ROINE OF CHARITY

AND

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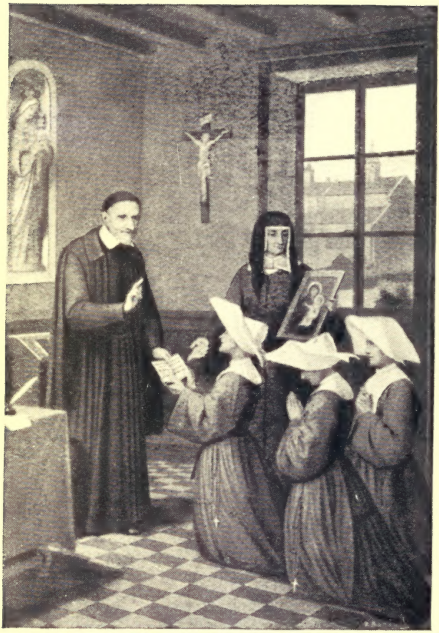


First Departure for the Foreign Missions

Keep your Rules, my dear Sisters,
and your Rules will keep you.
(*St. Vincent de Paul*)

Look upon the Blessed Virgin
as your only Mother.
(*Ven. L. de Marillac*)

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL and Venerable Louise de Marillac sent the Daughters of Charity to Varsovia at the request of the Queen of Poland, Marie-Louise de Gonzague, wife of King John Casimir.

This first departure for foreign missions took place in 1652; Sister Marguerite Moreau, Sister Madeleine Drugeon and Sister Françoise Douelle were the privileged three selected for this honour.

Most touching was the farewell addressed by the saintly Founder to the dear departing sisters.

"O what a grand vocation is yours, my dear daughters! To raise up saintly men and women for Jesus Christ, in this new kingdom!... This vocation of God is to honour His Son by going to accomplish in that country that which He Himself did. How few women are called to do the good spiritual and corporal works to which you are called to-day! I pray the divine Goodness to give you great blessings which shall spread not from the East to the West, but from time to eternity, and make you advance from virtue to virtue. Attach yourself to your Rules, as the snail is attached to its shell and dies if he leaves it."

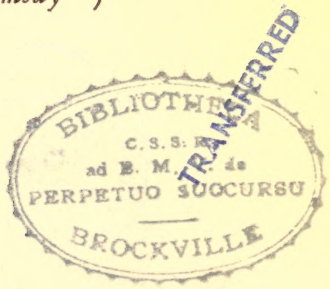
The Venerable Louise de Marillac handed over to her dear daughters a picture of the Blessed Virgin "SOLE MOTHER OF THEIR COMPANY," which is religiously preserved by the Sisters who have uninterruptedly succeeded to those first missionaries.

A Heroine *of* Charity

&

A Queen by Right Divine

By KATHLEEN O'MEARA
(*"Grace Ramsay"*)



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A Heroine of Charity

A HEROINE OF CHARITY

THE most disastrous epochs of the world have often been productive of its grandest characters, and the very excess of crime and suffering in a generation, appealing to these valiant souls, has stimulated them to efforts and sacrifices sometimes heroic and fertile enough to change, as by miracle, the whole face of the age. Never, perhaps, was this truth more forcibly manifested than in France during the early part of the seventeenth century, when the country, a prey alternately, sometimes simultaneously—as during the rebellion of the *Fronde*—to war, foreign and civil, famine and the plague, was continuously drained of its vital resources, and when even the spiritual life of the people was starved by the decay of ecclesiastical discipline, and their faith jeopardised by the irregular lives of the clergy. It was a time for both the Church and the faithful to send up incessantly that cry of a grand soul of our own day, "Send us a saint, O God! send us a saint!"

Many did, no doubt, utter the cry with pure hearts and persevering fervour; and it was answered with magnificent mercy in the coming of St. Vincent de Paul.

When "le bon Monsieur Vincent," as he was called by his countrymen for over sixty years, came to Paris after that adventure amidst the galley-slaves that forms the one chapter of divine romance in his lowly career of quiet miracles, he found the capital in a lamentable plight. The "good city" had, not long before, opened its gates to Henri IV.; and, although it was supposed to have then entered on a reign of repentance and prosperity, its condition was such as to be in many ways little short of barbarous, compared with our present standard of civilisation. Vincent was stricken to the heart by the spectacle of spiritual, moral, and physical misery which the brilliant capital presented to his compassionate eyes. Pauperism always has been, and always will be so long as the world lasts, no doubt; but if it constitutes in our own days the sin and the shame of our great rich cities, it is at any rate the object of wise and humane and effective legislation; the poor are looked upon as a suffering class, to be helped and healed, and the rich feel and practically acknowledge their responsibility towards them. But when Vincent de Paul came to

Paris he found the poor regarded and treated as enemies to be warred against, and noxious vermin to be exterminated. The Gospel was, no doubt, " preached to them " ; but here the message ended ; no care was taken to give light to the blind, or limbs to the maimed, or to raise to life those who were buried in a living death of vice and physical degradation. Lazarus sat on the steps of Dives, and only the dogs came to lick his sores.

