notices bibliographiques sur les écrivains de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Angoulême, 1878, oct. p. 150 ff.

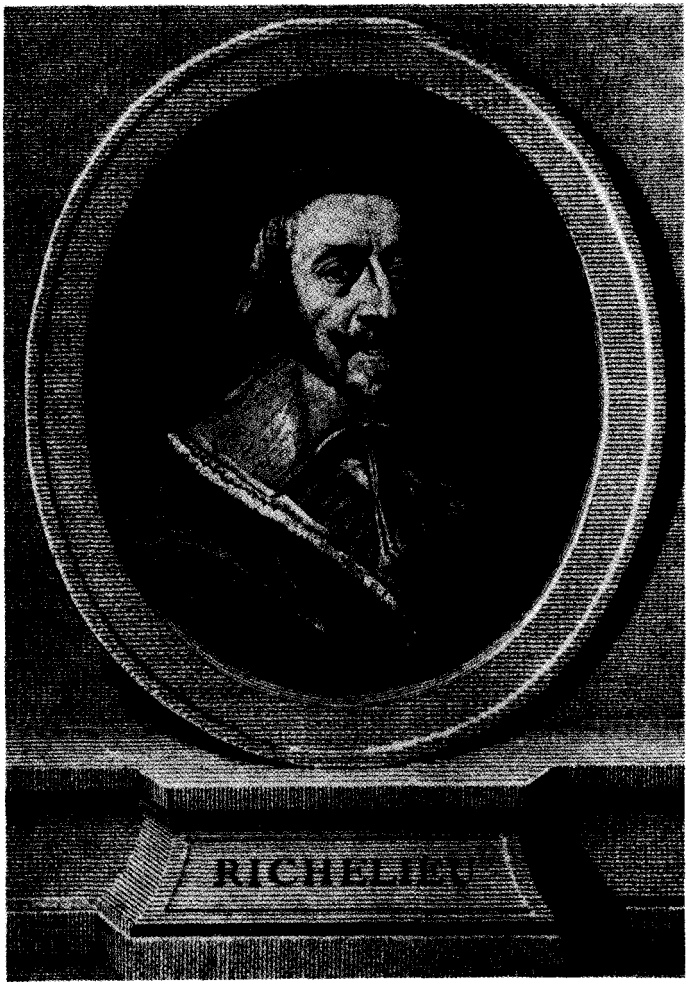
CHAPTER XXIII

THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN THE PROVINCES

THE first provincial establishment accepted by Saint Vincent was that of Toul, where the Missionaries took up residence in a hospital founded in 1238 by Némeric Barat, High Sheriff, for the sick and orphans and handed over by him to the Order of the Holy Ghost. The Vincentians were brought to Toul by Charles Christian de Gournay, Bishop of Scythia and Administrator of the diocese, in whose favour Commander Dominic Thouvignon had just resigned the benefice, on condition of receiving an annual income of 2000 livres (Barrois). The two Brothers of the Holy Ghost who then occupied the hospital also retired, each being promised an income of 600 livres (Barrois), as well as other compensations.

Fathers Lambert and Colée arrived in Toul from Saint-Lazare, fully intending to devote themselves solely to missionary work and retreats for ordinands, but they were profoundly disappointed on seeing how much of their time would be taken up with the administration of the hospital. Matters could not remain in such a state and hence, in virtue of an agreement dated May 17, 1637, a Board of Governors was appointed, consisting of two representatives of the Bishop, the King's Lieutenant and the High Sheriff; the Mission received one-third of the movable and immovable goods administered by the Brethren of the Holy Ghost previous to 1635. The division was not easily made and it took years before the matter was finally settled.[1] The title of Commander passed from Charles Christian de Gournay to Father Dehorgny and then to Father Jolly,[2] whilst steps were being

[1] *Histoire des diocèses de Toul, de Nancy et de Saint-Dié*, par Eugène Martin, Nancy, 1900–1903, 3 vols. oct. Vol. II, p. 208 ff.
[2] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 26.



CARDINAL RICHELIEU

taken to unite the Commandery to the Congregation of the Mission,[3] but this project raised so much opposition that Saint Vincent was frequently on the point of recalling his sons.[4] The approbation of the Holy See had not been received even at the end of 1657.[5]

The Missionaries of Toul had two important parishes to administer, and this proved to be a considerable restraint on their activities.[6] Saint Vincent suggested that the work should be handed over to two curates,[7] but this solution was not acceptable for the remuneration of these ecclesiastics would have swallowed up almost the whole of their means of subsistence. In the end, they realised, no doubt, that parish work was a matter of secondary importance, and that at Toul, as elsewhere, it would be better to get rid of such obligations and devote themselves entirely to the missionary work. If, between 1637 and 1641, missions took second place the reason was that nothing else could be done, for charity demanded that in times of famine everything should be sacrificed to the relief of the unfortunate.[8]

Saint Vincent, two years after he had established his priests in Toul, agreed, at the request of the Duchess of Aiguillon, to found a residence for four Missionaries in the Duchy of that name. By a contract dated August 18, 1637, it was agreed that missions should be given 'in the lands, hamlets and villages of the said Duchy on the four solemn festivals of the year : Easter, Pentecost, All Saints and Christmas,' and that every day a Mass should be said in perpetuity in the church or chapel of their house for the foundress and her family.[9] Aiguillon was fixed on as the place of residence, and the first mission was given to its inhabitants. Father de Sergis preached to the people for three weeks, and four or five parish priests of the diocese assisted him, except on Sundays, when they had to attend to their own parishes. Their zeal

[3] *Ibid*, p. 149.

[4] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 55 ; Vol. III, p. 373, 454-455 ; Vol. IV, p. 14 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XVIII, p. 278.

[5] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 37.

[6] The first was Ecrouves and the second was in Toul.

[7] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 234 ; Vol. VI, p. 517.

[8] See pages 589 ff. [9] Arch. Nat., MM. 534.

deserved and obtained success.[10] On December 27, Saint Vincent wrote : ' The whole of Aiguillon has done its duty. A number of people from the country, even from places ten leagues around, went there to perform their devotions.... Behold, Sir, how the prickly thorns of our Nature bring forth beautiful roses as soon as the Sun of Justice has shed the rays of His grace on them ! '

Two years later, the Missionaries moved to Notre-Dame de la Rose, near Saint-Livrade. This place of pilgrimage had just sprung up ; pious souls said ' re-arisen ' for they believed that the remains of a medieval sanctuary were visible in some broken walls surrounding, so it was said, a demolished altar. A small chapel was erected in 1624, thanks to the generosity of John Roche de Fonteux, a Royal Judge, and the care of this chapel was confided to the parish clergy. People came to pray from Saint-Livrade, then from places more distant, and so devotion to the shrine increased, and the pilgrimage became more important. The work grew too onerous for the local clergy ; three Fathers of the Community of Our Lady of Garaison[11] were asked for but did not remain there long, and the Priests of the Mission, at the call of the Bishop, were at their post in October, 1639.[12] The prelate had promised to unite the Chapel to the Congregation of the Mission and did so on June 14, 1640. The deed, to which the Duchess gave her consent, stipulated for five priests : two to look after the chapel, and three to give missions in the diocese and Duchy of Aiguillon. In addition, the Bishop relied on them to give retreats to ordinands or others.[13] The Duchess, who was also Countess of Agenois and Condomois, extended the benefits of missions and retreats to these districts by a contract dated July 4, 1642, and three more Missionaries were promised. She left it to the Bishop of Condomois to defray the expenses of the ordinands of Condomois until the Priests of the Mission should have a house of residence in his diocese, and stipulated for a full religious service or a Mass every

[10] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 414.
[11] Semaine religieuse du diocèse d'Agen, 1922, p. 380 ff.
[12] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 598.
[13] Arch. Nat. MM. 534.

year in perpetuity for herself and her uncle, Cardinal Richelieu.

The very year in which the Duchess established the Missionaries in Aiguillon, her uncle offered them a residence in his Duchy of Richelieu. The contract, long deferred, was at length signed at Reuil on January 4, 1638, and by it Saint Vincent bound himself to send ten priests, seven before the month of March, and three before two years. Four were to be in residence to carry out parochial functions, to prepare the Ordinands of Poitou by a twelve days' retreat for the Quarter-Tense ordinations, and to instruct ecclesiastics sent by the bishop for a fifteen days' retreat on the duties of their state. The six others were to give missions : three in the Duchy, the diocese of Poitiers and the surrounding districts, and three in the diocese of Luçon ' four times a year, at the most convenient seasons ' for ' six weeks each time ' so that the whole of the Duchy of Richelieu should be evangelised every five years. The Missionaries were to be provided by the Cardinal with a commodious and well-furnished house (it was not yet built), the parish with its emoluments, and an income worth 4,550 livres to be levied on the Record Office of Loudun. Another contract, of March 5, determined the properties annexed to the cure ; two small houses in the town, a farm at Vaux and the mansion de l'Epine. The property attached to the spiritual charge of souls, thus constituted, comprised a dwelling-house, courtyards, garden, an enclosure, vineyards, meadows and arable lands.[14]

Saint Vincent did not wait until January 4 to settle who were to staff the new establishment. Father Lambert, he thought, was clearly the best man for the post of Superior, his assistant would be Father Codoing, whose fine oratorical gifts were widely appreciated, the other members of the staff were Fathers Benedict Bécu, Gourrant, Buissot, Durot and Perdu. The letter addressed to the new Superior informs him of the special qualifications of those whom he did not know ; Father Gourrant is a musician, Fathers Benedict and Buissot are acquainted with the psalmody and the former is also a good catechist.[15] Father Codoing was at Romans

[14] Arch. Nat. MM. 534.

[15] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 428–429.

when he heard of his appointment, and as Saint Vincent was well aware how painful it would be, he was as urgent as possible in his letter : ' I have been for a long time weighing in the balance whether or not I should beg you to come and work in Richelieu. . . . On the one hand, I considered the needs of the dear people where you now are and the good use they have made of the grace Our Lord has given them ; but, on the other, I have considered that the same needs and the same good use are to be found in the people of Poitou, for various persons wrote to me and Father Renar, who has just returned from there, told me that never have they seen souls so moved by grace, nor such a welcome as was given them by all. What made me decide in favour of Richelieu is the obligation we are under, for the foundation there is in perpetuity, and it is this consideration, Sir, which makes me very humbly beg you to set out as soon as you receive this letter. . . . You will find Fathers Lambert and Perdu at Champigny, a league from Richelieu.

' Oh ! Sir, how great are the spiritual needs of that district in which there are many heretics because, as they say, they never heard God spoken of in the Catholic churches ! It was in this country-side that heresy was first propagated, disseminated and most obstinately defended. Thence it drew its greatest strength for the overthrow of our holy religion and of the State itself, if it could have done so. Oh ! what an empire has Satan had and still has there ! I hope, Sir, that Our Lord will make use of you and dear Father Durot to wage a good war for His sake. So depart then, Sir, *in nomine Domini.* I have no doubt whatever that your heart feels as if it were torn out from the place where you now are, in which you have struck deep roots of charity in those souls, and that you will feel the tender emotions of Saint Paul when he bade a last farewell to the people who bewailed him so bitterly. But then, there was nothing else for his great apostolic heart to do but strengthen itself against such tenderness, overcome it and go where holy obedience had let him see that Our Lord had called him.'[16]

Whilst Father Lambert was waiting for his confrères, who

[16] *Saint Vincent de Paul,* Vol. I, p. 412.

arrived in the course of February, he gave a mission[17] in the prison and, on their arrival, assigned each of them his special sphere of labour.[18] Several missions were decided on ; one at Richelieu, others in the Duchy and all set to work. Saint Vincent, in his desire to satisfy the Cardinal, did not cease from sending Father Lambert advice on the best means to succeed. In the first place, catechetical instructions must not be neglected. ' Everybody is agreed that the fruit produced at a mission is the result of the catechetical instruction. . . . My own idea is that those who are at work should give catechetical instructions ; one should give a long, and the other a short, catechetical instruction only, and they should speak twice a day. One can also mingle moral reflections calculated to move their hearts with the catechism lesson, for . . . it has been observed that the whole fruit of the Mission proceeds from that.'[19] A polemical tone should be avoided when dealing with controversial questions, and the truths of religion should be set out humbly, familiarly and charitably. The Missionaries ' are not going there for the heretics ; if however, as they go their way, an opportunity for instructing a heretic should arise, let them do so peacefully and humbly, and let them make it clear that what they say proceeds from the bowels of compassion and charity and not from indignation. . . . And, above all, let them never issue a challenge to the Ministers, nor to anybody whatsoever nor on any occasion whatsoever.' Another possible source of danger lay in the manner in which the Missionaries might treat the difficult and delicate questions that arise in connection with the sixth and ninth Commandments. In this matter, Saint Vincent counselled the greatest reserve : explanations given in the pulpit should be brief, and great discretion employed when asking questions in the confessional.[20]

Father Lambert and his confrères followed the Saint's advice, and hence souls flocked to hear them. The mission at Richelieu was most consoling, and as the Cardinal had

[17] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 228, 257, 463, 464.
[18] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 428.
[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 429.
[20] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 448, 457, 463, 464.

asked to have information as to its results forwarded without delay, Father Lambert wrote to him directly on April 16, 1638 : ' My Lord, as it has pleased Your Eminence to command M. Vincent to let you know how the mission in the Duchy of Richelieu succeeded, I do so with satisfaction, more particularly in the case of Richelieu itself, on which in general God has showered great blessings. . . . All, or almost all, have made general confessions. . . . Some of the principal citizens have made a retreat, and more would have done so if we had been able to find room. . . . The whole city seems, and actually is, changed. There is not a single person now who is not zealous for the law of God. There are no longer any serious quarrels save when, from force of habit, somebody utters an oath or a rude remark, and thus war is being waged against sin. . . . All quarrels and lawsuits have been settled. . . . It is a pleasure to hear country shepherds singing the commandments of God and, in the evening, in the shops, to the *Litany* and the *Exaudiat* for the King. We have established see the work-people end their day by chanting melodiously the Confraternity of Charity for the sick poor who have already been visited and helped by the most prominent citizens. We have acquired one hundred and eighty livres to assist them and, by God's grace, the money will be husbanded to that end.'[21] Whilst the mission was proceeding so successfully, Father Lambert had anxieties of a more material kind : he had to superintend the buildings and procure the necessary furniture. Saint Vincent did not leave him to face all these difficulties alone, for he himself interviewed the architect, supplied him with funds, sent instruments for making altar-breads from Paris and even went so far, for nothing was negligible in his eyes, as to indicate his own preference in the matter of drinking vessels and forks.[22] Father Lambert was still a novice in all that concerned parochial ministration, and hence he questioned the former parish priest of Clichy who gave him instructions with his customary precision. For instance, as a parish priest is bound to look after his whole flock and especially

[21] Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France, Memoirs and Documents, 830, f° 105.

[22] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 427–428, 430, 447, 463.

the poor, how much money should he give? 'As an alms for each mendicant, a *double*' was the reply, 'and if one catechises him then two *liards*, more or less, according to the condition of the individual; but as for the sick, if His Eminence does not supply the necessary funds then fifteen or twenty sols should be contributed every week, and you might put them into the box of the person who quests for alms.' As the cure was not yet united to the Congregation of the Mission and the Superior not therefore entitled to call himself parish priest, how should he sign himself? Saint Vincent's reply was 'Vicar of the parish of Richelieu.'[23]

The gravest difficulties began with the death of the Cardinal on December 4, 1642.[24] He had sold his claims on the Record Office of Loudun and, with the money realised, purchased landed property, intending to hand it over to the Mission at Richelieu as stipulated by the contract of January 4, 1638. The deed was prepared but not signed and death brought the business to an end just as it was about to be concluded. If his heirs refused to carry out his intentions, it would mean an annual loss of 5500 livres for the new foundation and, even if they were willing, as it was highly probable that the will would give rise to several other claims, they might have to wait several years before receiving any revenue. Providence and the Duchess d'Aiguillon arranged everything for the best. In August, 1643, Saint Vincent, whilst bearing in mind 'the great debts incurred by the succession, and the honour of those whom it concerned' addressed a petition to 'the commissioners appointed by the King to liquidate the debts of succession of the late Cardinal Richelieu' in which he called attention to the engagements undertaken by the Cardinal, the amount of money already expended, namely, 101,360 livres either for the buildings, the infirmary and other works or for purchases, and pointed out that there were further expenses to be incurred. The Commissioners had no hesitation in giving a favourable reply and sent on the petition to the Duchess

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 448–449. (The *sou* was worth the twentieth part of a pre-war *franc*, i.e. five centimes; the *liard* was equal to a quarter of a *sou* and the *double* the sixth part of a *sou*.)

[24] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 321.

d'Aiguillon,[25] who had in fact desired and sought for this solution. By a contract dated September 2, the lands and domains dependent on the barony of Saint-Cassien and the houses owned by her uncle in Richelieu were made over to the Congregation. All that remained to be done was to secure the union of the cure with the Congregation of the Mission by the Bishop of Poitiers, and also its authorisation by the new Duke of Richelieu ;[26] this deed was signed on April 2, 1646.

Saint Vincent had not accepted this parish without reluctance and raising objections and it needed all the authority of the great Cardinal to force him to yield,[27] but once he had accepted he wished Richelieu to become a model parish. Whenever he went there, and he did so frequently, for he made a canonical visitation of each house every year from 1638 to 1642 and, perhaps, later,[28] he loved to see how the people were carrying out their religious duties. His impression never varied ; no parish reminded him so perfectly of his own old one at Clichy as Richelieu. Towards the end of 1638, he wrote :[29] ' I have never seen people more assiduous or devout at holy Mass. They approach the sacraments frequently. There is no one there leading a scandalous life, and there seems to be the greatest peace amongst the inhabitants and no divisions, as formerly. The taverns are not so much frequented, in fact scarcely at all, especially during divine services on Sundays and Festivals. The Charity is doing remarkably well, and has taken care since Easter of sixty patients, only one of whom, a girl, died, whilst formerly, not a single one recovered. The two servants of the poor whom we sent there are working wonders, one nursing the sick and the other teaching the girls.' The Daughters of Charity admitted only poor girls to their school, and their services were gratuitous ; wealthier girls went to school to the nuns of Notre-Dame.

[25] *Histoire de Richelieu et de ses environs*, par l'abbé Bosseboeuf, Tours, 1890, pp. 296–297.
[26] Arch. Nat. MM. 534.
[27] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 617.
[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 524, 601 ; Vol. II, pp. 150, 181, 265.
[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 526.

The good order of the parish and the fervour of the faithful produced a favourable impression on the Huguenots who witnessed them, and several abjured their errors, for instance, in 1640, Peter Bellanger, Mary Brault and Francis Aubert, Surgeon; in 1641, Nicholas Le Lascheur and Mathew Lespagnandelle, Sculptor, and in 1642, four others.[30]

At this period, the commotion produced by the notorious cases of diabolical possession alleged to have taken place in Loudun was far from having subsided; the incidents continued to be discussed and to cause terror, and they were even exploited. A few leagues from Loudun, at the instigation of the parish priest of Saint James in Chinon, who had taken part in exorcising the Ursuline nuns in question, some women, pretending to be possessed, had, during their hysterical crises, injured the good name of the upright priest of Louans by all sorts of abominable accusations. The Cardinal of Lyons, who happened just then to be in the district, and Victor Le Bouthillier, the Archbishop of Tours, saw through the trickery of the impostor and his accomplices who were arrested in 1638 and confined within monastery walls. All were not so clear-sighted, not even all the Missionaries of the House at Richelieu, for one of them so far forgot himself as to maintain in the pulpit that the alleged cases of possession at Chinon were authentic. The Archbishop came to hear of this and sent a complaint to Saint-Lazare. One may easily imagine Saint Vincent's dismay; he wrote to Father Lambert at once and the priest was severely reprimanded.[31] Father Lambert was replaced by Father Gautier, who was succeeded by Father Codoing; the latter was sadly lacking in the qualities that had contributed to Father Lambert's success, for an independent character, a hasty judgement and a blundering disposition spoiled his many excellent natural gifts. It was usual to invite a member of some religious Order to preach the Advent course of sermons, but, as there were no special funds to provide for the expenses of board and lodging, Father Lambert was accustomed to defray them out of the Community funds. Father Codoing would not tolerate

[30] Bosseboeuf, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

[31] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 66, 81; Bosseboeuf, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

this practice ; his idea was that the city should defray expenses. He received a letter from Paris recommending him not ' to make any changes or innovations,' but it is doubtful whether he obeyed, for there is a document, dated 1655,[32] which shows that the expenses were borne by the city of Richelieu.[33]

One of Father Codoing's successors, Peter de Beaumont, forgot too easily that a parish priest, from his position, is bound to strive to settle disputes amongst his parishioners, and that it is his duty to stifle ' enmities, quarrels and lawsuits at their birth.' Saint Vincent reminded him of this, and advised him to hold a meeting, every week or fortnight, with ' two devout, pacific and intelligent parishioners ' not only to obtain information of incidents calculated to disturb public harmony but also to seek means, in conjunction with these men, to maintain peace.[34]

The parish priest of Richelieu occupied an important position. If any member of the Royal family visited the city it was he who welcomed them in the name of the clergy. In 1650, Louis XIV and Court remained there for two days, when marching South to put down Condé's insurrection. With him were his mother, his young brother, Cardinals Mazarin and Grimaldi, his tutor (Marshal de Villeroy), and preceptor (Hardouin de Péréfixe), his confessor (Father Paulin), Almoners, the Dukes de Joyeuse and de Dauville and a numerous train of noblemen and soldiers.[35] When Saint Vincent heard that the King intended to halt at Richelieu, he wrote Father Codoing a letter of instructions that is well worth quoting : ' The President told me the day before yesterday that the King intends to go to Richelieu, if he is not there already, and hence I am obliged to let you know what I think you should do, in case this letter arrives in time. You will please go, with three or four priests, to the Castle to pay your respects. He does not at all like orations and so you need not make one, but you might just say you had come to offer the Company's services to

[32] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 520.
[33] Bosseboeuf, *op. cit.*, p. 362.
[34] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 449.
[35] Bosseboeuf, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

His Majesty, to assure him of its prayers, that God may be pleased to bless his parish and arms, and preserve him for a century, that He may grant him the grace to subdue the rebellious and to extend his empire to the ends of the earth and, finally, that God may reign in his States. The Queen Regent should next be addressed in somewhat similar terms, and then the King's brother (Monsieur) ; on leaving, try to see His Eminence the Cardinal in order to pay your respects and good wishes and to offer your services, very briefly. Above all, Sir, avoid asking for anything or making any complaints. In case you are asked if you are quite satisfied with your parishioners, say "yes," that they are good folk who fear God ; for that may be said in a general way ; that they are loyal servants of the King, and that they have had a master and mistress who have given them this example, etc. Just a word like that is quite sufficient to induce their Majesties to grant them some favour or other, such as the confirmation of their privileges. Find out from one of the King's chaplains how he should be received in church : with or without a crucifix ; if you should present the crucifix to him to be kissed or not ; if you should present the aspergillum. If he should spend a Sunday in Richelieu, you might preach the sermon yourself and arrange beforehand the ceremonies for Mass and Vespers ; see that the whole house is neat and clean and everything in good order ; and, as it is customary to provide lodgings for the chaplains in the houses of ecclesiastics and communities in places where the Court is staying, you may perhaps entertain them all and also, perhaps, the Bishop of Rodez, the King's preceptor, Father Paulin, his confessor and several others. Hence you should have several good beds prepared, and the members of the Company should all sleep together in one room so as to leave the others free. I beg you to extend a hearty welcome to everybody, to offer all that you possess or can do, and to treat all in the best possible manner, without sparing any expense. If you have time, you might send to Tours to buy whatever you need ; and if a Sunday occurs before the King's arrival you should wisely exhort the people to give him a good reception and to show their great joy and affection by acclamations and praises of Their Majesties in every

possible, suitable way.'[36] This letter certainly arrived too late, for it is dated July 17 and the King was in Richelieu on the evening of the 18th. Louis XIV received the addresses of the various constituted authorities and, as the Abbé Bosseboeuf remarks, ' If there was anything to be regretted[37] about this magnificent ceremony, it is that Saint Vincent's remark : that " he does not like orations," had not arrived in time.'

Five years later, Peter de Beaumont learned that Mlle d'Orléans, ' La grande Demoiselle,' intended to stay at Champigny, not far from Richelieu. He wrote to Saint Vincent who advised him to go with a confrère to present his respects to the Princess and say : ' Mademoiselle, we are two Priests of the Mission from Richelieu who have received orders from M. Vincent to come and pay our respects to Your Highness and to offer you our humble services and prayers. And this we now do, Mademoiselle, with all the respect and submission due to Your Highness.' ' If she should speak to you,' he adds, ' you should listen without interruption, and reply to her questions.'[38] No doubt the Superior followed these instructions but he may, from natural timidity, have experienced some embarrassment in such a situation. It would certainly seem so from the fact that when, in 1660, Louis XIV, on his return from Saint-Jean de Luz, again stayed in Richelieu, Saint Vincent sent his Assistant, René Alméras, from Paris,[39] to welcome the King and the two Queens. Father Alméras on this occasion baptised a child a year and a half old, of whom Louis XIV and Anne of Austria were the sponsors.[40] The parish priests of Richelieu far preferred their usual life of prayer and labour to such ceremonial occasions, and indeed they had plenty to occupy them in their parish work, missions, private retreats, retreats for ordinands, and the training of seminarists both for the Congregation and the diocese. Every Quarter Tense, from forty to fifty young clerics made

[36] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 38.
[37] *Op. cit.*, p. 344.
[38] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 437.
[39] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 322.
[40] Bosseboeuf, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

their retreat preparatory to Ordination in Richelieu, and Father Lambert wrote that their modesty in Church charmed the people and even drew tears from their eyes.[41]

At the end of 1646, his successor, Father Gautier proposed to open a seminary for extern students ; Saint Vincent approved and even fixed the amount of the pension,[42] but we learn nothing further from his letters of the fate of this project. However, in a letter dated June 22, 1650, he writes to Father Codoing, who was then Superior :[43] ' You do not tell me how many boarders you have, what pension they pay, if you have any seminarists who pay nothing, who is their professor and who their spiritual guide, and such-like matters on which concerted action should be taken. I have seen seminaries begun that did not last very long from want of taking counsel together about them.' Such, very probably, was the fate of the Richelieu seminary, as Saint Vincent's silence in his correspondence would lead us to suppose. The other seminary, intended solely for the clerics of the Congregation, lasted longer. In 1649, when the civil war of the Fronde drove out the novices from Saint-Lazare they were received at Richelieu where the conditions for their training were excellent.[44] All of them did not return to Paris ; the novitiate was replenished with new postulants and a house of studies was also established there. Richelieu, up to and even after Saint Vincent's death, was, in fact, a second Saint-Lazare.

By the terms of the foundation contract, as we have seen, three priests from Richelieu were bound to give missions in the diocese of Luçon ' four times a year in the most suitable seasons,' each mission to last ' for six weeks.' To carry out this obligation, it would have been far better to have had a residence in Luçon ; a house was accordingly rented, and, in December, 1641, a gift from the Cardinal enabled them to purchase the Hôtel de Pont-de-Vie. The Missionaries[45]

[41] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 523.
[42] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 134. [43] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 35.
[44] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 412, 417, 468.
[45] *Saint Vincent de Paul en Bas-Poitou*, par F. Charpentier, dans *Le Revue du Bas-Poitou*, 1911, pp. 33–50. *Une fondation de Saint Vincent de Paul à Luçon*, par Benjamin Fillon, Fontenay, 1848, oct.

in Luçon lived in straitened circumstances ; there were no funds available for repairs to the buildings or for the purchase of furniture and food for the Ordinands who came each Quarter Tense. Richelieu could contribute very little, and Saint Vincent had come to their assistance as far as he was able. On November 22, 1642, he wrote to Father Chiroye, the Superior, to send back his two confrères to Richelieu, no doubt because there was no means of providing for them, and he suggested that the charity of the Cardinal should be sought through the intervention of the Bishop of Luçon.[46] The Cardinal died only a few days later, with unfortunate results for the Missionaries of Luçon. There are very few references to them in Saint Vincent's letters up to 1646. Only one letter dated May 3, 1645, addressed to Father Chiroye, 'Superior of the Mission at Luçon,' is extant ; after that there is nothing about them until December 23, 1646.[47] On that day, Father Gautier, the Superior at Richelieu, received a letter in which Saint Vincent says : 'I have at last yielded to the desire expressed to have us in Luçon. His Lordship of Luçon's and the Chapter's request, and the new proposal made by the Archdeacon are signs of God's will and are means which will facilitate the carrying on of this establishment. I am asking Father Chiroye to go there, accompanied only by a brother, to arrange the essentials with these Gentlemen ; and, at the proper time, we shall send the necessary labourers. I have already had an eye on one of our priests who seems to be most suitable, and on two ecclesiastics of the Bons-Enfants Seminary who have expressed a wish to go and give glory to God, for a year or two, in the exercise of our functions.'[48] It is clear, then, that the house at Luçon had been closed, but was opened again at the request of the diocesan authorities and by means of the liberality of the Bishop, Peter Nivelle and Nicholas Pignay,[49] Dean of the City and Archdeacon d'Aizenay, who also founded an annual mission for his Archdeaconry by a grant of 1800 livres and the surrender of his right to the Hôtel de Pont-de-Vie.[50]

[46] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 316.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 521.
[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 134.
[49] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 493.
[50] Arch. Nat., S. 6,706.

The Bishop of Troyes, René de Breslay, like the Bishop of Luçon, realised the value of missions for his people. One day, Mother Mary of the Trinity, the Superior of the Carmelite convent, said to him : ' Do you not think, My Lord, that God would be better served if you were to establish a house of Missionaries in your episcopal city ? ' He replied : ' Has God given you any special light on this matter ? ' She then told him how the idea had occurred to her ; he listened with surprise and attention and then said : ' I had the same inspiration at that very day and hour.' They then discussed the means of carrying out the project, and agreed on the necessity of interesting charitable persons in the work. Mother Mary of the Trinity was acquainted with a very devout and very wealthy servant of God, an intimate friend of Saint Vincent, who was also connected with the diocese of Troyes, for he had a benefice in that city. His name was Commander Noël Brulart de Sillery ; the Reverend Mother waited until his next visit to Troyes when the question was broached and both agreed that it should be discussed in the convent parlour in presence of the Bishop. The meeting was held and all present promised to do their best ; the Bishop and the Commander would make a contribution to the necessary funds, and the devout nun and her Community would implore God's help by their prayers and mortifications.[51] Saint Vincent went to Troyes, and the foundation deed was signed in the convent parlour on October 3, 1637, in the presence of two royal notaries.

The Bishop owned the Hôtel de Troyes, Rue de Faubourg Saint-Michel, Paris, which was let at 1200 livres (Tours), and which he now handed over to the Congregation of the Mission on condition that six priests and two lay-brothers should be sent to give missions, prepare candidates for ordination by a ten days' retreat and admit to their house for guidance in the spiritual exercises and training in the duties of the clerical state, all such parish priests and other ecclesiastics as the Bishop might send, though the Fathers should never have more than one person at a time. The Commander added an annual grant of 1000 livres on condi-

[51] *Saint Vincent de Paul et ses institutions en Champagne Méridionale*, par le chanoine Prévost, Bar-sur-Seine, 1928, oct.

tion that the lands dependent on his Commandery should be evangelised every five years, that the Confraternities of Charity should be visited regularly, and that he should have a share in the prayers, sacrifices and good works of the Congregation. The *Chronicle of Carmel* states that whilst the contract was being signed, the Bishop said to Mother Mary of the Trinity : 'At last, my dear Daughter, you see the event you foretold eighteen years ago !' and he recalled a conversation which they had had when the convent was first founded.[52]

By the terms of the contract, four Missionaries should have been in Troyes on February 17, 1638, the first day of Lent, but there was some delay caused by the objections raised by the city to the Missionaries residing in Troyes. In addition, it was discovered that the contract of October 3 was defective, and two new contracts were prepared ; one with the Bishop and the other with the Commander. On January 19, 1638, Noël Brulart de Sillery ceded to the Congregation of Saint-Lazare his share in the taxes levied on commodities, merchandise and wine within the parishes of Saint Aubin and of Saint Maurille in Ponts-de-Cé, in the diocese of Angers, which were estimated at 1800 livres a year ; he intended to retain the usufruct until his death, save for a revenue of one hundred livres (Tournois).[53] The contract with the Bishop was not signed until March 12, 1638 ; it contained the same stipulation as that of October 3, but the grant was increased by a capital sum of 6000 livres, of which only the interest, amounting to 300 livres, was at first to be expended. Four priests were expected to be in Troyes at Easter, and two more after three years.[54]

It was difficult to determine where the Community was to reside. To live in the city itself or the suburbs necessitated the permission of the municipal authorities who considered that these were already sufficiently well provided, for there were twenty religious communities, three Chapters, six hospices, a Commandery of the Knights of Malta and ten parish churches.[55] Saint Vincent was told that a magistrate's

[52] Prévost, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–8, Arch. de l'Aube, 5 G I.
[53] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 12. [54] Arch. Nat., MM. 534.
[55] Prévost, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

wife had said : ' Do not think of establishing the Priests of the Mission in the suburbs ; they would not be tolerated there.' He was advised to take no notice of the situation, and assured that the civil authorities would submit to accomplished facts rather than have recourse to violence, but such a solution did not by any means appeal to his temperament.[56] He preferred to accept a house in the village of Sancey which was offered him by a citizen of Troyes, Sebastian Gouault,[57] and it was here the Missionaries took up residence on March 20, 1638.[58] It was large enough for themselves but not for the ordinands, and Commander de Sillery purchased for the use of the latter a large house standing in 156 *ares* of grounds in the Faubourg Croncels,[59] Rue du Bas-Clos, afterwards Rue de la Mission. He would have preferred to hand over the building only after it had been decorated and embellished, but Saint Vincent, hearing of his plan, so earnestly begged him to give up the idea that the project was abandoned. The Commander's compliance with the Saint's wishes produced the following letter of thanks : ' In truth, Sir, it must be confessed that God works wonders in you. Your promptness in yielding to the inspiration of Grace as soon as whatsoever is more pleasing to God is proposed to you, and in annihilating, without suffering them to return, all considerations suggested by your own high and sagacious prudence is, in truth, to render a continual sacrifice to God, of most excellent odour and of admirable edification to all who become acquainted with these noble actions ! I have no words to thank you for the favour you have done me by falling in with my little suggestions regarding our house in Troyes. I am as deeply indebted to you, as if you had given me all the goods of this world.'[60] On August 25, 1640,[61] the Missionaries moved into the house in the Rue du Bas-Clos.

[56] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 578–579.

[57] Arch. de l'Aube 5 G 2, p. 9 ; Bibl. de Troyes, MS. 2,545, Vol. II, p. 409.

[58] Bibl. de Troyes, MS. 2,254, f° 503.

[59] Arch. de l'Aube, 5 G 21. (An *are* consisted of 119.6046 square yards.)

[60] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 87.