The kings of France, following the example of the Sovereign Pontiffs, had laboured through succeeding reigns, more or less earnestly, towards suppressing, at least partially, mendicity in the kingdom ; but so far their efforts had been vain. The evil grew till, in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it was strong enough to elude the combined legislation of the Church and the State, and had become a national peril as well as a social pestilence. The beggars formed a state within the State, organised themselves into corporations, and, placing themselves outside the law, lived in open defiance of it. Brittany was one of their strongholds ; they held their States-General there in a place called Pré-aux-gueux (the Beggars' Meadow) ; and in the fourteenth century they elected from amongst themselves a king, who was recognised by the beggars all over France, and whose

ninety-second successor represented this curious hereditary royalty so far on as the seventeenth century. In the reign of Louis XIV. the beggars in Paris alone numbered forty thousand, exactly one-fifth of the population. They were a formidable danger to the metropolis, baffling all efforts of the police to keep them in order, and constituting a permanent threat to the lives and property of the citizens. It was chiefly after dark that they plied their trade, sallying forth from their dens armed with murderous weapons, and with a total disregard of human life. Their business was also diligently carried on in the daytime, but rather by practices of clever and systematic fraud than by means of the ruffian violence which accompanied it by night. Every evening, when their day's work was done, the beggars congregated in centres which they called *Cours des Miracles*, in blasphemous parody of the words of the Gospel, " Behold, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk."

In these courts, of which there were eleven in Paris, transformations were indeed effected which might well pass for miracles in the eyes of the uninitiated. Cripples who had gone limping all day on one leg, maimed and deformed children, hunch-backs, invalids who had excited loathing and pity by exhibiting the most hideous ulcers and wounds, etc.—all on entering the " Court

of Miracles" underwent a sudden and complete metamorphosis ; humps dropped off, absent legs and arms appeared whole and active, ulcers vanished, and the sick and maimed became instantaneously sound and straight.

The Abbé Maynard, in his exhaustive biography of St. Vincent de Paul, describes one of these dens of lawlessness and vice. "It consisted in a large square, and a crooked blind alley, foul and dense, a sort of paupers' metropolis in the centre of the capital of Christian civilisation, or rather a sewer and sink of Paris and of France. In order to reach it you had to wade through a labyrinth of filthy, dark, cut-throat lanes, and then plunge into a long and winding descent. This brought you to ten mud-houses sunk deep in the ground, and in which some twenty families wallowed, huddled up with innumerable children, who were either illegitimate or stolen. The whole made a population of five hundred families, being about three thousand inhabitants for this one court of miracles. Neither police nor bailiffs could venture within the precincts, for they were sure to be met with stones and blows. It was the abode of brigandage and corruption, flourishing with entire impunity, a reservoir of all the vices, the school of every crime. . . . The beggars acknowledged no faith and no law, and yet they

believed in an Almighty Power. At the end of the court, in a large niche, was a picture of God the Father (stolen, no doubt, from some church), before which they said some prayers every day! This worship, however, in no way influenced their conduct. . . . They were literally a people without a God or a king, without laws human or divine, without creed or morals; knowing neither marriage, nor baptism, nor sacraments; bound to the Church, the State, and society solely by incessant warfare."

Such was the condition of the beggars in Paris when Vincent de Paul appeared, a heaven-sent messenger raised up to their relief and that of the great city in whose heart they dwelt, festering like a gangrened wound. Vincent was the son of a peasant, and had learned by that best of teachers, personal experience, how to feel for the sufferings of the poor, while the charity which had driven him to change places with a convict chained to the galleys had brought him into closest contact with the most wretched and degraded amongst criminals. He knew their vices and their temptations as few honest men ever come to know them, and he pitied them with the compassion of a heart that was Christ-like in its love for God and man. He had inaugurated a glorious reform in the French clergy by the foundation of the Mission. In-

spired by his spirit, its members were changing the face of France and carrying the Gospel all over the world. But other saints had worked wonders in the same line before him; St. Dominic and St. Ignatius had baptized and converted men in hundreds of thousands; they had made conquests to the faith of their Divine Master which later saints might emulate, but which it seemed almost impossible they could surpass. The great and unique vocation of Vincent de Paul was to be of an altogether different kind; he was to be in a special manner the apostle of the poor; he was to pity their physical sufferings, to labour for the alleviation of their human lot, as no saint had ever yet done. If one might venture to say so bold a thing, no saint ever so closely imitated the human side of Our Lord's character as St. Vincent; no saint ever so resembled Him in being pitiful over the bodily afflictions of men, their diseases, their hunger, their sufferings from want of the necessaries of life, as Vincent de Paul did. And again, no saint ever so generously imitated Our Lord in publicly associating women with his apostolate. His mission was essentially a mission of charity, of mercy to the suffering and the afflicted, and he had not gone very far in its fulfilment when he saw that the co-operation of woman was absolutely necessary for its perfect