[61] Prévost, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

René de Breslay never ceased to show them acts of kindness. He died on November 2, 1641 and left them an annual income of 200 livres for which his heirs gave in exchange on March 1, 1642, a small house adjoining the Hôtel de Troyes in the Rue Denfert, Paris, on condition that a seventh Missionary should be sent. Before the contract of March 12, 1638, Saint Vincent had expressed a wish that together with the town-house of the Bishop,[62] two small lodges that were in front of it should also be given ' on account of ancient lights and other subjections of tenements to easements,'[63] and it was in all probability on this account that the settlement of March 1 was arrived at. These gifts clearly show how much the labours of the Missionaries were appreciated. Their chief work was the preaching of missions, and to the obligations included in the contracts made with René de Breslay, Commander de Sillery added others for, in 1646, the Fathers bound themselves to give a three weeks' mission, every five years, in Arcis-sur-Aube[64] and, in 1652, Saint-Lazare handed over to them the foundation of Ferreux by which they were obliged to give a mission every eight years.[65]

The first retreat for ordinands[66] was probably given at the end of Lent, 1638 ; subsequently there were some interruptions but, from 1643 onwards, they were regularly held.[67] René de Breslay would allow of no exception, save those who were ill or suffering from a grave infirmity. Even the Canons were invited to follow the exercises, if they were to receive one of the major Orders, but they protested, alleging that they were exempt from the jurisdiction of the Ordinary and that the Canons of Notre-Dame, for the same reason, did not go to Saint-Lazare. The Bishop replied that he had not given an order but a counsel, based on the fact that as they were ' the first ecclesiastics in dignity ' they

[62] Arch. Nat., MM. 534.
[63] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 452.
[64] Arch. Nat., MM. 534.
[65] Arch. Nat. MM. 534. The original contract stipulated ' every five years ' but, in 1640, the founders agreed that the obligation should be restricted to every eight years.
[66] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, p. 454.
[67] Prévost, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

should also be first ' in virtue and good example.' It was a sound motive and the Chapter consented, not without some protests from individuals.[68] Devout benefactors such as Chomel, Vicar General and Official of Saint-Flour, and Mary Girardin, helped on the work of giving retreats by their gifts, thanks to which the Missionaries' house of residence, now become too small, was enlarged by the acquisition of two small houses.[69]

The more the works extended, the greater became the need for enlargement. The house admitted not only ordinands, for, from 1653 onwards, seminarists began to arrive ; on February 13, 1654, there were twenty-two ;[70] on February 8, 1656, sixteen,[71] and on December 29,1657, twenty.[72] This new charge demanded new resources, and the Bishop, Francis Malier, proposed to unite the cure of Barbuise to the Seminary which would have meant an additional revenue of 2000 livres[73] but Saint Vincent raised objections and finally requested the Bishop to alter his decision,[74] as such spiritual charges were an obstacle to the works of the Company. The Bishop did not easily surrender and, in fact, held out until 1662,[75] so that up till then, or at least until 1658,[76] the Priests of the Mission were in charge of the parish. This disagreement between the Bishop and Saint Vincent delayed the signing of the foundation contract for a Seminary until May 25, 1662,[77] and, in the meantime, it subsisted on parochial dues and gifts from individuals.[78]

[68] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45. [69] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–47.

[70] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 75.

[71] Letter of Father Senaux to Father Ozenne. (The original is in the possession of the Priests of the Mission, Cracow.)

[72] Letter of M. Guillot to Father Ozenne. (Original is in the same place.)

[73] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 75.

[74] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 313 ; Letter of Father Senaux to Father Ozenne.

[75] After refusal, the parish became a perpetual curacy which was given, on November 24, 1662, to Simon Taffignon. (Cf. Prévost, *op. cit.*, p. 47.)

[76] Letters of Fathers Senaux and Guillot to Father Ozenne.

[77] Arch. de l'Aube, G 39, f° 185 ; and 5 G 2, p. 23 ; Cf. Prévost, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[78] Prévost, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

At certain times, the Missionaries in Troyes had other occupations as, for instance, assisting the poor during the famine caused by the Fronde,[79] and helping the Irish who had been driven from home and who remained for a long time in that city.[80] The Superiors of the house, in order, were : Fathers de Coudray, Dufestel, Bourdet, Ozenne, Rose, Brin and Dupuich. It is worth recording that amongst the professors there was one who had been blind since he was two years old ; this was John Dassonval, a cleric, Bachelor of the University of Douai, admitted to Saint-Lazare on June 3, 1641, aged thirty-six, and who died, in 1654, after ten or twelve years' sojourn in Troyes.[81] Saint Vincent wrote : 'God blessed the lessons and conferences which he gave in the Seminary to such a degree as I cannot express . . . In him, it has suffered a great loss, and he died with all the marks of a saint and of a great servant of God.'

All the foundations were not as long-lived as that of Troyes ; Alet was begun in 1639 and ended in 1642. Nicholas Pavillon, Bishop of Alet, before leaving Paris where he had just been consecrated, asked Saint Vincent to send him four of his Missionaries. Stephen Blatiron, who was to be Superior, accompanied Pavillon to Alet where he was soon joined by two or, perhaps, three of his confrères.[82] The young Bishop of Alet, a zealous and reforming prelate, found the men he needed for his task in these new arrivals. The country-side was evangelised ;[83] even Alet itself had a mission ; candidates were prepared for Holy Orders by a retreat lasting some days ; a seminary was established and entrusted to Father Blatiron and another ecclesiastic,[84] but this Seminary, it is true, was erected on very shaky foundations, for it had no assured resources and the means suggested to provide them—the union of the Seminary with a parish in Alet—was problematical and remote.[85] The Bishop,

[79] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 413.
[80] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 75 ; Vol. VII, p. 333.
[81] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 188.
[82] It is very doubtful whether the house in Alet ever had four Missionaries ; there were only two there when it was closed.
[83] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. I, pp. 588, 590.
[84] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 275. [85] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

NICHOLAS PAVILLON,
BISHOP OF ALET

deeply intent on the end he was pursuing, made a mistake in not recognising the special status of the men Saint Vincent had lent him ; they were members of a Community and it had been arranged that they were to obtain facilities to lead a Community life. This consolation was, however, denied them and, no doubt, this was Saint Vincent's reason for sending them elsewhere on October 8, 1642.[86] Nicholas Pavillon admitted his error for, a few days later, he wrote to the Saint : ' I confess, Sir, that I experienced some slight pain on seeing myself deprived of such excellent labourers at a time when I needed them most, but Providence having disposed of them otherwise for the good of the universal Church, I acquiesce therein with all my heart. Moreover, Sir, I thank you very humbly for having lent them to me until now, and humbly beg you to forgive me for the faults I have committed in their regard, as well as for my want of fidelity to the promise I made you to place them at once in a house apart so that they might lead a life in exact conformity with their rules. Although there may have been some grounds for my having done so, they are not of much weight, bearing in mind the orders you gave them. I trust that when I have done penance for this and all my other faults you will have compassion on our needs in accordance with what you were pleased to tell me.'[87] Father Blatiron's departure struck a mortal blow to the Alet Seminary which, after an interval of two or three years, was reopened in 1645, but without any Priests of the Mission.

For one establishment, however, that was given up there was an abundance of others offered to Saint Vincent. Not only France but countries outside its frontiers were asking for his Missionaries ; the Bishop of Geneva and Saint-Chantal ardently desired them to come to the Duchy of Savoy, and Commander de Sillery provided them with funds

[86] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 302.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 304. Hence it was not, as Pavillon's Jansenist biographer states (*Vie de Pavillon*, 1738, Vol. I, p. 40), because he did not think them qualified to teach Theology, or because he was annoyed at not receiving two more Missionaries, as Abbé Benjamin Mayran alleges (*Raymond Bonal dans les diocèses de Pamiers et d'Alet*, Foix, 1914, oct., p. 34) that the Vincentians left Alet.

devotion. . . . Dear Father Duhamel spoke to me with the greatest naïvety of his difficulties ; he has a virtuous heart and a sound judgement but he will find it hard to persevere. I strongly urged him not to think about going or staying, but to devote himself in good earnest to God's work, to abandon himself bravely to, and trust in, Providence. I should like him to become more fixed and resolute, for he gives hopes of great things. In fact, they are all most amiable and have given great edification in this city for the three days they remained here.'[94] Her first impressions were strengthened as time went on. Some months later, she wrote : ' The holy edification and usefulness of their lives, their continual employments for God's greater glory and the good of souls have made everyone say that they were sent by God and that Father Codoing has the spirit of God.'

In a diocese containing six hundred parishes, of which one hundred and forty-five were for the most part heretical, and many very large and thickly populated, the work of the Missionaries was bound to prove most onerous. Father Codoing reckoned that it would take four years to give missions in them all, and Saint Chantal expressed a wish for two more priests and a brother, but this was impossible, although Commander de Sillery would gladly have given assistance.[95] Saint Vincent, indeed, would have done anything to please Saint Chantal, for she had helped his sons to set up house and even supplied them with some of the furniture.[96] Amongst other benefactors we may count James de Cordon, Commander of Genevois and Compaisières, who on September 24, 1641, gave 14,000 florins to secure five-year missions in the territories of his Commanderies and, on August 6, 1642, 4200 florins for a daily Mass to be offered for his intentions.[97]

Immediately on their arrival the Missionaries set to work evangelising the country districts and preparing clerics for Holy Orders and, at the Bishop's request, a mission was given in Annecy itself.[98] Father Codoing, however, was not

[94] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 25.
[95] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 48.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[97] Arch. Nat., MM. 534.
[98] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 102.

yet satisfied ; he wished to have a Seminary as well, and we learn from a letter that, before August 26, 1640, there were seminarists in the house.[99] We shall deal later on with the seminary, its constitution, methods of teaching, and with Saint Vincent's displeasure when he learned that children had been admitted and that lectures were being dictated.[100] The number of pupils was at first small ; there were only eight in number on April 9, 1647.[101]

Legal approbation was required for the foundation ; Duke Charles Emmanuel II was favourable, but the decision rested with the Senate of Chambery ;[102] there was every indication that there would be no serious opposition when a regrettable incident occurred which modified the Senators' friendly disposition. Avignon had long possessed two colleges founded and governed by Savoyards. The Pope dismissed the staff and replaced them by members of M. d'Authier's Congregation which was known as ' The Missionaries of the Blessed Sacrament.' This decision deeply humiliated the Duke of Savoy's subjects and their anger was vented on the Fathers in Annecy whom they believed to be confrères of the Avignon Missionaries. Crowds gathered in front of the house shouting and threatening, and an attempt was made to throw the priests into the lake. When the danger was past, they emerged from their hiding-place, but no longer met with the same friendliness. The Senate could not be moved from its prejudices and, deaf to the requests of Charles Emmanuel, was in no hurry to give the necessary authorisation.[103] Some of those most bitterly opposed to the Missionaries resolved to deprive them of all their property so as to compel them to leave Annecy. The right of ownership to their house was contested, the lawsuit dragged on for four years, and the verdict was at length given against them. The Priory of the Holy Sepulchre was offered them, but its union with the Congregation was opposed and prevented. A lawyer,[104] a great friend of Charles Augustus de Sales,

[99] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 102.
[100] See Chapter XXX on ' Seminaries.'
[101] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 168.
[102] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 294 ; Vol. VI, p. 499. [103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 309 ; Vol. VII, pp. 27, 392, 397, 481.

Bishop of Geneva, made himself conspicuous by his hostility and, in the course of an animated discussion with the Superior, Achille le Vazeux, who was not over-patient, was described by the latter as an ' arch-fool.' This epithet let loose a storm. The Bishop of Geneva, armed with ecclesiastical thunderbolts, intervened in his friend's defence, and gave orders to his Official to take proceedings and issue a warrant for Father le Vazeux's arrest. The latter thought he had a right to be heard but was told : ' Go to prison first, and you will be heard afterwards.' He refused, and force was about to be used when Father Berthe arrived from Turin and pointed out that the Holy See had given a Brief of exemption to the Congregation of the Mission. The Official submitted but the Bishop, now more angry than ever, reissued the warrant against Father le Vazeux, who, to avoid imprisonment, had only one resource left, and that was to appeal to the Senate.[105] Saint Vincent did not remain neutral whilst the battle was raging ; we have two of his letters written on this occasion to the two Presidents of the august Assembly on behalf of his confrère. The abuse of power was so evident that the Senate quashed the episcopal writ.[106] Father le Vazeux was the victor in the conflict but, after the battle was over, Saint Vincent, ever deferential to the Bishops, removed him from Annecy. The Seminary, deprived of its property, only subsisted by the generosity of the Vicar General of Saint-Flour, M. Chomel ; it was forced to send the students away and resumed the ten days' spiritual exercises for candidates for ordination. D'Arenthon d'Alex, Bishop of Geneva, supplied the Seminary with means to begin work once more by uniting it to the Commanderies of Quiers and Chivas.[107]

Other houses, such as that in Crécy-en-Brie, experienced difficult times. This establishment was founded by M. de Lorthon, Councillor and Secretary to the King, in the King's name, and approved and authorised by Dominic Séguier, Bishop of Meaux. The Missionaries took up residence in

[105] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, pp. 75, 79–82.
[106] *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 83.
[107] Innocent Le Masson, *Vie de Messire Jean d'Arenthon d'Alex*, Clermont-Ferrand, 1834, oct. Bk. II, Ch. V, p. 111.

April, 1641, in virtue of the Letters-Patent registered in Parlement on January 7, 1658. Louis XIII gave them the castle in perpetuity and an income of 8000 livres: 4000 to be raised from five large farms, and 4,000 from the licensed retail dealers of the salt-stores at Lagny-sur-Marne; it was understood that if these licences were suppressed, 4,600 livres would be raised from other funds and hereditaments. The King also gave them a right to submit their legal cases and disputes before either the Roval Judge at Crécy or the Presidial Court at Meaux. On the other hand, it was stipulated that the staff should consist of eight priests and two brothers who were to give missions in the diocese of Meaux and to prepare clerics for Holy Orders; that they should distribute 4000 livres in alms every year; that two Low Masses should be said daily in the castle chapel; one for the King and the Royal Family, and the other for the noble tenants of Royal lands in Crécy; five for deceased Kings, Queens and Royal children of France, on the ten days following their death, and five for the noble tenants for five days immediately after their decease.[108]

The King guaranteed all the clauses concerning himself, and promised to compensate the nobles for what had been taken from them for the support of the Missionaries, but as this engagement was not kept a heavy loss of income ensued and Saint Vincent sent only three priests and a brother.[109]

In 1654, de Lorthon changed his mind and transferred the revenues to the General Hospital. The Missionaries had no means of support and only Dominic Lhuillier, a Brother and a servant remained in Crécy. The Bishop of Meaux's rights had been violated and he accordingly applied to the Courts. He desired Saint Vincent to interfere but the latter refused. 'He brought us to Crécy of his own accord,' he remarked, 'and if he now wishes to dispose otherwise of his foundation, that is quite all right. We prefer to let him go his own way.'—'That is the part you play,' replied the Bishop, 'but I will play another and will certainly put a stop to this man's designs.'[110]

Dominic Lhuillier, in the meantime, whilst waiting for

[108] Arch. Nat., S. 6,707. [109] Archives of the Mission.
[110] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 243.

the case to be decided, was left in an enforced state of idleness. However, he said Mass every day in the domestic chapel, heard Confessions every Sunday in the parish church and visited all the sick who asked for his ministrations.[111] He needed the utmost prudence not to hurt the parish priest's feelings, for he was a man who took offence at any and every trifle, and also to show no preference for either one or other of the great local families—the de Lorthons and the de Lavals. The hour fixed for Mass that suited Madame de Laval would not suit at all for M. and Madame de Lorthon. He wrote to Saint Vincent to ask what he was to do, and the question proved so embarrassing that all the latter could reply was : ' You would do well to speak to Madame de Laval and then to M. de Lorthon so as to try to induce them to agree about the time, for the latter being your founder, and the former being who she is,[112] you should obey both and, consequently, act in such a way as not to displease one by preferring the other.'[113]

De Lorthon was bound by the Courts to restore to the Mission the funds he had withdrawn and did so with a good grace, for he had been deeply impressed by Saint Vincent's attitude of reserve whilst the case was being heard. He went to thank the Saint in person, offered his excuses and even made very advantageous proposals. Nevertheless, it was he who delayed the Missionaries' return by laying down as a condition that Madame de Laval should give up the residence granted by the King.[114] On June 8, 1660, Saint Vincent wrote : ' I will send him a priest as soon as possible to find out what are his final arrangements, and to act in such a manner that we may not be delayed, but we could not possibly begin the missions again until All Saints Day.' The missions, in fact, were resumed but only after the man who wrote these lines was dead.

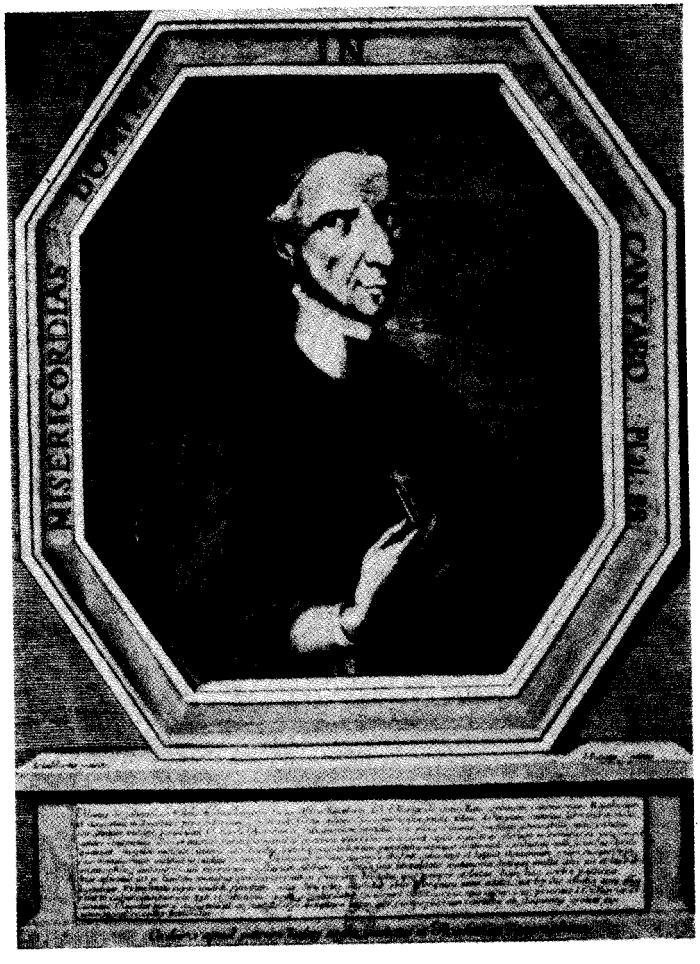
There was a frequent change of Superiors in Crécy—nine between 1641 and 1660. The sixth, John Baptist Gilles,

[111] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 386.

[112] A daughter of Chancellor Séguier, and a niece of the Bishop of Meaux and of Lady de Crécy.

[113] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 243.

[114] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 305.



ALAIN DE SOLMINIHAC,
BISHOP OF CAHORS

from the diocese of Avranches, had been Professor of Philosophy and even Principal of the College of Lisieux in Paris before he joined the Congregation. After a brief stay in the Cahors Seminary, he had been appointed by Saint Vincent to the chair of Moral Theology in the Mother-House but, if we are to judge from one of his interventions during the Assembly of 1651, it was not the subject that suited him best.[115] He put a certain amount of passion into his teaching—which is no harm in itself—but it was accompanied by an uncompromising spirit that did not appeal to students who have little liking for ultra-dogmatic professors. He was sent to Crécy and died there on August 22, 1652.[116]

The house established in Cahors had one advantage over Crécy inasmuch as it was founded by the Bishop himself, Alain de Solminihac, who was not of quite so changeable a disposition as de Lorthon. The contract was signed on January 4, 1643. Saint Vincent bound himself to supply three priests and two brothers for missionary work, to educate the clerics of the diocese who cared to present themselves, to train three seminarists selected by the Bishop, and to receive for ten days clerics called to receive Holy Orders, during which time they should make a retreat, whenever Ordinations were held. The union of the Priories of La Vaurette and of Saint-Martin with the Seminary provided it with an annual income of 1200 livres.[117] A supplementary grant of 800 livres to be levied on those who held benefices was promised on two conditions : first, that a fourth priest should be sent and, second, that six instead of three clerics should be gratuitously admitted to the Seminary.[118] At the Diocesan Synod, held on the following April 22, the Bishop invited the assembly to vote this sum and his suggestion was all the more favourably received as he himself, to make up the amount, agreed to sacrifice 300 livres of his own income.

[115] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 347.

[116] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 328 ; Vol. IV, p. 355.

[117] The Priory of La Vaurette gave rise to the lawsuit mentioned by Abelly (*op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, sect. I, p. 113). Cf. Brother Robineau's MS.

[118] Arch. Nat. S. 6,703.

The new directors of the Seminary arrived on June 12 to begin the retreat for Ordinands, and the students arrived on the 15th.[119] In the very first year, or shortly afterwards, the Bishop modified the contract considerably ; the Canons Regular of Chancelade were entrusted with the missionary work, and the new arrivals were confined to their duties in the Seminary and the care of the Ordinands.[120] Under the Bishop's watchful eye and the guidance of its Superiors, especially that of Gilbert Cuissot, who was rector of the establishment for twenty-nine years, the Seminary of Cahors, as we shall tell elsewhere, became one of the most flourishing in the Kingdom.[121] Alain de Solminihac was very proud of his Seminary and never refused to give it anything which he believed to be essential or useful ; on December 27, 1644, he united it to the parish church of Saint Stephen or Saint Bartholomew at Soubiroux and, in 1646, gave 2000 livres for the purchase of Fajemot House, close to that church. He may, perhaps, have also influenced his famous Archdeacon, Claude Anthony Hébrard of Saint-Sulpice who, in 1649, bequeathed his farm at Cayran to the Seminary. But even then the Bishop was not fully content. A fire having driven out the seminarists from the Chantry—the Cathedral Chapter-House—a provisional home was found for them in Saint Projet's. The Bishop, instead of seeking elsewhere for a fixed abode for his seminarists, made up his mind to build and, as he had 16,000 livres in hand, presented it on July 23, 1652, for the new buildings. In the Lent of 1654, Alain de Solminihac, after a discourse to the Ordinands, paid a visit to the workmen, when a large stone, intended for the foundation, caught his eye ; on it was carved : *Illustrissimus ac Reverendissimus Alanus de Solminihac, episcopus, baro et comes Cadurcensis, hanc domum collegii et seminarrii fundavit et erexit.* He at once procured a hammer and chisel and with strong firm blows proceeded to render the inscription illegible. When he felt tired he handed the tools to his valet and stood by him until the last letter had disappeared.

[119] *Le premier grand séminaire de Cahors et les prêtres de la Mission*, par Adrien Foissac, 1911, oct. pp. 7, 8.

[120] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 43.

[121] See Chapter XXX.

In the original plans, a chapel had been provided for but, perhaps, because the money spent exceeded the estimates, the Bishop had to be content with a building sixty metres long by ten wide consisting of a basement, a raised ground-floor and two stories, terminated at each end by a wing, the roof of which was higher than the main building which was crowned by a bell-tower.[122]

Alain de Solminihac personally supervised the selection of candidates for his Seminary and questioned applicants on the motives of their choice ; if a young man arrived with a desire to acquire a benefice or to keep one in his family, he was sent about his business. Those who received a favourable response went back to their college or parish and remained there, wearing a cassock, for three months, after which they might return to Cahors, provided with a certificate from their Rector or parish priest, sit for an examination and, if this proved satisfactory, they were granted a ticket of admission. One candidate was refused because he had presented himself in lay dress, another because he had been accused of ' grave public crimes,' another because he had received sub-deacon's Orders outside his own diocese, and yet another because he did not know a word of Latin. The most usual motive for refusing a candidate was incapacity.[123] The new arrival began his Seminary life by a retreat and a general confession.[124] He remained six months, if preparing for the Sub-Diaconate and, from 1646 onwards, another six if preparing for the Priesthood.[125] The pension was fixed at 100 francs.[126] The Bishop would grant no dispensation from residence in his Seminary, and if a candidate appeared with an indult from Rome, he simply declared it surreptitious on the ground that the obligation imposed on all clerics in the diocese had not been mentioned in the petition. He wrote himself to the Cardinal Datary asking him to turn a deaf ear to all such requests, and his wishes were respected.[127]

[122] Foissac, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–14.
[123] *Ibid.*, pp. 17–19 ; Chastenet, *op. cit.*, pp. 217–218.
[124] Chastenet, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
[125] Foissac, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[126] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[127] *Ibid.*, p. 20 ; Chastenet, *op. cit.*, pp. 218, 219.

The six seminarists educated at the expense of the diocese spent four years in the Seminary. Alain de Solminihac himself selected the candidates from his diocesans and demanded from them a most exemplary life, even after they had been ordained priests. They pledged themselves to remain at their Bishop's disposal for life, or to pay back the expenses of their education. The special rule of life which they were bound to follow after they had been ordained priests prescribed an annual retreat in the Seminary ; they were to eat and drink at home and never abroad ; they were not to go to law and, as far as possible, not admit any woman into their lodgings or even visit one, save in case of necessity and then accompanied by a companion.[128] The Bishop chiefly relied on these priests to bring about a restoration of clerical life in his diocese ; he also expected much from retreats for Ordinands and frequently presided over all the spiritual exercises.[129] A zealous and holy bishop is the greatest treasure God can bestow upon a diocese, and it would have been well for the Church of France in the seventeenth century if all her dioceses were governed by de Solminihacs.

The Missionaries had only been a month and a half in Cahors when a contract was signed that led to the foundation at Marseilles. The Duchess d'Aiguillon supplied a capital sum of 14,000 livres for a foundation of four priests who would secure the spiritual and religious welfare of sick convicts under treatment in the hospital, and who would give a mission every five years on each galley in the port of Marseilles and other ports of the Kingdom. The staff of Chaplains to the Galleys was placed under the authority of the Superior of the Missionaries who had a right to select and dismiss them. Finally, a Low Mass was to be said annually for the soul of Cardinal Richelieu and another for the Foundress ; the first to be said in black vestments whenever the Liturgy permitted. The Duchess also requested that several Missionaries should be sent to Barbary, in perpetuity, whenever it would be judged fitting, to strengthen poor slaves in their Faith and in the love of God by

[128] Foissac, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[129] Chastenet, *op. cit.*, pp. 220, 221.

missions or otherwise.[130] The clause in the contract relative to the Staff of Chaplains would not be valid unless the title of Chaplain Royal to the Galleys passed on to Saint Vincent's successors, and the faculty of delegating their rights and powers was recognised. Recourse was had to the King and the Letters petitioned for were granted under date of January 16, 1644.[131] Other Royal Letters, in 1646, determined the prerogatives of the Chaplain Royal,[132] regulated the functions of the Missionaries,[133] and an agreement defined more particularly their duties in the hospital.[134] This is not the place to enter into details, for a special chapter will be devoted to the galley-slaves.[135]

The Missionaries in Marseilles gradually extended the scope of their work during the year 1648. Father Portail, who was staying with them for a time, established a Seminary which began with four pupils,[136] but its development was arrested by pecuniary difficulties arising out of the civil wars of the Fronde. On January 22, 1649, Saint Vincent wrote to Father Portail: 'In the first place and without any hesitation, all your seminarists who do not pay a sufficient pension must be sent away; 2° His Lordship of Marseilles should be told of what is being done in order to rouse him to come to your assistance in some way or other. . . . I regret to have to tell you this, but necessity prevails over every other consideration.'[137] Father Portail, no doubt, showed some hesitation, for another letter dated March 4, reminded him of the advice given on January 22.[138] The appeal to the Bishop of Marseilles met with no response and the Seminary, at the end of its resources, had to close its doors. M. de Simiane de la Coste was not content with heaving a sigh; on his deathbed he realised that it was his duty to contribute to the re-establishment of such a meritorious work.

[130] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 298.
[131] *Ibid.*, p. 302. [132] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 309.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 310. [134] *Ibid.*, p. 322.
[135] See Chapter XXXVIII.
[136] Letter of Father Portail to Mlle Le Gras (cf. *Notices sur les prêtres, clercs, et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 1e série, t I, p. 63).
[137] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 403.
[138] *Ibid.*, p. 417.

In August, 1649, he made a will containing this clause : ' I give to the Priests of the Mission of France the sum of 16,000 livres, the interest of which shall be employed, annually and in perpetuity, by the said Priests of the Mission for the maintenance of the Seminary which they desire to establish for the education of ecclesiastics in all things concerning the perfection of their state. . . . If the said Seminary be not fully established at the time of my decease, they shall employ the said revenues on missions and the maintenance of ecclesiastics who are about to be ordained, in accordance with the forms and laudable customs observed in their houses, and it is my wish that, whenever they establish the said Seminary in Aix, as they propose to do, or in any other part of Provence, they shall enjoy, in the same manner, the said legacy just as if the project had been carried out in this same city of Marseilles.'[139]

The chief obstacle the Fathers had to contend with was that of finding a suitable site ; it was also essential that they should build, and this was quite impossible during the troubles of the Fronde.[140] Work was begun in 1653 or 1654 even though they had not sufficient funds in hand and Father Get, the Superior, was forced to borrow from the Board of Governors of the Galleys and from others but, not to alarm Saint Vincent, he informed him of only some of the debts. However, as the interest had to be paid by Saint-Lazare, the Saint at last perceived that he had not been told the whole truth. On July 24, 1654, he wrote to Marseilles : ' I have no doubt that your building is costing more than was expected ; that is what usually happens. I should very much like to see a detailed account of the expenditure.'[141] Father Get was thus compelled to admit his fault. The debt amnted to 1500 livres and, if they wished to complete the work, that sum would have to be doubled. Saint Vincent could not conceal his surprise ; he had such confidence in Father Get that he had believed him to be incapable of such dissimulation. He wrote : ' I confess, Sir, I have been as

[139] *Saint Vincent de Paul et ses œuvres à Marseille*, par Simard, p. 75.
[140] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, pp. 141, 161.
[141] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

much surprised at this as I have been at anything that has happened to me for a very long time. If you were a Gascon or a Norman, I should not have thought it strange, but that a straightforward Picard and a man whom I regard as one of the most honest in the Company should have concealed this fact from me,—how can I but be astonished at this, and how am I to find the means of paying all that money? Good heavens, Sir, why did you not tell me? We would have considered the idea of continuing the work in relation to what we can do or, to put it better, to what we can not do.' And he ended his letter thus: 'You must stop there until God is pleased to give us the means to pay up the amount you mention.' Father Get, in another letter,[142] completed his confession and may, perhaps, have expected some further reproaches but Saint Vincent considered that the shame already experienced by the culprit was quite sufficient. He simply put him under an obligation not to begin again: 'I have just this moment received your letter . . . by which I clearly see the increased indebtedness of which I was unaware; I desire that God may be pleased to grant us the grace always to proceed in the same way. In this, you have a great advantage: the natural candour of your native province, and also the candour of grace. In the name of God, let us always act in this spirit; and, as I have not this candour by nature, do you obtain for me the grace ever to employ this candour by this same grace. You will, please, endeavour to have the payment of these sums deferred, and we shall try to pay them off little by little.'[143] To cease building operations meant to defer the opening of the Seminary and so, Saint Vincent, after due deliberation, preferred to authorise the continuation of the work and the postponement to a later day of whatever was not essential, for instance, the College chapel. When the main block was finished, work was suspended and on May 14, 1655 Father Get received permission to place the coat of arms of the Mission over the entrance.[144]

However, even then everything was not completed, for the new building was not quite ready until 1656 and in

[142] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 199.
[143] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 211.
[144] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 379.

September or October of that year the first seminarists arrived. Some came from the diocese of Marseilles, but the Abbey of Saint-Victor supplied the majority. This monastery, once so prosperous, had fallen on evil days, partly from the type of person who entered it, and partly from deficient training in the novitiate. The Prior was on the look-out for a remedy and thought that in the new Seminary he would find the solution of his difficulties. At a Chapter held on September 7, 1656, the question was debated and his proposal approved. 'Inasmuch,' says the official account,[145] 'as the Missionary Priests have had a very commodious house built in this city to establish a Seminary there, for which they have selected from their Congregation persons most fit and capable of educating young ecclesiastics both in piety, literature, chant, ceremonies, and all the functions which they are bound to exercise, it seems that it would be well to profit by this opportunity afforded to the young religious of this monastery, and to place them under good directors who will render them capable of making themselves useful to the glory of God, to the great edification of the public ; by continuing to act in future, in the same manner, in regard to those who are here, this Seminary will be, as it were, a nursery from which this monastery will, without cessation, draw its subsistence and be provided with men great in piety and learning. And to this end it would be well to withdraw religious who are students in Grammar, the Humanities and Philosophy, from those places where they now are and in which, for the most part, instead of profiting, they grow worse by mixing with young people and return here ignorant and incapable of fulfilling ecclesiastical functions and send them instead to the aforesaid Seminary where they will be well educated and where there will be an opportunity of supervising their actions and conduct.' 'Whereupon it was deliberated and resolved by the said Lord Prior and Chapter that the religious who are students shall be recalled and placed in the said Seminary of Marseilles to be instructed there in piety, literature, theology, and the chant and ceremonies of the Church ; similarly, the other young religious, to the number of forty, both those who are

[145] Simard, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

now here and those who may come here in future, shall also be placed in the Seminary of Marseilles to remain there as long as shall be judged advisable.'

Saint Vincent did not share the optimism of the monks of Saint-Victor ; this mingling of seculars and regulars, children and ecclesiastics, did not seem to him a promising experiment.[146] Later, he wrote to Father Get : ' We have no vocation for colleges except, as you know, those for secular ecclesiastics.' However, urged on as he was by various parties, he accepted the proposal out of kindness, for which he was soon to repent. Fathers Admirault and de la Fosse were sent to Marseilles and the former, when passing through Valence, brought along with him two young monks of Saint-Victor who were studying there.[147] The first year passed off pretty well. On November 19, 1656, Saint Vincent said : ' Word has been sent me from Marseilles that they have begun to teach the novices of Saint-Victor to read the Breviary and to carry out ceremonies, which they had never done before. Now, just consider a little what that means and to what a state this great Order has now fallen. I say ' great Order ' from which so many Cardinals and Prelates have come, and even Popes ; an Order which, in the beginning, lived so holily ![148] Nevertheless, you see the state to which it is now reduced.' When the long vacation arrived, Saint Vincent asked Father Get for news and was happy to hear that the monks[149] of Saint-Victor were delighted with the progress of their novices.[150] The second scholastic year was not so satisfactory ; the observance of discipline became so bad that, in the month of April, all the novices from Saint-Victor had to be sent home to their Prior. ' As the majority of these young men,' we read in a manuscript,[151] ' had no other vocation to the religious life than the decision of their parents who wished to get rid of them and to provide them with board and lodgings in a religious house, just as if it were a benefice, these children, not knowing what it means to be a monk, followed their own ideas and inclinations,

[146] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 146.
[147] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 87, 105.
[148] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 388.
[149] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 410, 426.
[150] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 469.
[151] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 371.

were idle and knavish and sought only what would gratify their senses so that, as they showed no appearance of good, or hope of reform, it became necessary, after a year's trial, to request the Prior and their parents to remove them.' This step proved to be a very embarrassing one for both Prior and parents. What was to be done with the boys who were sent away and how were they to be trained? They begged Father Get to alter his decision and he would, perhaps, have allowed himself to be persuaded were it not that Saint Vincent advised him not to yield. 'You will do well,' he wrote, [152] 'to be steadfast in refusing to take charge any longer of the novices of Saint-Victor, no matter what promises they may make and no matter what pressure their Superiors and parents may put on you; for, as God has not given you the grace to succeed in this first attempt at their amendment although you, for your part, have done all that you possibly could to effect it, I see no reason why a second attempt on your part should be successful.'

After the novices of Saint-Victor had left, it seems very likely that the Seminary was left empty, for the professors were sent elsewhere and there is no indication that education was afterwards actively carried on there. The person chiefly responsible for this state of decay was the Bishop himself, Stephen de Puget, who gave the Seminary no assistance, and took no measures to oblige his clerics to prepare for ordination. All eyes, then, were turned on him and, early in 1658, there was a rumour that he was about to intervene. Father[153] Get, like everyone else, was hopeful, but when he saw that the prelate still remained as indifferent as ever he asked for an interview in which he pleaded for the Seminary, but his efforts proved all in vain.[154] Stephen de Puget died in 1668, and it was his successor, Toussaint de Forbin-Janson, who, in 1673, recognised the Seminary of the Mission of France as a diocesan establishment.