development, and he called her to his aid, and gave her full share in the glory of the sowing and the reaping. He had proved himself a father to all the sinners and sufferers ; but with that sweet instinct of human pity for human pain that sets him apart amongst the saints, he soon discovered that these poor forsaken ones needed something more than a father : they wanted a mother ; they wanted the tender touch of a mother's hand, the incomparable compassion of a mother's heart. He looked around him, and his eyes fell upon Louise de Marillac.

The De Marillacs were a fine old family, that for many generations had counted distinguished members in the military and civil service of the State. M. de Marillac, the father of Louise, had two brothers—Louis, Marshal of France, and Michel, Keeper of the Seals—both high in popular esteem and in royal favour, and both destined to excite thereby the resentment of Richelieu, and to fall victims to his implacable jealousy. M. de Marillac's wife, Marguerite de Camus, belonged to the *noblesse de robe*, as the dignitaries of the bar were styled. She died when Louise was still a child, and M. de Marillac, fearing the effect of his own over-indulgent fondness and the atmosphere of political excitement which filled his home, sent his little daughter to the care of the nuns in the ancient royal Abbey of

Poissy. This monastery was supposed to be a seat of learning more liberal and advanced than was usual for feminine education in those days. Ancient and modern literature was there cultivated, and its pupils were often good Latin scholars, as well as proficients in the arts of music and painting. M. de Marillac would seem to have thought the education too fine for his daughter, or perhaps, rather, the tone of the monastery too worldly, so at the end of a couple of years he removed her, and placed her with a lady capable of carrying on her studies in a more serious spirit, without, however, changing their programme ; for Louise continued to cultivate music, and more especially painting, for which she had no mean talent. Her father himself instructed her in philosophy and the abstract sciences, in which she took great pleasure.

These masculine studies strengthened her mind against the frivolous pursuits so attractive to young girls of her position, and, instead of drawing away her thoughts from spiritual interests, seem rather to have nourished her piety and turned her aspirations towards the religious life. The seventeenth century was an age of strong contrasts. Side by side with savage lawlessness there arose examples of virtue and heroic faith grand and beautiful enough to redeem all the surrounding ugliness and corruption. The

daughters of St. Teresa, after kindling the fires of their seraphic fervour all over Spain, had carried their lighted torch across the Pyrenees, and set its flame burning in the midst of dissolute Paris. Michel de Marillac, the Keeper of the Seals, had been chiefly instrumental in bringing the Carmelites into France, where they had soon become objects of veneration and sympathy. It would, therefore, have seemed natural enough if Louise had felt attracted towards Carmel; but she did not: her preference was for the Capuchin Sisters, or the Daughters of the Passion as they were called. The Rule of the Capuchins was nearly as severe as that of the Carmelites, and Louise was satisfied that her vocation was for their order. She prayed and pondered over it, and when her mind was quite made up she spoke to her confessor, Père Honoré. He unhesitatingly desired her to put the idea from her, assured her that she had no vocation for the cloister, and that God had quite other designs on her. Père Honoré was a man held in high esteem for sanctity, favoured with the gift of miracles and prophecy; Louise, with the simplicity and obedience of a child, bowed to his authority as to the voice of God Himself. She continued her quiet life of study and piety, devoting herself to her father for a few years more. She was not much over twenty when M. de Marillac died.

With his last breath he declared she had been the great blessing of his life ; " given to me," he said, " for the repose and consolation of my mind under its many sorrows."

Louise was now quite alone. Her family, according to the custom of their nation, sought at once a suitable marriage for her, and, in dutiful compliance with their wishes, she accepted the protector of their choice, and allowed herself to be united to M. Antoine Legras, a gentleman some few years older than herself. Antoine Legras was not noble, but he was of a good family—good enough to qualify him for the high and responsible position of Secretary to the Queen, Marie de Medicis. M. Legras was rich in worldly goods, and still more so in virtue, being the worthy representative of a family noted in Auvergne (their native country, and that of the De Marillacs) for their extraordinary love of the poor—a virtue comparatively unknown in those days, and which his young wife was destined to display with an almost unprecedented generosity.