The Fathers in Marseilles also devoted themselves to missionary work. Not only did they give missions on the galleys, as they were bound to do by the terms of their contract, but they also evangelised the whole country-side

[152] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 146.
[153] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 54. [154] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

of Provence. Before 1657, their Missions to poor country-folk seem to have been few in number, but the generosity of Madame Laurence Veyrac de Paulian, Marchioness of Vins, enabled the Fathers to extend their missionary work. This devout woman, who died on February 20, 1659, bequeathed a sum of 18,000 livres to the Congregation of the Mission. The Fathers, on their side, were pledged to send two more priests to the house in Marseilles ; to employ two or three Missionaries, for three months of the year, in evangelising, every five years, her estates and those of her heirs, not excepting those outside the diocese of Marseilles ; and, if any free time remained, to give missions in all such places as the Bishop might determine ; to admit, without payment, into their house, for a retreat of eight or ten days, parish priests or other supernumerary priests residing on the estates of the foundress or her heirs, and, finally, to say one Mass daily for the foundress and her family.[155]

When Saint Vincent learned of this unexpected gift, he invited his confrères in Saint-Lazare to give thanks to God.[156] 'Who,' he said, 'will not be filled with admiration at this grace from God, Who, seeing this poor family in danger of perishing, has raised it up and fortified it by this notable assistance ? Marseilles is half-way on the road to Rome ; it is a seaport from which vessels sail for Italy and the Levant and is thus very useful to the Company. The House sees after the salvation and comfort of poor convicts, both the healthy and sick, manages all the business affairs of the slaves in Barbary and, in addition, carries on the same works as all the other houses.' The house in Marseilles, as a matter of fact, carried on the same works as the other houses,[157] including retreats for Ordinands and others.[158] Among its special duties we have already referred to that of the spiritual aid and assistance of convicts, but this was not all, for, owing to its geographical situation, it was the natural site for a clearing-house for the Mission in Barbary. Parcels, letters, money for Missionaries and for thousands of Christian

[155] Arch. Nat., S. 6,707.
[156] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XII, p. 149.
[157] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 141 ; Vol. VII, p. 35 ; Vol. VIII, p. 208.
[158] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 425.

slaves passed through the hands of the Superior who had, in consequence, such an enormous amount of business to transact as to have scarcely a moment's free time. Saint Vincent used to say that, after Saint-Lazare and Rome, the house at Marseilles was the most important in the Congregation, and hence he was anxious to have at its head ' an intelligent, experienced, vigilant man prepared for every emergency.'[159] Father Get was such a man and, from 1654 to 1662, proved to be an able administrator and a Superior full of resource. When, in 1662, his health proved too feeble to support any longer the heavy weight of responsibility, he was appointed Superior of Sedan.

The Priests of the Mission had by then resided for nineteen years in that city, in which they had a parish, and from which they set out to give missions through the neighbouring country-side inhabited by a mixed population of Catholics and heretics. Between 1556 and 1574, Calvinism had been introduced, under Prince Henry Robert de la Marck, who had been won over to the Protestant cause by his wife, Frances de Bourbon, and had gradually invaded the vital centres of the life of Sedan until it finally became master of the College, churches, public offices, and also the Board of Ecclesiastical Finance which was of great importance inasmuch as it controlled the management of Church property with powers of alienation, the collection of tithes, quit-rents and revenues, the payment of college professors, schoolmasters and the Catholic and Protestant clergy, the latter receiving twice the income of the former. Such was the state of affairs in 1636 when Prince Frederick Maurice de la Tour embraced Catholicism. He restored to the Catholics the use of the churches of which they had been deprived, but the Protestants were not driven out, for each form of worship was authorised, at different times, and in different parts of the churches. He suppressed the Board of Ecclesiastical Finance, or rather replaced it by a Privy Council, of which he reserved the Presidency to himself, threw open all offices of State to all citizens, without distinction of religion, and gave permission to the Capuchin Fathers and the Daughters of Charity to establish houses in the city. Were it not for his

[159] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, pp. 235–236.

mother, Elisabeth of Nassau, an ardent Calvinist, he would have gone much farther in the way of concessions. When he was compelled by the wars in which he was engaged to leave his Principality, Elisabeth became temporary sovereign, multiplied vexatious measures against Catholics and renewed the era of oppression.

The Conspiracy of 'Cinq-Mars' in which Frederick Maurice was concerned was fatal to the Principalities of Sedan, Raucourt and Saint-Menges against which Richelieu sent his victorious armies; the Cardinal also invaded the States and, on September 15, 1642, annexed them to France. The Marquis Abraham de Fabert was appointed Governor and, on February 23, 1643, re-established the complete freedom of the Catholic religion, threatened severe penalties on all who would provoke scandal or disturbance during religious services, either inside or outside the churches, and forbade the discussion of religious topics in all public places: streets, squares, shops open to all comers and even in any place where several persons could meet together.[160]

The devout Louis XIII ardently desired the return of his new subjects to the Catholic religion and left in his will the sum of 24,000 livres to Saint Vincent for a foundation of two annual missions in the city to be given for ten years by six missionaries.[161] Anne of Austria completed this Royal gift, for she thought that a house of residence for the Priests of the Mission in Sedan would prove most useful. In order to please the Queen, René Louis de Fiquelmont, Abbé de Mouzon and, as such, collator of the parish of Sedan, agreed to unite this benefice to the Congregation of the Mission. Two conditions were laid down: first, that the Abbé de Mouzon should preserve his title of parish priest and should be free to sing High Mass in the church once or twice a year on festivals chosen by himself with all the marks of honour due to a parish priest; second, that should the Congregation

[160] *Procès-verbal de la visite de Léonor d'Estampes de Valençay, archevêque de Reims, pour le rétablissement du culte catholique dans les principautés de Sedan, Raucourt et Saint-Menges en* 1644. Sedan, 1893, oct. avant-propos.

[161] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 394, note 10.

withdraw, he would resume his right of nomination.[162] It was certainly high time that the parish should have at its head pastors worthy of the name. The ignorance of the Catholics of Sedan of the teachings of their religion was simply deplorable. Ever since preaching had been tolerated in the Principality, that is to say, for four or five years, they had listened to long and learned dissertations on controversial subjects but had heard very little indeed on their religious duties. When, later, they were told that all grave sins should be mentioned in Confession, and that Holy Communion should be received fasting and in the state of grace, they were quite surprised.[163]

Five Priests of the Mission arrived in Sedan on May 7, 1643, under the charge of Father William Gallais.[164] A great mission was begun a few days afterwards and proved most successful. The Superior declared when it was over that nowhere else had 'he laboured so usefully or where there had been greater need.' The Calvinists themselves had gone to hear him, and if they did not abandon their religion, at any rate they admitted that their prejudices had been to some extent dissipated.[165] This mission established contact between the Fathers and those who were to be their future parishioners. Father Gallais took formal possession of the cure on September 8 and, on October 21,[166] the Archbishop of Reims, Léonor d'Estampes de Valençay, approved of the union.[167]

Queen Anne of Austria thought that a further effort should be made to re-establish the Faith in these recently annexed territories. Louis XIII had left a sum of 64,000 livres for missionary work: 24,000 for Sedan, as we have seen, and 40,000 for other places to be selected by Father Dinet, S.J., and Saint Vincent de Paul. On June 11, 1644, it was settled by Letters-Patent, with Father Dinet's consent, that the 64,000 livres should be invested and the revenues accruing

[162] Arch. Nat., MM. 534.
[163] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, Ch. I, sect. II, and 5, p. 38.
[164] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 425, note 2.
[165] Abelly, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[166] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 425, note 2.
[167] Arch. Nat., S. 6,710.

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placed at the disposal of the Superior General of the Mission, who should devote them to the maintenance of six priests and two brothers of his Congregation, conformably to the rules of their Institute, at Sedan and other places in the annexed principalities where the need for missions was most felt.[168] Saint Vincent found means to utilise the 64,000 livres for the benefit of the Foundling Hospital, whilst setting aside the income allotted to Sedan. By his orders a row of thirteen houses was erected in Saint-Lawrence's Field, a little to the north of Saint-Lazare and leased on August 22, 1645, to the Ladies of Charity for the babies under their care,[169] at a rent of 1300 livres. This sum did not amount to the 2200 livres which he had at first expected to obtain from the houses and which he had promised to Sedan and, to honour his bond, he probably supplied the deficitof 900 livres from the funds of Saint-Lazare.

The Archbishop of Reims, even before he was aware of the Letters-Patent and the amount of revenue from Louis XIII's legacy at the disposal of the house in Sedan, presented the new parish priest with a list of the tithes and dues which he proposed to levy on the new establishment for his personal expenses. Father Gallais informed Paris and Father Lambert was sent to Sedan where he experienced the full weight of the Archbishop's displeasure, for the prelate was convinced that Saint Vincent had prevented the despatch of the Letters-Patent. Father Lambert returned to Paris to present a report on his mission and was sent back to Sedan provided with definite instructions and a letter of excuse. Saint Vincent wrote : ' I very humbly thank Your Grace for the favour you have been pleased to show us in regard to the humble representations we have made you on the subject of Sedan, and I ask your forgiveness, with all possible respect and humility, for anything I may have done in the proceedings which I have taken that may have displeased you. I protest, My Lord, that it was contrary to my intention, for I have never had any greater desire than to obey you in all things ; I contented myself with having the Queen's attention called to the question of whether she wished that the late King's bequest to the Mission at Sedan should be

[168] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, p. 303. [169] *Ibid.*, p. 305

employed for the same purpose, without either saying or doing anything whatever to prevent the despatch of the Letters-Patent, for I felt quite certain that, once this point had been settled by Her Majesty, we could have recourse to Your Grace with complete confidence that you would do all that is reasonable. And this indeed you have done, as I have been told by Father Lambert, whom I am sending to you to settle the matter in any way you may consider suitable, and I, for my part, will ratify it here.' The discussions were terminated by an agreement embodied in an official text, dated September 24, 1644, which was approved by the King two months later. It was agreed that the house should maintain two brothers and eight priests : four for parochial duties and four for missions in the territories of Sedan, Raucourt, and Saint-Menges, and wherever else the Ordinary might send them ; and that the parish priest should select a curate from the secular clergy who would take charge of Balan, a chapel-of-ease attached to Sedan. The document then goes on to give a list of the revenues allotted to the foundation. A special clause dealt with the preacher for the Advent and Lent courses of sermons. His salary, everything included, was fixed at 800 livres a year, of which the parish priest was to contribute 180, and the balance was to be made up from three dividends from different investments mentioned in the text. ' This sum,' we read, ' shall be placed in the hands of a leading citizen of the Catholic religion in the aforesaid Sedan who shall see to the maintenance, lodging, board and recompense of the preacher.'[170]

Saint Vincent did not conceal from himself the difficulties which his confrères were bound to meet with in a large city like Sedan with a population largely composed of heretics, for they had works to create, schools to establish, poor to be assisted and members of religious Orders to be conciliated, and a Governor whose friendship it was important to preserve and whose protection should be fully deserved. Nowhere, perhaps, does he show such breadth of mind as in his letters to the Superior of Sedan.[171] ' When the King sent you to Sedan,' he wrote to Father Gallais, ' it was on

[170] Procès-verbal du 24 Septembre, 1644.
[171] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 526.

condition that you should never dispute with heretics, either in the pulpit or in private, knowing that such discussions are of very little service and most often produce more noise than good results. A good life and the sweet odour of the Christian virtues carried out in practice attract wanderers to the straight path and confirm Catholics in treading it. And that is the way in which the Company should benefit Sedan, adding to good example the exercise of our functions, such as teaching the people in our usual manner, proving and persuading the virtues, pointing out their necessity, beauty, practice and the means of acquiring them. This is what you should chiefly work at ; if you wish to speak on some controversial points, do not do so unless the Gospel of the day leads up to them, and even then, you can uphold and prove the truths which heretics attack and even answer their arguments without, nevertheless, either naming or speaking of them.' Father Gallais needed such words of wisdom for his kindness of heart urged him too strongly to defend his co-religionists at the expense of heretics, even in purely civil affairs ; he intervened on their behalf, either with the Judges or the Governor himself, without first finding out who was in the right. This tendency could not but prove harmful to his ministry and Saint Vincent begged him to correct it. 'If it is a Catholic,' he wrote,[172] 'who has inflicted an injury or caused damage, is it not just that the Huguenot should demand lawful redress ? Is a Catholic less subject to justice because he is a Catholic ? '—' O, Father Gallais, my dear brother,' he said on another occasion, 'what great Missionaries should not you and I be if we could animate souls with the Spirit of the Gospel which will infallibly render them like unto Jesus Christ ! I promise you that that is the most efficacious means of converting heretics and of sanctifying Catholics that we can practise, and that nothing can attach them so firmly to error and vice than to act in the contrary way. Remember, Sir, what our Lord said to the man who complained to Him of his brother : *Quis me constituit judicem inter te et fratrem tuum ?* And tell those who would like to make use of you to plead their cause : *Quis me constituit advocatum vel negociatorem vestrum !* ' In his letters to

[172] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 449.

the Fathers of Sedan, Saint Vincent often touches on another delicate point: their relations with the Governor. His advice in this matter may be summed up in two words: confidence and respect. Confidence, that is to say, they should pay him fairly frequent but unceremonial visits;[173] consult him before making any innovations, but only on important matters that concerned the external side of the parish, and not on mere trifles.[174] And respect, that is to say, they should not attempt to teach him his own business, avoid too much familiarity and even excuse themselves[175] when invited to dine or sup.[176] By following these wise counsels, the Missionaries of Sedan avoided many a reef, and contributed to the spread of Catholicism in a province which had been gradually led on into heresy by its political chiefs.

Whilst they were thus evangelising the diocese of Reims, their confrères of Montmirail en Brie were spreading through the dioceses of Troyes and Soissons, seeking to win back or unite souls more closely to God. The Priests of the Mission were brought to Montmirail by Peter de Gondi, Duke of Retz and Baron of that town. At his request, Francis Malier, Bishop of Troyes, united in perpetuity to their Congregation, on June 20, 1644, the Priory or Hôtel-Dieu de la Chausée, in the suburbs of Montmirail. When Saint Vincent accepted this union, he also accepted all its intrinsic temporal and spiritual obligations and undertook, amongst other things, to maintain the building in good repair. Furthermore, in accordance with the terms of the contract, he placed at the Bishop's disposal two of his priests and a brother for missionary work. Wars and the state of the buildings compelled the Fathers to leave La Chausée, and they went to reside in the hamlet of Fontaine Essart, in the commune of Courbetaux, on one of the two farms bequeathed by Louis Toutblanc, secretary to the Duke of Retz, on May 12, 1644.[177] The house at Montmirail had barely sufficient to subsist on, but that did not prevent it, during some critical

[173] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, pp. 51, 190.
[174] *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 485.
[175] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 100, 483; Vol. VII, p. 590; Vol. VIII, p. 197.
[176] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 190, 604. [177] Arch. Nat., S. 6,708.

years,[178] from giving alms to the destitute and hospitality to refugees.[179] Its poverty interfered with its development and, as a rule,[180] there were only two priests in residence, rarely three, and sometimes only one.[181]

The house at Saintes was established, on September 26, 1644, on a more solid foundation. James Raoul de la Guilbourgère, Bishop of that city, endowed it with a revenue of 1200 livres. Three priests and two brothers were to form the staff which was to be employed in giving missions, directing a Seminary, and receiving ordinands for the preparatory retreat. The Priests of the Mission also pledged themselves to serve the parish church of Saint-Preuil, which had quite recently been united to the Seminary. If this union supplemented their income it also involved additional expenses and duties, for they were bound to provide in perpetuity for the maintenance of a curate, to supply him with a suitable annual salary, whilst leaving him all stole and altar fees, assist him, on the four great Church festivals, to administer the Sacraments and instruct and preach to the people ; to give a mission in the locality at whatever time the Bishop might determine and, finally, admit, without payment, to the Seminary a cleric of Saint-Preuil should one present himself with the requisite dispositions for the priesthood, and this without prejudice to the gratuitous admission of two other clerics or ecclesiastics to be selected by the Bishop himself. On November 22, Saint Vincent accepted the Bishop's proposal and, in addition, promised to raise the number of priests to four : two for missions and two for the Seminary and to receive six clerics instead of two, whenever the establishment should enjoy a fixed income of at least 3300 livres.[182]

The Fathers had been giving missions in the diocese of Saintes for over ten years and the contract, at least as far as missions was concerned, merely consolidated the estab-

[178] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, pp. 10, 205.

[179] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 493 ; Vol. III, p. 413 ; Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, Ch. XI, sect. I, p. 113.

[180] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 44.

[181] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 77, 604 ; Vol. VII, p. 205.

[182] Arch. Nat., S. 6,710. *Saint Vincent de Paul et sa Congrégation à Saintes et à Rochefort*, par Louis Audiat, Paris, 1885, oct. p. 29.

lished order by perfecting it in two ways : first, by assuring its resources and second by supplying it with a permanent house of residence in the episcopal city. The Seminary, on the other hand, was quite a new institution. The Bishop had been thinking of one as far back as 1633,[183] but had constantly hesitated before the difficulties of establishing it. The chief difficulty was overcome by the acquisition and repair of the Priory of Saint-Vivian, which was well adapted to its new purpose. Though the contract was signed and approved by Saint Vincent, for some reasons unknown it would seem as if the Seminary did not open until 1647.[184] Want of vocations may, perhaps, have been the cause, for in this part of France, where heresy was in the ascendant, the priesthood was despised. Protestants regarded it with such contempt that it was difficult to find in the whole diocese even a single child inclined to adopt the ecclesiastical state and if one did manifest a desire, his parents opposed it.[185] Hence, at first, the Seminary found it hard to exist ; on June 11, 1656, there were no pupils ;[186] on August 26, 1657, three, and the scholastic year of 1658 began with four or five.[187] These are the only figures available, but they are very significant.[188] When, from lack of seminarists, the class halls were closed, the professors found plenty of work to do in assisting the Missionaries or in directing candidates during their retreat for Ordination.[189]

In 1656, the house was in a state of confusion during several nights owing to thunderous noises which sounded as if a huge beam were falling from the top of a house. Some thought the disturbance was due to the machinations of ' poltergeists or evil spirits,' and Saint Vincent was accordingly consulted, but his practical turn of mind led him to seek for a more obvious explanation. The prayers prescribed by the Ritual,[190] he replied, might be recited, but only if it were clearly established that the phenomenon could not be explained by natural causes. ' The first idea that occurred to me about this matter is that some one is making

[183] Arch. Nat., 6,710.
[184] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 604 ; Vol. III, p. 164.
[185] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 66.
[186] *Ibid.*, p. 628.
[187] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 424.
[188] *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 66.
[189] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 164.
[190] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 83.

this noise either to amuse himself and to have a laugh at your astonishment, or is designedly trying to deprive you of sleep and peace so as to force you to quit the house. . . . If it is being done for a laugh, they will not stop once they know you are frightened, but if it is for some evil end, or if they are at work on some forbidden traffic, such as forging money, as some have imagined, they will cease as soon as they hear that people are generally discussing the loud noises made at night, because they will be afraid of immediate discovery and they will go off to some other place.' The enquiry, no doubt, showed that, as Saint Vincent had expected, the 'poltergeists' were innocent of the crime laid to their charge.