Mademoiselle Legras, as she was henceforth named—her husband's birth not entitling her to take the title of Madame, which was reserved to the wives of noblemen—bid fair to be a very happy wife. Her husband was devoted to her, and worthy of her ; she was surrounded by kind

and pleasant friends ; her health was good, her position excellent, and in due course a child came to cement the union, which henceforth included every element of domestic happiness. This full cup of earthly bliss did not intoxicate the young wife, or lessen the place that God and His suffering poor had hitherto filled in her heart. Even in the first days of her happy motherhood her thoughts were divided between her child and the poor, to whom she was one day to become such a universal mother. Visiting the poor was not in those days, as it is now, one of the obvious duties of a Catholic lady's life. The manners of the times, and still more the horrible conditions of existence of the poor, put barriers between the classes which it required extraordinary courage, both moral and physical, to break through. The glance we have taken at the haunts of the beggars gives a faint idea of the difficulty there must have been in penetrating there even on an errand of kindness, and the abodes of the honest poor were not much more accessible. Mlle. Legras determined to brave all obstacles, to run all the risks, and defy human respect, in order to bring some relief to these unfortunate fellow-creatures. Every day she went forth alone and penetrated into the slums where they lived, sought out those who were sick, and ministered to them. In those days, when

the poor fell ill they lay there uncared for till they got well, or died like animals that were of no account to any one. Louise discovered these forsaken outcasts, brought them medicines, dressed their ulcers, shook up the filthy straw that was their only bed, helped them to die when the end came, and then washed their poor bodies, that were often beginning to putrefy before death delivered them from the pangs of disease.

Antoine Legras must have been a very brave man to let his young wife set such an extraordinary precedent to the society of her day, and we can readily understand the amazement, the mild scandal, that it must have caused to her fastidious friends. The total and systematic neglect of the poor, in an age when faith was so much livelier and more heroic than in our own, is hard to understand ; but charity, though it shone forth with miraculous power in individuals, was not organised as it is now, and our modern appliances for making material life so much less cruel to the destitute were unknown in a century whose civilisation looks to us like barbarism. Louise's devotion and activity in the service of the poor grew in proportion with her experience of their need and sufferings. Nothing hindered her attendance on them. She visited them in all weathers ; when the snow was deep on the ground, and the wind and rain driving against

her, she was to be seen plodding daily through the dark lanes and courts so unfrequented by any decent-looking person as to be considered unsafe. There was a hill at that time at the back of her house (in the parish of Saint Sauveur) that she used to climb up every day to nurse an old woman who lived at the top of it. She would break away from the society of her husband, and escape from pleasant gatherings of her friends, to go to this poor soul at the hour she was expected, carrying a heavy basket with food which she would herself prepare for the invalid, after washing and combing her and cleaning out her room.

Not long after Mlle. Legras' marriage, Saint Francis de Sales was passing through Paris, and attracted by her reputation for charity, he went to visit her. She was ill at the time, so the visit of the holy Bishop was no doubt doubly welcome to Louise, who all her life spoke with fervent gratitude of his kindness to her, and the help he had been to her spiritual life. St. Francis gave her for director the venerable Bishop of Belley, Monseigneur Camus, whom he had ordained and consecrated, and of whom he used to speak as "my son, my apprentice, and my one *chef-d'œuvre*." Monseigneur Camus was a man of great sanctity, and his love for the poor made at once a strong bond between him and his new

penitent. He stimulated her ardour in their service, while his wisdom and firmness kept it within the bounds of prudence and discretion. His direction was very simple ; the only books he prescribed for her daily use were the *Imitation of Christ* and the *Spiritual Combat* that little book that sufficed to St. Francis de Sales as his spiritual reading for twenty years. In the matter of bodily mortification Mgr. Camus was generous, allowing her, in addition to the use of the hair-shirt that she had been in the habit of wearing under her silk gowns, the frequent use of a discipline, which had been presented to her by St. Francis as a means " of waking up her devotion."

This fervour in the service of the poor and the pursuit of personal holiness did not interfere with Mlle. Legras' home-life and her duties as a mother and the mistress of a house. She seems to have seldom made her appearance at court, although her husband's position near the Queen compelled his constant presence there ; but she was far from leading the life of a recluse, and seems to have taken her place in society graciously and ungrudgingly. Louise had been about seven years married when her husband's health began to give her serious anxiety. Her love for him had grown to be part of her life, and the mere thought of losing him filled her soul

with terror. It may have been a presentiment that this sacrifice was in store for her, as well as a generous impulse to give herself more unreservedly to God, that moved her one morning (on the Feast of St. Monica), after Holy Communion, to make a vow that if her husband died she would consecrate herself absolutely and irrevocably to the service of the poor in the state of widowhood, as described by St. Paul. This vow she renewed every year on the same feast until the hour came for its fulfilment.

Meantime Louise was not spared those interior trials which are the lot of souls aspiring to perfection. She suffered from scruples till they reached the point sometimes of destroying her peace of mind and darkening her understanding. Her impulse in these crises was to pacify her conscience by making a general confession, a remedy which her confessor was firm in refusing, urging her to turn away from the thought of her sins and the punishment they deserved, and to think more of the goodness and love of Our Lord.

" There you are again with your general confession ! " writes Monseigneur Camus in answer to her prayer to be let make one for the Jubilee. " Ah no ; the Jubilee has not come for that, but to make us rejoice in our Saviour and our God, and cry out to Him from our hearts, *Jubilemus Deo salutaris nostro !* " He rebukes her again

for thinking so much of herself and her sins, a habit which had the effect of disquieting her naturally sensitive conscience. "Turn your eyes away from yourself and fix them upon Jesus Christ," repeats the confessor; "in this consists your perfection, and in this I will say with the Apostle that I speak to you according to the spirit of God."

During this trial, which lasted several years, there were intervals of deep peace, when Louise felt like one resting after the battle, and drawing breath for fresh combats. But the trial, severe as it was, was only the prelude to one far more painful that she had yet to undergo. She was suddenly assailed by a very tempest of temptation concerning the validity of her present vocation and state of life. Had she not been deaf to the voice of God, and gone deliberately against His will in renouncing her first vocation to the religious life? And if so, was she not living in sin, and was not her marriage a sacrilege in the eyes of God? What remained to her, in that case, but to leave her husband and her child, and go and embrace the religious life to which she had been called, and which she had renounced from cowardice in the first instance? When Louise found her soul suddenly submerged in this torrent of temptation, her first movement was to fly to Monseigneur Camus for counsel and sup-

port ; but here the enemy met her with a fresh attack. Was not Mgr. Camus too indulgent ? was he not likely to take a more merciful view of her miserable case than was consistent with the stern rights of God's inexorable justice ? Might he not be influenced by the kindness of his heart, by pity for her, and by regard for the happiness of her husband and her child ? Ought she not rather to carry her soul to some strange priest, who would judge her with a severity unmitigated by any of these considerations ? This doubt, at first a mere whisper, rose rapidly in strength and terror, until the darkness closed round her, and she saw no ray of light, no door of escape in any direction. Her life became a torment, her very sleep was disturbed by visions in which she beheld her soul lost, and God angry and threatening. Little by little, the darkness, which had so far only clouded the external conditions of her spiritual life, as it were, invaded her inmost soul, and she began to feel the foundations of her faith giving way ; the immortality of the soul, the divinity of Christ, at last the very existence of God—all seemed to be vanishing in a night of blackness and despair. For ten days this anguish lasted without one moment's rest. Louise spoke to no one, but clung blindly to God by prayer, crying out to Him incessantly like one shipwrecked on raging waters. At the end

of the tenth day God took pity on her. It was on Pentecost morning. She relates the incident herself in a letter that is preserved in the archives of the Sisters of Charity : " During Mass, in the Church of S. Nicholas-des-Champs, my mind was instantaneously cleared of all its doubts. I was made to see that I might remain with my husband ; that a day would come when I should be in a state to take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and that I should be with persons who would do the same thing. I understood that it was to be in a place where I was to help my neighbour ; but I could not make out how this was to be, because I saw that there was coming and going. I was also assured that I might be at rest concerning my director, that God would give me one whom He showed me then ; I seemed to see him, but to feel some repugnance towards accepting him ; I consented, however, and it seemed to me that the change was not to take place yet awhile. My last trial was removed by the assurance I felt within me that God was telling me these things, and that consequently, since God was, I should not doubt of the rest."

This terrible interior trial was followed by a period of great peace and renewed fervour, and was no doubt sent to prepare Louise for the sorrow that was approaching. M. Legras, whose

health had been declining for some time, though he was still a young man, fell suddenly ill. His wife nursed him herself with untiring devotion and a tenderness which made him realise as never before that the strongest human love, so far from being chilled or lessened by being shared with God, is, on the contrary, strengthened and intensified. Louise tended him "like a mother," he said himself, and he died supported by her faith and consoled by her tenderness and piety. She was quite alone with him when he breathed his last; it was in the dead of the night, and there was no one near her; she closed his eyes, and gave way unrestrainedly to her grief, and passed the remainder of the night weeping and praying by his dead body. During this solemn watch she renewed once again her vow of consecration to God in the holy state of widowhood.

The time had indeed now come for her to put it in practice, and to look for the fulfilment of that interior prophecy concerning her future vocation which had soothed her soul under the temptation we have related. The new director who had been promised to her, and whom she saw herself "accepting with a certain repugnance," was no other than the "good M. Vincent." The repugnance had been at the first moment mutual. When Monseigneur Camus, compelled to absent himself from Paris,

requested M. Vincent to take Mlle. Legras as his penitent, he refused. The pitiful-hearted priest, whose charity to the poor was destined to shine like a new sun in the firmament of the saints, had the greatest reluctance to take a moment of his time from their service to give it to the rich. It required a certain amount of persuasion, therefore, to induce him to accept Louise as his spiritual daughter; and he only yielded at last to the assurance that had St. Francis de Sales, whom he had deeply loved and venerated, been still alive, he would have added his entreaties to those of Monseigneur Camus. Mlle. Legras soon felt that Vincent was truly the servant of God promised to her in her vision—was it?—and in order more fully to profit by his direction she resolved to change her residence from the then fashionable Marais to the Rue St. Victor, which was in Vincent's parish.