The reader should not be surprised at seeing the Saint dealing with such petty details, for when there was question of reassuring or instructing his confrères, nothing seemed to him to be too small. This anxiety to leave no enquiry without an answer, led to a great increase in his correspondence as establishments kept on increasing. In one year, 1645, five more foundations were made : at Le Mans, Saint-Méen, Saint-Charles, Genoa and Tunis.

On January 26, 1645, Martin Lucas, Abbot *in commendam* of Saint-Hilary, in the diocese of Carcassonne, Master and Superior of the splendid Hôtel-Dieu in the city of Mans, acting in his own name and in that of his confrères, surrendered into the King's hands, in favour of the Congregation of the Mission, the Royal and collegiate Church of Notre-Dame de Coëffort, of which he was Provost. The income was 2400 livres which he reserved to himself for life, handing over all the duties of his office to the Missionaries : the celebration of the Divine Office, the celebration of foundation Masses for the living or the dead, and the payment of the usual pensions to the Canons. The King confirmed the agreement in the following month and, on November 18, Emeric Mark de la Ferté, Bishop of Mans, signed the decree of union. By this deed the Missionaries acquired the right to present and nominate to the cures of Montbezat and the Maison-Dieu ; but, at the same time, they were required to take charge as far as spirituals were concerned of the Hôtel-Dieu of Mans, and to receive any

Ordinands and Seminarists who might be sent there. Also, Canonical Office was to be recited daily, in Choir, in surplice, and a High Mass to be celebrated, but, that the priests might have more time for their various employments, it was agreed that, with the exception of Vespers on Sundays and Holy Days, the Office should be recited, not chanted, and they should never be bound to more than one High Mass daily.[191] The property handed over to the Congregation was extensive, consisting of farms and *métairies*, houses, lands, woods, meadows, gardens, fish-ponds[192] and several chapels depending on the hospital.[193]

Father William Gallais was nominated Superior, took possession of the Provostship on June 30, 1645, and, that he might not be too much distracted from the disciplinary and moral administration of the house by cares of the material order, was given an Assistant with the title of Bursar in the person of Father Mathurin Gentil. The latter, who had remarkable gifts for the office of Bursar, did not always know how to preserve the mean between stinginess and extravagance, and was severely reprimanded by Saint Vincent for his avarice in a letter already quoted.[194] But when it came to building, Father Gentil became another man : he put his hand down deep into the community purse and spent money without a second thought. Saint Vincent reproves him in a letter ' for almost always having workmen about the place, who keep on moving, changing, destroying, restoring, altering and who consume a great deal of money in wages and maintenance,' without permission either from the Superior General for extensive alterations and repairs, or from the local Superior for works of lesser importance, as the Rule demands.[195]

This foolish expenditure was all the more unreasonable as the foundation owed large sums of money to the Mother-House.[196] On November 10, 1646, Saint Vincent wrote :

[191] Arch. Nat., S. 6,707.

[192] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 193 ; Vol. V, p. 575 ; Vol. VI, pp. 109, 133, 259, etc. (A *métairie* was ' a farm held on condition that the landlord shall receive a settled portion of the produce.') [193] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 389, 579 ; Vol. IV, p. 434.

[194] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 504. [195] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 273.

[196] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 105.

The money spent in Le Mans has reduced both our house and yours to a state of indigence,' and, on January 26, 1658, writing to the Superior, he said : ' Your family has been able to subsist only by the help of Saint-Lazare, as may be seen from the fact that we have always payed it 4,000 livres a year.'[197] The deficit kept on steadily increasing,[198] for the Bishop taxed the chapels and wished to oblige the Missionaries to receive the Ordinands without payment ;[199] the Canons of Coëffort, who were individually responsible for the tax on the clergy, transferred it to the Superior,[200] whilst those who owed money to the house, such as the farmers and the staff of the General Hospital, multiplied ruses to evade paying their debts.[201] It was no easy matter to set the finances in order ; the Bishop was requested to exempt the chapels from taxation ;[202] the pension of the pupils was raised from forty to sixty crowns,[203] but even then there was a large deficit to be met by Saint-Lazare. The works, happily, did not suffer from this state of affairs ; missions, retreats for Ordinands and others, the Seminary and the Chaplaincy to the General Hospital followed their normal course, at least as long as the Bishop, Philibert de Lavardin, did not interfere with them, for he was a capricious prelate who forbade all missions during Lent and Advent[204] and demanded that he should have a Missionary to accompany him during his visitations.[205] The Missionaries, thus reduced in number,[206] gladly accepted the help and collaboration of extern priests.[207] There were very few students in the Seminary : eight, on April 9, 1647 ; fifteen, on January 13, 1657. In 1648, the pupils were all young children but ecclesiastics were,[208] no doubt, admitted in 1649 for, on October 12,[209] Saint Vincent in a letter refers to ' the small and the large Seminary '[210] and the same phrase is used in

[197] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 62. [198] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 579, 619.
[199] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 413. [200] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 62.
[201] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 235, 389, 496, etc.
[202] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 579, 619.
[203] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 54 ; Vol. VI, p. 32.
[204] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 133. [205] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 190.
[206] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 324, 518 ; Vol. VIII, p. 115.
[207] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 168. [208] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 159.
[209] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 379. [210] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 496.

1657.[211] As in other places, Ceremonies and Chant formed part of the Syllabus[212] and also, as in other places, the dictation of notes in class was forbidden.[213]

The early days of the Seminary of Saint-Méen were more chequered and troubled than those of Le Mans. In return for the union of the conventual revenue of the Benedictine Abbey with the Congregation of Saint-Lazare and an annual income of 500 livres, assigned to the Seminary from episcopal tithes, Saint Vincent promised by contract dated July 14, 1645, to send five priests to Saint-Méen : two for missions in the diocese, and three for a Seminary ; to admit without payment twelve young ecclesiastics for two or three years, amongst whom there should be, if possible, four priests ; to give a pension to the two aged monks who still remained in the Abbey, Dom Boissel and Dom Robinault, and after their death to increase the number of pupils to be admitted without payment ; lastly, the Superior was bound, either in the persons of his confrères or the seminarists, to carry out the usual Services of the Church, that is to say, to recite the Canonical Hours, to fulfil the obligations of the foundation, to hear the confessions of pilgrims or travellers, to provide the necessary books and vestments for public worship and to carry out repairs.[214] The Priests of the Mission arrived in August in charge of their Superior, Father Bourdet. Dom Boissel and Dom Robinault handed over the monastic buildings and went to live in two adjacent small houses placed at their disposal, quite content with their pensions of 400 livres apiece. One of the first duties of the new arrivals was to repair the claustral buildings, and this they did thanks to a bequest of 7000 livres left for the purpose by a devout lady.

The Benedictines of the Province, however, were not slow to protest because one of their most celebrated Abbeys had been taken away from them by the sole will of the Bishop, a mere commendatory Abbot, without any intervention on the part of the Pope or King, or even the States of Brittany, in flagrant violation of the Letters-Patent of November 7, 1640, in which Louis XIII declared that ' no Order or new

[211] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 546.
[212] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 513 ; Vol. V, p. 414 ; Vol. VI, p. 259.
[213] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 323. [214] Arch. Nat. S. 6,711.

Company should or could be established in any part of the province without the consent of the States, verified and registered in Parlement.' The Bishop, who felt the storm beginning to rumble, took every precaution : he asked Doms Boissel and Robinault for their resignations in writing, had his project approved by the ecclesiastics of his diocese assembled in Synod and finally went to Paris to petition for Letters-Patent of secularisation to be addressed to the Parlement of Brittany for purposes of registration. On December 5, the Benedictines of Saint-Melaine presented a petition of intervention to the Parlement of Brittany, and when the Bishop heard of this move he changed his tactics : he refused to take advantage of the Letters-Patent and allowed his opponents to proceed to extremes. On June 1, the Parlement rejected the Bishop's plea to make use of, and profit by, the King's Letters, forbade all innovations in the establishment of Saint-Méen, condemned him to pay the costs of the trial, and delegated the Procurator General to the Superior General of the Congregation of Saint-Maur to obtain from the latter an undertaking that as many monks should be sent there as were needed to carry on the duties and functions of the Abbey. However, even in face of this attack, the Bishop of Saint-Malo was not dismayed. The Court granted him fresh Letters-Patent which differed from the former in this respect that, for purposes of registration and execution, they should be presented to the Great Council and not to the Parlement of Brittany. The Great Council delivered judgement on June 22, 1646, after an enquiry *de commodo et incommodo* held before the Seneschal of Ploërmel : the revenue of the Abbey of Saint-Méen was secularised and it became a Seminary.

The Benedictines refused to submit because, they asserted, such a decision violated at one and the same time the rights of the Parlement of Brittany and ecclesiastical law. The Parlement assembled on July 17 and upheld its decision of June 1 : whosoever should dare to carry out the decree of the Great Council would be fined 3000 livres, and the Priests of the Mission were ordered to leave the Abbey. On July 20, before six o'clock in the morning, the Commissary of the Parlement, the representative of the Procurator

General, an assistant Councillor, a Court usher, nine Benedictine Fathers and a lay-brother knocked at the Abbey gates. The gates remained closed ; a debate was carried on from behind the grating but all to no purpose, and at three o'clock in the afternoon matters remained in the same state as they had been in the morning. What was to be done ? The decree did not give them power to break in or to expel and, if an additional order to proceed was to be obtained from the Parlement, haste was necessary, for as the following day was the last day of the half-yearly term, no further proceedings could be taken for another fortnight. At this remark of the Commissary, two of the Fathers mounted on horseback and rode so hard that they were present at the opening of the Parlement at Rennes on the following day and presented their petition, which was granted. On the 23rd the whole group met again at Saint-Méen. Their arrival was announced by a general ringing of bells followed, for a quarter of an hour, by the dismal tolling of the alarm-bell. All exits were barricaded. A large crowd of pilgrims was gathered in front of the church (which had been closed for two days) waiting for the doors to be opened, and they watched with the greatest interest the posting-up of the Parlement's decree and the preliminary skirmishes in this epic contest. The various summonses to open had no other reply than the crash of slates thrown down from the top of the tower by those who were ringing the alarm-bell. The Commissary marched round the enclosure looking for an opening ; he found one door not barricaded in the house occupied by Dom Boissel by which he obtained entrance to the courtyard. There was a second door, which, in ordinary times, gave access from the courtyard to the cloister and this was hacked down with an axe. The passage, writes Dom Morel, a Benedictine, was so encumbered that a considerable amount of time was required to clear it. ' There was a huge ladder, a horse-cart, two large balks of timber, twenty-eight or thirty feet long, three benches, a quantity of barrel-staves and other timber, a number of logs, a heap of large uncut stones and such an amount of other material mentioned in the official report that I think there is no use in pausing here to give them in detail, for I should lose almost as much time

in doing so as was wasted in clearing them away. But this was not all, for when they got into the cloister they saw all the doors in the place so strangely reinforced that the oldest inhabitant protested that he had never seen anything like it, and that he could scarcely imagine the barricades of Paris, so renowned in history, could come near them.'

Once the interior was gained the rest was child's play. When they could not get in by a door, they went in by a window, but the whole place was empty. However, a Missionary was at last discovered and questioned, but all he could say was that the Superior had fled and that they would find Father de Beaumont and the other members of the Community in a room which he pointed out. The Commissary marched off to the place indicated and demanded that the door should be opened but, as he heard no reply, he decided on an escalade. The empty barrels used for the barricade were now procured, piled on top of each other and, in this way, it was quite easy to reach the window. The besieged, now forced to retreat, fell back on the Abbot's lodgings, to which they had prudently removed the furniture and all articles of value : relics, sacred vessels, vestments, archives, linen, beds, provisions, plates and dishes.

Whilst the Benedictines installed themselves as victors in the Abbey, the Missionaries and Seminarists occupied the Abbot's lodgings, but such close quarters, as one may imagine, produced unpleasant results. The servants and seminarists took delight in annoying the monks, and one fine morning the latter found their well half-choked with dirt. The Benedictines, growing tired of the boys' unmannerly tricks, appealed to the Parlement, and, on August 7, the Court ordered the Missionaries, their pupils and all other persons, no matter of what quality, to leave the Abbey buildings empty-handed, under threat of forcible expulsion and even imprisonment. Councillor de la Tousche-Freslon was charged with the execution of the decree. The night after the Court had given sentence, the servants, seminarists and professors left the Abbot's Lodgings in which only Master Louis d'Orgeville, Canon Penitentiary of Saint-Malo, Doctor of the Sorbonne and Vicar General of the diocese, remained. The Commissary, finding that no reply was given

to his summons, gave orders to have the doors forced, and as one of them was not firmly shut, M. de la Tousche secured an entrance, officially seized all the movable property of the Abbey, especially the relics and treasury, and handed them over to the Benedictines. The Canon Penitentiary's reply to this second invasion was to excommunicate the monks, put their church under an interdict and command all the parish priests in the neighbourhood to publish his sentence.

The Benedictines were not perturbed for their privilege of exemption sheltered them from episcopal thunders and they continued to celebrate as before. The Canon Penitentiary, Louis d'Orgeville, and the Superior, Father Bourdet, soon returned to Saint-Méen to tell the pilgrims that the monks had been excommunicated and were rebels against the Bishop's authority. The streets, squares and houses of Saint-Méen now began to resound with the noise of disputes between two factions, one favouring the Bishop, and the other, the Benedictines. Families were divided, husbands against wives and parents against children. The Parlement, naturally enough, remained loyal to the monks and, on August 18, the Canon Penitentiary was summoned to appear in person ' to be interrogated on the Procurator General's formal demands and to be proceeded against as may be judged fitting.' The Bishop, in the meantime, was preparing a counter-attack. He approached Marshal de la Meilleraye, the King's Lieutenant in Brittany, pointed out that the Royal authority had been treated with contempt, and succeeded in convincing the Marshal that it was his duty to intervene. De la Meilleraye sent a squadron of fifteen troopers under the command of Grand-Maisons, an officer in the Guards, and after a night's march the soldiers arrived in Saint-Méen on the 20th, just before six o'clock of the morning, when the monks were beginning to sing Prime. ' Behold,' writes Dom Morel, ' this troup entering the church on horseback, all of them with pistols, and some with drawn swords in their hands, crying out " slay, slay,—outside, monks, outside." ' The monks fled without offering any resistance. His mission concluded, Grand-Maisons was preparing to leave when, in the evening, he received a letter from the Bishop of Saint-Malo requesting him to remain

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with his squadron in case of a counter-attack. He replied, Dom Morel goes on to tell us, that 'he would hold the place against all the monks of the Thebaid on condition that he was supplied with ammunition for war and his gullet.' It was not very difficult to let him have supplies, and from the neighbouring towns and villages sheep, calves, poultry and other provisions began to arrive as well as stores of a different kind, powder, lead, guns, musket, carbines and arquebuses. The Abbey, in the meantime, was transformed into a fort. A large number of empty barrels and casks were filled with earth and placed at strategic points: four at the main entrance, and the remainder in rooms close to the staircase. Doors and windows were stoutly barricaded and loopholes effected wherever it was thought they might prove useful.

When these operations were completed, the band bravely stood its ground for an attack. The monks had recourse to their usual protector—the Parlement of Rennes and, on the 22nd, the Court ordered an enquiry. On the 28th a decree was issued ordering the arrest of d'Orgeville, Bourdet, de Beaumont, the domestics of the Seminary, Grand-Maisons and two others, the restoration of the monks and the expulsion of the Missionaries. The execution of such a decree was a delicate matter for it seemed difficult to avoid an armed conflict between the Governor and the Parlement and hence two Councillors and the Advocate General were entrusted with its execution. The Advocate General called on all the country gentlemen of the neighbourhood to come to his assistance and summoned the Lord Provost to bring all his archers. He wished to secure such a superiority in numbers over the fifteen defenders of the Abbey that Grand-Maisons would immediately see that it was hopeless to put up a fight. He was carefully preparing his plans when word arrived that the Abbey was empty; the news was quite true for Marshal de la Meilleraye, surprised to find the soldiers still in Saint-Méen, had sent word that they were to return to their barracks in Nantes.

The Missionaries, deprived of their defenders, had fled, some to Saint-Malo, others, to Plancoet, leaving Father de Beaumont behind, for he had volunteered to look after the house. Father Bourdet, writes Dom Morel, 'was seized

with such panic terror that, on the spot, he put his foot in the stirrup and galloped night and day without drawing rein, not daring to put his foot on the ground for fear of falling into the hands of justice, until at length, as both man and horse were utterly exhausted, he dismounted at the door of an inn in a village in the diocese of Vannes in which, wishing to tarry for a while to recover his breath and procure some refreshment, he unluckily discovered two horses in the stable which he was told belonged to two Sheriff's officers who had just arrived ; this astonished him so greatly that, without waiting to find out from whence they came, whither they were going, or who was in charge, he folds up his baggage once more, remounts his nag and begins all over again to clap spurs in its sides until, as I am told, it sank down dead between his legs.'

Father de Beaumont had to pay for his Superior ; he was put in irons and locked up in gaol. M. de Marbeuf, President of the Parlement of Rennes, censured this severe treatment and, on September 4, after de Beaumont had appeared before the Criminal Court, the President gave orders that he was to be released. On the previous evening, the Benedictines were restored to their old Abbey, but twenty days later, on September 22, about eleven o'clock of the morning Ferdinand de Neufville, the Bishop's nephew and Suffragan, arrived at the Abbot's Lodgings with a document from the King's Privy Council ordering the monks to leave the Abbey. He read the document and to all their protestations replied that it was their duty to obey. Scarcely had he left than a band of forty or fifty men invaded the house and expelled the monks who were never to return.

The King's decree, dated September 7, suspended the two Councillors of the Parlement and even the Procurator General, and ordered them to come up for sentence. The Parlement protested against these measures, and gave orders that most ' humble remonstrances should be addressed to His Majesty in regard to the result of the sentences on the said Councillors as to both matter and form ' and it forbade de Harlay to establish in the Abbey ' the Priests of the Mission, without Bulls of His Holiness and Letters of the King registered in the said Court, after representatives

of the three estates had been heard.' This Platonic protest was without result, and the Parlement no doubt understood quite well that it would not be prudent to proceed any further.

There is no need to say that Saint Vincent was profoundly distressed when he saw his confrères involved in a struggle which had brought a Bishop and the members of a religious Order into conflict. Nevertheless, he did not disown them and even told them not to yield. 'If the matter depended on us,' he wrote to Father Portail, on August 25, 1646, 'we would recall our confrères, but it is His Lordship's affair and he has acted in his own name.'[215] To abandon the Bishop of Saint-Malo would have seemed to him an act of ingratitude, and ingratitude, in his eyes, was 'the crime of crimes.'[216] In principle, members of a reformed Order could not be introduced into a non-reformed monastery except with the consent of the Bishop, the Abbot and the religious themselves. Now, the Benedictines of Saint-Maur had not received this triple consent and, indeed, it had been signified to them that they were not required. But it may be said, no bishop has a right to alienate property belonging to the Order of Saint Benedict. To this Saint Vincent replied :[217] 'If Saint Benedict were alive to-day he would be very loath to deny this proposition, he who was a child of the Church, all the more so as the property of his Order was given it by the Church for the help which it then gave the Church by means of its seminaries for ecclesiastics, whom in those days it trained for the service of the Church and to supply its benefices. Now, they do so no longer and the Church has ordained that this work should be carried out by the Bishops, who are also obliged to do so by the King's command, and the Church also devotes benefices and other revenues to this purpose. Is it not just that that same Church which gave the property to that Order for the creation of the aforesaid Seminaries, a work which the Order no longer does, and which it is not in a condition to do, is it not just, I say, that this same Church should now employ this little piece of property, on the authority of the

[215] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 27.
[216] *Ibid.*, p. 37. [217] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Prince and the Prelate, to supply for what those Fathers once did but no longer do, provided it be done with the consent of its first possessors ? '

But it may further be objected that the Parlement of Brittany took sides on behalf of the Fathers of Saint-Maur. To this Saint Vincent replied : ' This sovereign State has neither power to introduce nor maintain any particular person or body in a property that does not belong to it of right, and it looks as if that of Brittany, which has the reputation of containing some of the foremost jurists in the Kingdom, will not uphold the Fathers, when it shall be better informed. Moreover, the King, in whom the sovereign power of Parlement, and the power of overruling their decisions, resides, has authorised us.'[218] Such were the arguments brought forward by the Saint in a letter to Father Bourdet to persuade him not to desert his post,[219] and to Claude de Marbeuf, First President of the Parlement of Rennes, to induce him to set Peter de Beaumont at liberty.[220]

It is not of any great importance whether one does or does not agree with his view that the Bishop had a right to secularise property belonging to the Order of Saint Benedict without first having recourse to Rome, but what is important is the recognition of the perfect correctness of his conduct in this lamentable affair, and this was fully revealed during the process of Beatification by the defender of his Cause in his replies to the objections formulated by the Promoter of the Faith.[221] His confrères took no part in the violent proceedings and avoided all controversy with the Benedictine Fathers, and if Saint Vincent did not recall them to Paris, this was solely out of deference to the Bishop of Saint-Malo whom he believed to be acting within his rights and to whom he was bound in gratitude.[222] Furthermore, out of love for peace and in order that the union of the conventual revenues

[218] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 38.
[219] *Ibid.*, p. 36. [220] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[221] *Novae animadversiones*, pp. 9 ff ; *Responsio ad novas animadversiones*, pp. 37 ff ; *Summarium additionale*, pp. 5 ff ; *Ultimae animadversiones*, pp. 3 ff ; *Responsio ad ultimas animadversiones*, pp. 24 ff.
[222] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, p. 569 ; Vol. III, p. 27.

might not be tainted by any irregularities, he decided, in agreement with the Bishop of Saint-Malo, to proceed in accordance with the demand of Parlement of Brittany, that is to say, to petition for the Bulls, which would be deposited in the States of the Province and verified by the Parlement. He foresaw that this would be a very tedious business, and that the Benedictines would certainly do what they could to prevent the granting of the petition but, all things considered, he thought that this was the right course to pursue.[223] On November 8, 1646, the letter was forwarded to Rome but it took twelve years and all Father Jolly's diplomatic skill, to attain the desired result.[224] When the Bull was prepared and signed, its opponents did not even then give up the fight ; they tried to prevent its despatch, but only succeeded in deferring it.[225] After 1645, things resumed their normal course ; some of the Priests of Saint-Lazare gave missions in the villages, whilst others taught the seminarists, tended the pilgrims or served the Chapel of Notre-Dame de Plancoët. At first, the Seminary admitted only children ;[226] on April 9, 1647, there were from twelve to fifteen pupils[227] and, on December 26, 1657, fifteen.[228] Father Bourdet had accepted the Chapel of Notre-Dame de Plancoët without consulting Saint Vincent, who reprimanded him for having done so, because the work involved in serving this shrine, by immobilising one or two Missionaries, gravely interfered with the preaching of missions.[229] At one time there was

[223] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 99. [224] *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 387 ff.

[225] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 147. On this matter of the disputes between the Bishop of Saint Malo and the Benedictines, see *Défense de la verité contre les fausses maximes touchant la prétendue sécularisation de l'abbaye de Saint Méen* (by Dom Noel Mars or Dom Germain Morel), MS. Bib. Nat. ff. 19,831. This MS. has been admirably summarised by Saint Ropartz (*Histoire de la sécularisation de l'abbaye de Saint Méen* in the *Mémoires de la Société archéologique des Côtes-du-Nord*, Vol. III, pp. 177–204). One may also consult on this question Bibl. Nat. MS. ff. 11,556, 12,685, 22,358 ; f. 1. 12,685 ; Bibl. Sainte Geneviève MSS. 701, 739 and 1,942 ; Bibl. de l'Institut, fonds Godefroy, 13, f° 190 ; *Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Touraine*, Vol. XXV, pp. 515–520. [226] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. III, p. 379.

[227] *Ibid.*, p. 168. [228] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 30.

[229] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 600 ; Vol. III, p. 131.

question of establishing an internal seminary or novitiate in Saint-Méen for Breton postulants but, for reasons unknown, the project was abandoned.[230]

There is very little information at our disposal as to the origin of the house at Tréguier. In 1643, the Bishop Noel de Landes, suggested to Saint Vincent that he should take charge of the Seminary, but as the revenue did not exceed 500 livres the offer was not accepted. In 1648, his successor, Balthasar Grangier de Liverdi, was more successful, because very probably the conditions were more advantageous. The Seminary was not, however, really solidly established until March 16, 1654, when Michael Thépault, Lord of the Manor of Rumelin, Canon of the Cathedral Church and Grand Penitentiary, made a foundation which was approved a few days later by the Bishop and Saint Vincent. By the terms of the contract, the Priests of the Mission were to be the perpetual directors of the Seminary. The motive for this choice is given : ' they seem to be persons who, in this century, are labouring in the Church with the greatest blessing, not only when, in accordance with the commands of Their Lordships the Bishops, they give missions to country folk or instruct those who aspire to Holy Orders in ecclesiastical learning, and, in the course of these instructions, lead them on to devotional exercises, but also, and more efficaciously, by the care they take in the government of Seminaries in various dioceses, where they zealously exhort ecclesiastics to devote themselves to the holy exercise of their functions, as they have done at Saint-Méen for several years in this diocese itself, where the said priests have been labouring in various ways with the greatest success.' After this tribute to Saint Vincent's sons, the Grand Penitentiary gives a list of his donations : houses, gardens, yards and fields, and 7700 livres for a church and residence, all on condition that the foundation and revenues shall never be alienated, that the Seminary shall remain in Tréguier, that the coat-of-arms of de Rumelin shall be placed in a conspicuous place on the walls of the building and of the church, that the vault beneath the choir shall be reserved for himself, family and

[230] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 103.

heirs and, finally, that prayers shall be offered, Masses said and the Divine Office recited for his intentions.

De Rumelin's benefactions just sufficed to cover the expenses of building the Seminary, and hence the directors had to look in other directions for the means of maintaining it. The Bishop agreed that funds for this purpose should be levied on the revenues of the bishopric and, on June 28, established a burse of 1000 livres for the support of at least three priests and one brother. This was not, however, a purely gratuitous gift for, in making it, he reserved to himself the right to send the priests to give missions in the diocese, wherever he might think fit, though their personal expenses would be defrayed, and also to take one of them with him whenever he made a pastoral visitation.[231]

The Seminary at Tréguier admitted both priests and clerics.[232] Its early history does not contain any incidents worth noting in this place, but there is one piece of advice given by Saint Vincent in regard to the training of seminarists which may be mentioned for it was inspired by one of the greatest dangers to which the Breton clergy was exposed. In a letter to the Superior, he says :[233] ' There is one point to which you should pay particular attention, and that is the destruction of the evil spirit of Drink, which is a source of disorder amongst ecclesiastics ; and, to that end, it is necessary to endeavour to make them interior men, men of prayer, who will love to maintain intercourse with God rather than seek for company, and to perform their duties rather than remain idle.'

Like Balthasar Grangier de Liverdi, Bartholomew d'Elbène, Bishop of Agen, begged Saint Vincent to accept his Seminary which had until then been directed by the diocesan clergy. The first Missionaries arrived in 1648, under the charge of their Superior, Father Delattre. More than a year went by before the contract was signed but, on March 1, 1650, the prelate, now fully satisfied with the work done by the Priests of the Mission, gave them the ' entire and perpetual direction and administration ' of the Seminary. He asked

[231] Arch. Nat. S. 6,712.
[232] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 314.
[233] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p.145.

for three priests and two brothers who should prepare clerics for Orders by retreats, admit and maintain, for as long as he thought fit, priests, parish priests, curates and other ecclesiastics sent by him to be instructed in ecclesiastical discipline, and reserved to himself the selection of four seminarists. ' For which exercitants, ordinands and priests, as mentioned above,' the deed goes on ' a reasonable tax shall be levied by ourselves and our successors.' The Seminary was maintained partly by benefices united to it, namely, a Chapel and the Priory of Sainte-Foy, and partly by a subsidy granted by the clergy. A special clause stated that Superiors should be changed within two months after the Bishop had asked for their recall.[234]

The Missionaries at La Rose gave Missions in the diocese but those at Agen were only concerned with the clergy. There are no figures to indicate the importance of the Seminary ; we only know that, on December 17, 1659, there were seven ecclesiastics and some pupils in residence.[235] The numbers must always have been small, for the house was poorly endowed.[236] The Bishop turned a deaf ear to every request for money,[237] and Saint Vincent threatened more than once to recall his confrères if the Bishop continued to refuse them essentials.[238]

When Bartholomew d'Elbène offered his Seminary to the Priests of the Missions, he was acting under the influence of the saintly Bishop of Cahors, who had also induced the Bishop of Périgueux, Philibert Brandon, to follow the same course. Saint Vincent would have preferred to send four priests : two for the Seminary and two for missions, but the prelate would accept only two, and Alain de Solminihac suggested three as a compromise. In the end, it was settled that a beginning would be made with two, and that others would follow later. The two were Charles Bayart and Denis Laudin, who arrived in Périgueux in December, 1650. We do not know whether they showed themselves unequal to the

[234] Arch. Nat. S. S 6,700.
[235] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 195.
[236] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 502 ; Vol. IV, p. 277.
[237] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 421, 547 ; Vol. VII, pp. 33, 35 ; Vol. VIII, pp. 13, 195.
[238] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 347, 421, 454.

task or whether the discussions on the contract made it clear that no agreement could be arrived at ; in any case, they were recalled after two or three months. Balthasar Brandon de Bassoncourt, the Bishop's brother and Vicar General, informed Paris that he could dispense with their services. Nothing could be more Christian or humble than Saint Vincent's reply, on April 1, 1651 : ' My Lord, various letters which I have received from several ecclesiastics in your city, and from those who have the happiness to approach you, have made me sufficiently realise that we are utterly unworthy to render any service to God under such a good Prelate as yourself ; when I think of the reasons which Providence has had for causing us to be regarded in such a light, I can see none save my own sins. Hence, My Lord, I hope you will permit Fathers Bayart and Laudin to return here, according to the orders I have given them. This will not prevent you from always having sovereign power over us, or from my embracing with greater joy than ever whatever opportunities God may give me of pleasing and obeying you.[239]

The Seminary at Montauban had a longer life than that at Périgueux. In 1652, the Priests of the Mission were established in this diocese after the parish of Saint-Aignan and the Chapel of Notre-Dame of Orme had been resigned in favour of one of them,—Father Emerand Bajoue. Two or three Missionaries were asked for to serve this benefice and chapel, and at the same time, to give missions.[240]

In January, 1653, Father Cuissot, Superior of the Seminary of Cahors, was sent to interview the Bishop, Anne de Murviel, with a view to prepare the basis of an agreement in regard to a Seminary. The episcopal city would seem to have a certain right to an establishment of this kind, but Montauban nevertheless was set aside, possibly for motives of economy. Montech, now the chief town in the district of Castelsarrasin, was selected. The Bishop and clergy had frequently sought refuge in Montech during the Wars of Religion, and quite recently most of the Chapter had retired there to escape from the plague. The Bishop owned a large house opposite the church which, when repaired and

[239] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 166. [240] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 541.

suitably furnished, was quite suitable for a Seminary.[241] A far more thorny problem was how to maintain it ; it was decided to adopt two means, first, taxes on the clergy and, second, a union of benefices. In order to effect this, the Bishop had recourse to the deputies of the clergy and the King ; from the former, he obtained, on July 5, 1653, an extraordinary contribution of 1200 livres,[242] and from the latter, Letters-Patent empowering him to open a Seminary and to unite to it benefices other than canonries. The plan was put before the Diocesan Synod, on April 13, 1655, and cordially approved.[243]

In all probability, it was at the beginning of the scholastic year of 1655,[244] and not later, that the first seminarists arrived.[245] It was very quickly seen that Montech was not a suitable locality and, towards the end of July, the Bishop transferred the Seminary to Castelferrus, where the Chapel of Notre-Dame of Orme was situated. If he had consulted Saint Vincent he would probably have selected some other locality. It was difficult to live on good terms with the Lords of Castelferrus, and the Saint's fears may be seen from the following lines written to the Superior :[246] ' I do not know whether you have carried out certain juridical forms in order to establish yourselves there, or whether it is expedient for you to do so. You will, please, take advice on this matter.' It was a very wise suggestion, for their sojourn at Our Lady of Orme was rendered unpleasant by innumerable acts of

[241] *Le grand séminaire de Montauban et les prêtres de la Mission avant la Révolution*, par l'abbé Camille Daux, Paris, 1883, oct. pp. 11–12.

[242] *Procès-verbaux des assemblées du clergé du diocèse de Montauban.* (Cf. Daux, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–14.)

[243] Arch. dép., serie G. liasse 461 (Cf. Daux, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

[244] It is true that, in 1653, Saint Vincent spoke of sending Father Lièbe to Montauban as professor (*Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. IV, p. 583) ; but he did so thinking that the Seminary would shortly be opened, which was not the case as may be seen from reading the deed of April 13, 1655, given by Daux (*op. cit.*, p. 16).

[245] We know from one of the Saint's letters (*op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 465) that the Seminary was at work in the beginning of the scholastic year of 1655–1656.

[246] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 54.

annoyance, and even of violence for, on one occasion, their house was nearly burnt down by malevolent hands.[247] This was not the only grave inconvenience ; there were others, such as the confined area of the establishment, and its distance from the episcopal city.

The whole Community wished to be transferred to Montauban, and in this they were supported by Saint Vincent,[248] but the Bishop was afraid of the expense. The finances of the diocese could not stand the strain of at once purchasing a site and building a Seminary, but the plan seemed feasible if the total sum involved were spread over a number of years. There was an admirable site at hand that seemed almost as if it had been designed for a Seminary and this was the ground on which the old cathedral and the ancient monastery of Montauriol had once stood ; it was the property of the Chapter, and was at that time encumbered with ruins. The Canons, before consenting to transfer it, deliberated at great length on August 7 and September 2, 1660,[249] and the contract of sale was signed on the 3rd. The transfer was accompanied by certain conditions, for the Chapter, jealous of its prerogatives and rights, desired to bind the directors of the Seminary to be present as a body at all public, general processions, to ask permission to carry a Cross during such processions, and to abstain from administering the Sacraments or burying the dead in the case of persons who lived outside the Seminary. Saint Vincent was seriously ill and in fact near his end when the Canons' proposal was submitted to him ; he rejected the two first conditions, on the ground that they were ' onerous and embarrassing,' calculated to distract the staff from their duties in the Seminary, but he made no objection to the last, which was quite in conformity with the usages of the Company at that time.[250]

On the same day, September 16, 1660, he gave his approval to the Bishop's pastoral of the 5th, by which the perpetual direction of the Seminary was entrusted to the Congregation of the Mission.[251] The deed united the Chapel

[247] *Ibid.*, p. 458 ; Vol. VII, pp. 412, 487.
[248] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 458, Vol. VII, pp. 358, 413, 488.
[249] Daux, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.
[250] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. XIII, pp. 182–183.
[251] Arch. Nat., MM. 536.

of Our Lady of Orme and the parishes of Brial and Falguière to the Seminary, and there was a solemn pledge to add further revenues 'in accordance with needs and opportunities.' Saint Vincent was very reluctant to accept the union with these two parishes, and it certainly seems as if this was the real reason why the proceedings had dragged on so long.[252]

The Seminary bore fruit, and good fruit. The number of pupils increased ;[253] this was, no doubt, due in part to the very moderate pension (in 1660), of 100 or 120 livres which, however, often put the Superior at his wits' end, when he asked himself how he was to provide for everybody with such meagre funds.[254] Several years went by, as we have just seen before Saint Vincent and the Bishop of Montauban came to an agreement about the deed of foundation, but it was even more difficult to come to terms with Francis Fouquet, Bishop of Agde.