Her life now entered on an altered course. She determined to renounce the few external signs and habits which had hitherto bound her to the world, and to become in spirit and in deed the perfect widow described by the Apostle. Her duty to her child took the first place in her heart and conscience, and she devoted herself unsparingly to its fulfilment; but this still left a large margin of time and energy to be disposed of, and Louise filled it up with prayer and the

service of the poor. She still cherished the desire of embracing the religious life, but her child offered an insurmountable barrier to its realisation for the present, and must do so for many years to come ; and, moreover, she had been told by that mysterious voice, which on Pentecost morning had set her soul at rest, that the religious vocation in store for her was one " where there was coming and going,"—a circumstance absolutely incompatible with the conventual life as it was then understood, and excluding, in fact, the idea of the cloister altogether. She became the intimate friend of the saintly Prioress of Carmel, Mère Madeleine de St. Joseph, and of that other holy religious, Mère Catherine de Beaumont, Superior of the Visitation ; but while assisting her with their pious counsels, neither of these friends endeavoured to draw her into her community ; they discerned, as did St. Vincent de Paul, that God was leading her soul to some high vocation, known as yet but to Himself.

Louise found another help and most valuable spiritual guide in her uncle, Michel de Marillac, who, though bearing the cares of State, and living amid the splendours of a dissolute court, kept his heart unspotted from the world, and his piety as pure and fervent as the piety of a child. This piety was a birthright amongst the De

Marillacs. While the Keeper of the Seals was edifying the world by his holiness amidst its most perilous allurements, two of his sisters-in-law, young widows, and three of his nieces, were practising heroic virtue under the habit of St. Teresa. M. de Marillac's letters to Louise are full of the most mature spiritual wisdom, and read rather like the letters of an austere religious than of a busy statesman.

St. Vincent soon discovered that he had no ordinary soul to direct in the young widow who rejoiced his heart by her practical unworldliness and her generous love of the poor. He felt with the instinct of a soul taught of God that she was destined to do something more than work at her own perfection, and that while arriving at great personal holiness she was meant to do some great work for others. He could not as yet discern what that work was to be, but he followed God's lead simply, and directed her without knowing it to the vocation which was to be the dawn of a new era in the history of the Church.

Mlle. Legras had sacrificed a good deal in leaving her spacious and handsomely appointed house in the Marais for the small and uncomfortable one that she now occupied. She had given up the near neighbourhood of her own and her husband's family, and the pleasant companionship of old friends, who all resided in the Marais.

In coming to the Rue St. Victor she had, therefore, condemned herself to a sort of exile ; for in those days of bad roads and difficult means of communication, those who lived in the suburbs were practically as far off from those who inhabited the fashionable quarter as if they had removed from the city altogether. The Rue St. Victor had, however, many compensations for Louise. Besides enjoying the vicinity of St. Vincent, she was surrounded by a great number of religious communities, and amongst them the Seminary of St. Nicholas, which he held in high esteem, and where, by his advice, Louise sent her little Michel as a day-scholar. The partial separation evidently cost the mother many struggles before the stronger element of her love triumphed over the weaker ; for we see "le bon M. Vincent" lecturing her in his gentle way on her too great indulgence and "sensiblerie" for the child, who seems at a very early date to have become rather too much for his fond mother to manage without assistance. Few traits in the intercourse of the Saint with his penitent are more touchingly beautiful than his interest in Michel, and the way he shared her anxiety and affection for him.

The absence of this claim upon her time during the day, left Louise now free to content more abundantly the pious desires of her soul. She

drew up a kind of deed of consecration, which is still preserved amongst the treasures of the Sisters of Charity, and made doubly precious by the corrections written in the hand of St. Vincent. After a fervent act of contrition, Louise goes on to renew her baptismal engagements, and her vow to devote herself wholly and irrevocably in the service of God, "and to the practice of humility, obedience, poverty, suffering, and charity, in order to honour these virtues in Jesus Christ," protesting her resolve "never again to offend God with any part of my being, and to abandon myself entirely to the designs of His Providence for the accomplishment of His holy will in me, to which I sacrifice and dedicate myself for ever, choosing it for my supreme consolation." Not satisfied with writing out this long, detailed Act of Consecration, Louise made an abridgment of it, which she placed so that it continually met her eye and reminded her of the solemn engagement she had contracted. St. Vincent was delighted with both, and cordially congratulated her on the fervent dispositions with which God favoured her. "I will keep in my heart," he writes to her, "the generous resolution you have made of honouring the adorable Hidden Life of Our Lord, as He has given you the desire to do from your youth up. . . . Oh! how far removed are such

thoughts from flesh and blood! But this is what is needed by a dear child of God."

He gave practical shape to these generous resolutions by drawing up for his penitent a rule of life, which constituted in reality a sort of novitiate, in which he trained her to the religious vocation that she was destined one day to inaugurate and render so divinely fruitful to her own and later times. This rule of life fixed her hour of rising at half-past five, then came an hour's meditation on the Gospel or Epistle of the day, to be followed by Prime and Terce "keeping steadily in her mind the affections of the meditation." After laying this spiritual foundation for the day, she was to turn her attention to household cares, "and while dressing attend to such orders as are necessary to be given." Mass then follows—at half-past eight in summer, and nine in winter. After Mass, work until dinner at eleven, when there comes a quarter of an hour's meditation, after which, adds the rule, "you will return gaily to work either for the Church, the poor, or the *ménage*, continuing thus employed until four o'clock, unless interrupted by some indispensable visit to be received or paid." If neither charity nor propriety make any such demand upon her, she is to go to church and recite the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin, and collect her thoughts in half

an hour's meditation ; and at five o'clock make her examination of conscience and say the Rosary. After this she will return home, and divide the evening until bedtime between work and spiritual reading. Throughout the day, thus largely filled with spiritual and devout exercises, she is to practise constant ejaculatory prayer, " making four times in every hour an act of union with the Passion of Our Blessed Saviour," and taking Our Lady for her mother and model, and mistress in all things.

Such a rule of life left little room for self or the world ; but St. Vincent, not satisfied with the barriers of assiduous prayer and work, further supplements these by prescribing habitual mortification and penance : Louise is to take the discipline three times a week (the discipline given to her by St. Francis de Sales to " help her to stir up her devotion ") ; and to wear the iron girdle on Communion days all the morning, and the whole day on Friday ; she is to fast not only in Lent and Advent, but every Friday and on all the vigils of Feasts of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the Apostles, and to restrain herself to two meals all the year round.

It may excite surprise not to see in this rigorously supernatural rule of life any provision made for the service of the poor, the work so specially dear to both the confessor and the penitent. But

this omission is a further proof of the Saint's wisdom and respect for the primary natural duties imposed by God. There can be no doubt but that visits to the sick poor near her own dwelling, and work for them at home, found a large place in Louise's daily life ; but she was a mother, and, although her boy was absent for many hours of the day, and in safe keeping, St. Vincent would not encroach upon his pre-eminent place in the mother's life by committing her to obligations which might at any moment interfere with Michel's interests, or have to be broken through at his call. Even his " dear poor " should not come between the devout Christian woman and that primordial sacred duty which was of God's own ordinance. The guide who was leading her to perfection was careful above all " not to go faster than Providence," as he used to say himself, and, while training her soul to heroic detachment in other ways, he helps her with his wisdom in training the wayward little fellow, who gave her constant anxiety. She loved him with all her heart, and it does not detract from our sympathy and reverence if we harbour a suspicion that she spoiled him a little, and was altogether a trifle weak with him ; and if, moreover, the " good M. Vincent " strikes us as having been very paternally condescending to this weakness in the widowed mother, it only

makes us love him the more, and helps us to realise what the sublime austerity of their lives sometimes tempts us to forget, that the saints are, after all, of the same flesh and blood as ourselves.

While patiently carrying out the self-denying rule prescribed for her, Louise continued to sigh for a life of more direct and active service: she longed to go and devote her energies wholly to the suffering poor, to give up everything to serve them. She complained to St. Vincent of the good-for-nothing life she was leading, "where the days drag on as if they were months." He urges her to be patient, to wait for the holy will of God. "Honour specially," he tells her, "the mystery of Nazareth, the condition of Our Lord unknown as the Son of God. This must be your centre; this is what He demands of you for the present. If the Divine Majesty does not make known to you, in a way that you cannot mistake, His will that you should do something more than you are doing, don't think about it, and don't let your mind dwell upon it." Again and again he repeats the same counsels: "Pray, pray; prayer is the source of good counsel: communicate often; the Eucharist is the oracle of the inspirations of charity."

She had been about four years under his direction before he began to associate her with

his own works of charity. Though we have no distinct assurance of the fact, it seems evident that Michel was by this time placed altogether with the Fathers of the Seminary, and it transpires in the correspondence of his mother with St. Vincent that he was giving signs of a vocation to the priesthood. So great was Louise's joy at this prospect that St. Vincent was obliged to moderate it, reminding her that it might be but a passing phase of fervour, and that if so she should not repine, but give God thanks for the grace of piety which would enable the boy to be a good Christian in the world, and eventually secure his salvation.