Francis Fouquet was a very old friend of Saint Vincent and, before his elevation to the episcopal bench, was one of the group of ecclesiastics who frequented Saint-Lazare for the meetings held there on Tuesdays. Moreover, his mother, Madame Fouquet, was one of the foremost Ladies of Charity, yet Saint Vincent and the Bishop could not come to an agreement. The Saint did not like the deed of foundation, and the Bishop's obstinate determination not to alter a tittle seemed to leave no room for compromise. The Missionaries were to be entrusted with the Seminary but not, as elsewhere, with its perpetual direction ; and its endowment, from the union of a parish and several chapels, was not guaranteed,[255] so that the future of the Seminary would be always uncertain, and a lawsuit might deprive it of all its possessions.[256] Furthermore, it is very probable that Francis Fouquet, as he afterwards demanded in the case of the Seminary at Narbonne, wished to reserve the right to dismiss professors with whom he was not satisfied, and also demanded that the financial accounts of the Seminary should be submitted to him. Such were the points of disagreement between the prelate and

[252] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 358.
[253] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 459 ; Vol. VII, pp. 152, 358.
[254] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 225.
[255] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 625 ; Vol. VIII, p. 398.
[256] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

the Saint and the latter, after vainly endeavouring to bring the Bishop round to his own views, came to the conclusion that it would be better to withdraw. On July 9, 1655, he wrote to the Superior : ' Considering what is now happening I beg you, Sir, after you shall have given an account to the Vicars General, and obtained a receipt for all those things which you received, of which you have an inventory, and which you will hand back to them, to take a gracious farewell, without uttering a single word of complaint or giving the slightest indication that you are very well pleased to be leaving the place, and you will also pray God to bless the city and the whole diocese. Above all, I beg you not to say a single word in the pulpit, or anywhere else, which would manifest any discontent whatsoever. You will ask for the blessing of those Gentlemen for yourself and the whole little family and, at the same time, you will ask it for me who wish to prostrate myself with you at their feet, and to ask their forgiveness for faults committed there.' As a result of somebody's intervention, perhaps Madame Fouquet's, the order of recall was withdrawn, and both parties waited for better days to reach an agreement.[257]

When Louis Fouquet succeeded his brother as Bishop of Agde, Saint Vincent thought the time had come to draw up a contract ; he wrote to the Superior to tell him what line of action he should adopt and suggested : that the deed of union with the chapels should be prepared, after obtaining the consent of the patrons, if there were any, and also the consent of the Chapter ; and that the deed should then be presented to the King for his approbation. ' Now, that this may be validly done,' he went on to add,[258] 'it is essential that the said Lord Bishop of Agde should be willing to enter into a new contract for the erection of his seminary and entrust its perpetual direction to the Company, because this perpetuity was lacking to the concordat entered into by the late Father du Chesne with His Grace of Narbonne, who was then Bishop of Agde.' The Saint's advice was, unfortunately, not followed, and the Seminary, erected on shaky foundations, closed its doors in 1671.

[257] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 395, note 1.
[258] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 101.

Its first Superior, Father du Chesne, was far from expecting such a rapid disappearance for, in his optimism, he foresaw not one but two Seminaries flourishing side by side : a diocesan, and an ' internal ' seminary, which would furnish subjects to the Congregation.[259] On June 8, 1654, writing to one of his colleagues in Poland,[260] he says : ' There are four of us here, and we have begun a Seminary which goes on increasing day by day in numbers and virtue. Our quarters are rather confined, but we are only waiting for the masons to start work on a beautiful building and, as soon as it is finished, we hope to have one of the finest seminaries in the Kingdom. There is also talk of an internal seminary and I think we shall in time find plenty of subjects to fill it.'[261] The masons did, as a matter of fact, get to work and the building was erected but we do not know whether Father du Chesne saw its completion or even beginning for, before the year was out, he had to leave Agde through ill-health. He was replaced by Father Mugnier who, in turn, gave way to Father Durand, and if the latter only followed the admirable advice given him by Saint Vincent, when leaving for his new post, we may be sure that he was a model Superior.[262]

At the period we have now reached most of the Bishops of France realised that the proper training of their clergy was one of their most important duties, but their good intentions did not always meet with success. Dominic Séguier, Bishop of Meaux, established a Seminary on October 30, 1645, and placed it under the direction of James Polangis, Doctor of Theology and Canon of the Cathedral Church, and a staff of six secular priests. At least ten priests and ten clerics were to be admitted as seminarists. In addition to a revenue and some immovable goods bequeathed by a Canon, the Seminary owned the John Rose Hospital, with its estates and revenues, and it also had charge of its inmates ; it possessed, moreover, the Municipal College. Though apparently wealthy it was in reality extremely poor,

[259] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. V, p. 132.

[260] Letter to Father Ozenne (the original is in the possession of the Vincentian Fathers in Cracow).

[261] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, p. 100.

[262] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, pp. 342 ff.

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for the union of the Hospital and of the College involved so many extra charges that the Seminary was not able to support itself. The clergy, therefore, had to make good the deficit and, with the King's approbation, undertook to pay an extraordinary contribution of 4800 livres payable within four years.[263] The unsatisfactory financial situation was also partly due to the deplorable administration of the Superior who, as the Bishop at length realised, had to be removed. As Dominic Séguier could see no one of those around him capable of saving the imperilled establishment, he appealed to Saint Vincent for help and Father Brin, the Superior of Troyes, was sent to Meaux. We should have had no information relative to Father Brin's first sojourn in that city were it not for a letter sent to him by Saint Vincent on September 6, 1657. 'I have received your letter in which you tell me what His Lordship of Meaux said to you about the house in which you now are, and to this I have nothing to add save that we shall be very pleased to satisfy him. But you know the reasons why we cannot do all that he desires. I am deeply distressed by what you are enduring. I have no doubt that you have plenty of annoyance on account of the way in which this matter is dragging along, without your knowing whether you are without or within. But, then, you are honouring the various states of Our Lord Who frequently found Himself in similar straits. I beseech you, Sir, still to have patience for the love of that same Lord.'[264] Father Brin had not to exercise his patience very long for, a month after receiving this letter, he was giving a great mission at Sezanne.[265]

In the following year he was back in Meaux with a cleric, Nicholas Pierron, twenty-three years old, who was one day to be Superior General. On November 6, 1658, Saint Vincent wrote: 'I have nothing to do but to respect all that their Lordships may ordain for the good of their Seminaries, and I have nothing to say about the administration of temporal matters with which they have charged you, save that we

[263] *L'hôpital Jean-Rose et le grand séminaire de Meaux*, par O. Estournet, pp. 24–28.

[264] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VI, p. 438.

[265] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 556.

cannot send anyone to help you or to keep your accounts. I should like to think that you pointed out to them how little aptitude you have for business affairs, and hence, as you have been entrusted with them despite this avowal, you should remain in peace, and hope that you will not spoil anything, above all, if, in matters of importance, you consult with the Vicar General. If the state of affairs in the Seminary alters within two months, as you hope, then there is no need to make, for such a short period, the changes you suggest. So I beg you to be satisfied with brother Pierron and to leave Brother Claude in Crécy.'[266] Father Brin, no doubt, had difficulties to contend with, but he also had around him men well fitted either to give him advice, such as Nicholas Caignet, the Vicar General, Canon Theologian and Chancellor of the Church of Meaux, or to defend him, such as the Bishop, Dominic Séguier, who bequeathed the Seminary 25,000 livres. Séguier died on May 16, 1659, and was succeeded by his nephew, Dominic de Ligny who, in 1660, took Father Brin with him on his Visitations, entrusted him with the distribution of alms, the task of reconciling enemies and of preaching the word of God wherever they went.

The Seminary, however, had to deal with others besides its friends and protectors. Francis Le Meuniers, Canon Regular of Saint Augustine and parish priest of Montagny, laid claim to the buildings and revenues of the John Rose Hospital ; he was well aware that the founder had entrusted its administration and property in perpetuity to two Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, one of whom should have all the rights and privileges of Master. The union of the Seminary and the hospital was, therefore, in formal opposition to the terms of the foundation-contract, which he attacked, alleging that the benefice was vacant through invalidity of title, and he accordingly petitioned the Court of Rome for investiture. He had to wait for a long time before his wishes were realised but, at the end of 1660, and consequently after Saint Vincent's death, Le Meunier obtained letters conferring the benefice on him on the grounds of the original collator's incapacity to grant. As the Canon Law required that he should take possession within a year, if he were to avail him-

[266] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 338.

self of this concession, he hastened to Meaux to expel Father Brin and to take his place. The Bishop, however, was on the watch and prevented the Augustinian Friar from carrying out his design. A prolonged lawsuit and even, perhaps, deeds of violence might be expected, so Father Alméras, who was then Superior General and had not forgotten the sad affair at Saint-Méen, preferred to withdraw his confrères. The Priests of the Mission, therefore, were in charge of the Seminary of Meaux for only three years. Cardinal de Bissy, no doubt, had them, as well as their brethren in Crécy, before his mind when, in a letter written to the Pope during the eighteenth century, he said : ' We have beheld with joy ecclesiastical discipline, ruined in this diocese by a long series of wars, restored to life thanks to the zeal and efforts of labourers sent here by Vincent de Paul.'[267]

Montpellier, opened in 1659, was even more short-lived than Meaux. ' Fathers Get and Parisy,' we read in a contemporary document,[268] ' have spent a year or so here, engaged in the training of ecclesiastics . . . together with a brother and a servant, on money supplied by the Bishop, namely, one hundred livres a month.' No preparations had been made for their arrival : there was neither a habitable house, nor an assured foundation, nor even sufficient resources. Every cleric should, in principle, pass through the Seminary before ordination, but the length of each individual's stay depended on the whim of the Bishop.[269] Saint Vincent admitted, after Father Get's first letter,[270] that if he had appreciated the situation more exactly, he would never have sent anyone to Montpellier. He had been strongly urged to do so ; he had not been given time to obtain information, and he had confidently gone ahead. But the error had been committed and he was not accustomed to beat a retreat. After all, he wrote to his confrère, God can re-establish shaky foundations ; we must trust in Him and then, point by point, he replies to the unhappy Father Get's comments. ' Men's minds in those parts are naturally inclined to dissipation.' Granted, but the remedy

[267] Estournet, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–33. [268] Arch. Nat. S. 6,707.
[269] E. Bousquet, *Le grand séminaire de Montpellier* dans *La Revue historique du diocèse de Montpellier*, 15 Novembre 1909, pp. 204–205. [270] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 592.

is : ' To train them in the interior life, in prayer, recollection and union with God.' That, however, will be a long and difficult task. Quite true, but ' the grace of God and your example will be a great help.' Resources are wanting.— ' The beginnings of all important works are always difficult.' Those who are now in the Seminary are threatening to leave it. ' Perhaps, that will be all for the better ; do not distress yourself, others will come.' And so Time will settle everything. ' If God wishes us to be in Montpellier, He will certainly find means of firmly establishing us, and if He does not, we should not desire to be there.'

A few days later, Father Get wrote once more to express his fears which had been confirmed by a fuller knowledge of the locality and its circumstances, and Saint Vincent again replied encouragingly : ' God, Who knows how to draw good out of evil, will turn all this to His glory. One should not try to repair one fault by committing another, or leave the place where you now are, after undertaking to serve God and the diocese. If a work begun does not succeed it should, nevertheless, not be our fault if He does not bring it to perfection, since His Providence entrusted us with it.'[271] Even when he was writing these lines, he had very little hope for the future of the Montpellier Seminary and hence, shortly afterwards, he was in no way surprised to hear from the Archbishop of Narbonne that the Bishop of Montpellier was proposing to send his seminarists to establishments in neighbouring dioceses.[272] The news was not yet official but it might be regarded as certain, and he therefore confided it to Father Get advising him ' carefully and quietly to arrange for ' his return to Marseilles without, however, offending the Bishop, Francis de Bosquet.[273] A plan was arranged : Father Get was to ask the Bishop's permission to proceed to Marseilles on ' urgent affairs ' of the house, of which he was still Superior and, after his departure, Saint Vincent would write to the prelate suggesting that Father Get should remain in Marseilles.[274] After he had heard from the Bishop he

[271] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VII, p. 617.
[272] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 235.
[273] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[274] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 249.

would either fill Father Get's place in Montpellier, or recall Father Parisy and Brother Duchesne. The second hypothesis was realised. 'The time for the Vincentians in Montpellier,' writes an historian,[275] 'had not yet arrived. Providence deferred it until the nineteenth century, but the labours and sorrows of the past were to render fruitful that future harvest of which our contemporaries have seen the rise and glorious development in this diocese.'

Francis Fouquet, Archbishop of Narbonne, was by no means sorry to see the Montpellier Seminary closed, for he hoped that the staff of his own establishment would thereby be increased. The Seminary at Narbonne had been opened in the preceding month of September with three priests ; the Archbishop wanted five, of whom two were to assist him in his Missions and Visitations.[276] Saint Vincent was in no hurry to gratify his desires ; he may have been unable, or he may have been doubtful about the future for, as we have seen, it was no easy matter to come to an agreement with Francis Fouquet on the details of a foundation-contract. The Prelate, however, was urgent as may be seen from a letter to Saint Vincent, dated August 26, 1660. He is astonished that the Saint will not agree to the union of the Seminary and the little parish of Maiour which would help the seminarists by giving them practical experience, and he speaks of a project 'to acquire, as soon as possible, a very pretty house with a lovely garden on the edge of a lake, a short quarter of a league from the city, as a place of retreat and recreation for the seminarists and their professors.' He ends thus : 'In the name of God, Sir, let this be the last time I am forced to write to you on this subject, and you will set me free from the greatest source of worry and annoyance which I have at present in this diocese, and also one that gives me a perpetual headache ; if not, make up your mind to receive, every week, longer letters than this, for on this matter depends the ruin or stability of all my plans ; without which, I might just as well depart to Paris and remain there.'[277] Saint Vincent did not dare to vex the Archbishop ; he promised to let him have all the help which he hoped for,

[275] Bousquest, *op. cit.*, pp. 203–208.
[276] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. VIII, pp. 123, 124, 147.
[277] *Ibid.*, p. 398.

accepted the parish of Maiour on condition that his priests should not be bound to act as parish priests and, on his side, demanded some concessions : first, that the Superior should not be bound to submit an account of his temporal administration, and second, that the change of subjects should be left entirely in the hands of the Superior General.[278] He had only ten more days to live. Death interrupted the negotiations which were resumed by his successor, René Alméras, and the contract was signed on September 10, 1661.[279]

Narbonne closes the list of establishments opened during Saint Vincent's lifetime, but another list might be made of those which were offered him and which death or other causes prevented him from accepting.[280] 'A large number of prelates,' writes Abelly, 'turned to M. Vincent with requests for labourers from his Company. . . . But this wise founder, being unable to supply them all, either because he had not men prepared or for other reasons, let these proposals drop, as he did not wish to embrace any that were unseasonable or beyond the range of his ability.' James du Perron, Bishop of Angoulême, was one of these prelates. In a letter dated January, 1644, he asks Saint Vincent for a 'stable and permanent mission' in his diocese, adding, 'when I know you are in a condition to grant us this favour, I will do all in my power here to find means to bring about this establishment.'[281] And that is all we now know of that project. Further south, in the Pyrennean district, the Priests of Our Lady of Calvary were in charge of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Bétharram. In 1640, their founder himself, Hubert Charpentier, offered to replace the 'Calvarians' with Priests of the Mission ; several members of the Parlement of Navarre supported this request and finally, in 1659, the Bishop of Lescar urgently insited on their accepting the Sanctuary. There were two strong objections to the plan in Saint Vincent's eyes : those in charge of the pilgrimage would not have time to go on missions, and four out of

[278] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 450, Vol. XIII, pp. 181–182.
[279] Arch. Nat. S. 6,708.
[280] *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XLIV, p. 226.
[281] *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 430, 441, 443.

the seven Calvarian priests had refused to resign. These were, indeed, formidable but not insurmountable obstacles and Saint Vincent in his reply showed how they might be overcome.[282] This letter went astray and, at Lescar, all were surprised and thought that the project had been definitely abandoned.[283] In the following year, the Bishop, tired of waiting, wrote to Saint Vincent to express a wish to know what the Saint really meant to do ; Saint Vincent, in his reply, was profuse in apologies, and repeated the explanations contained in his preceding letter.[284] He had only one more month to live, and we are ignorant of what happened after his death ; we only know that the pilgrimage to Bétharram was never under the charge of the Priests of the Mission.

Mention may also be made of the Seminaries of Amiens, Noyon and Metz. Amiens, founded in 1662 by Bishop Francis Faure, would have begun some years earlier had not death prevented Abbé de Sery, of the house of Mailly, from realising his design. Henry de Baradat, Bishop of Noyon, had also approached Saint Vincent, but as the project was not fully ripe, the latter deferred it and the contract was signed, in 1662, by their respective successors, Francis de Clermont and René Alméras. The Seminary at Metz was the work of Queen Anne of Austria who thought of establishing it, in 1658, after a great mission had been given there by the priests of the Tuesday Conferences. Bossuet was interested in the project and there are several letters from the great orator to Saint Vincent on the subject, in one of which he mentions that his father is taking part in the search for a house, and in having the price lowered. The preparations did not terminate until 1661.[285]

Saint Vincent, at the end of his career, could have thanked God for the part played by his priests in the regeneration of the French Church in the twenty-three establishments which they occupied and more particularly in the fifteen seminaries which they directed. But they had by then

[282] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 443.
[283] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 515.
[284] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 358.
[285] Abelly, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, Ch. XLVI, pp. 225–226.

crossed the frontiers of France and were at work in Italy, Poland, Ireland, Scotland, Barbary and Madagascar. We shall now follow their footsteps in lands that experienced the results of their zealous labours and were even watered by their blood.

END OF VOL. I.

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