St. Vincent had associated her with many charitable works that she was able to help in without leaving her own house. This house had thus gradually become a kind of centre of charity: alms were there received and distributed under his direction; poor girls from the provinces were sent there for help and protection, children to be instructed in the catechism, and others to be prepared for their First Communion. But this usefulness, which involved comparatively small self-sacrifice, was not yet enough to satisfy the generous longings of Louise. She continues her importunities with St. Vincent who finally begins to yield. While absent on one of his missions, in the year 1629, he writes

to her, " Why not, Mademoiselle, since God gives you still this holy desire ? Go to Communion to-morrow, and prepare for the salutary review of the past you propose to make. I cannot express to you how my soul longs to see yours, and learn how it has fared with it. But I am satisfied to mortify my heart in this for the love of God, with which I alone desire to see you occupied. . . . I pray Him in His infinite love to make you always a true tree of life, producing good fruits of charity."

St. Vincent evidently thought the fruit was now ripe, and that the time had come for gathering it. Some twelve years before he had founded a sort of confraternity of charity peculiarly characteristic of the age in its origin and results. This is how it began. He went, one hot summer's day, to preach in the parish church of Chatillon ; as he was coming from the sacristy to the pulpit he was waylaid by a charitable lady (named Mme. de Chassaigne, as Abelly, the Saint's first historian, tells us), who entreated him to make an appeal to the congregation in behalf of a poor family, lying sick and destitute at a miserable farm about half an hour's walk from the town. St. Vincent was touched with compassion and he spoke with such an eloquence of charity that all who heard him were moved to pity, and immediately after Vespers a great concourse of

people trooped off to the farmhouse, carrying with them provisions of all sorts. St. Vincent, following soon after on the same errand, met them coming back, many sitting down under the trees to rest, for the heat was sultry. It occurred to him, as he looked around and beheld this prompt response to the call of charity, that a great work might be done with all this generous goodwill, if it could but be judiciously employed ; whereas, unwisely lavished, it was calculated, as in the present instance, to do more harm than good : these poor people would have much more than they wanted for a few days, after which they would fall back into their former misery. This thought pursued him for the rest of the day, and on the following morning he called some of the devout ladies of the parish together (amongst them Mme. de Chassaigne), and invited them to form an association for visiting the sick poor in outlying districts beyond the reach of notice or help from the parish. The ladies were some married, some single, but all were to obtain the consent of their husbands or families before committing themselves to the work. They obtained the needful authorisation without difficulty, and St. Vincent drew up a few rules for their guidance. They were to be called *Dames de Charité ;* they were to look upon the sick poor as children confided to them by Our

Lord, and they were to attend upon them regularly every day; going themselves to the butcher's for the meat, and the baker's for the bread, to procure all things necessary for their meals; and they were to prepare these meals at their own houses, and take them twice a day to the poor—dinner at nine, and supper at five—themselves administering the food to the patients if necessary, and saying a prayer every night for their temporal and spiritual comfort. It was all as simple and spontaneous as possible.

St. Vincent named from amongst the devoted ladies a president and manager, who were to be called *officières*, and whose duty it would be to superintend the working of the association, and to recruit new members to it. Having dropped his tiny seed on the good soil, he went home; and the seed sprang up and bore fruit so rapidly that before many months in every parish around Paris there was a "Charity," as the little congregations were separately styled. He said himself, "It has spread like an epidemic." At the end of twelve years there were few towns or villages in France without a Charity, and it became necessary to organise some more special and definite form of supervision over them than it was possible for him to exercise personally. It was essential that some person, on whose zeal, gentleness, and wisdom he could implicitly rely,

should be empowered to visit the numerous and widely scattered associations, control their working, take cognisance of the lives and characters of the members, and report accurately to him the conditions and results of the work.

St. Vincent had long decided in his own mind that Mlle. Legras was the person who united the qualities of heart and head requisite for the responsible and arduous office of superintendent. When he proposed that she should go on a journey of inspection, she accepted the offer with joy, and set forth on her mission in the spirit of one who had received a command direct from Our Lord. Indeed, she felt that the command was an answer to her prayers, and that God had at last condescended to engage her service wholly in the interests of the poor. Louise had experienced enough already to know what that service meant. She had none of the illusions of untried enthusiasm, eager for sacrifice without realising what it is going to cost. She knew that this visitation of the Charities would involve remaining at a distance for months from her child (whose vocation had melted like a fair morning mist, and who was giving a good deal of trouble to the Fathers who had charge of him), and that, in the next place, it would expose her to great personal fatigue of every description. But the prospect of suffering in the service of

the poor only stimulated her ardour the more. St. Vincent gave her a solemn and pathetic benediction before she departed. "Go," he said, "in the name of Our Lord! May His divine goodness accompany you; may it be your consolation on the road, your shade in the heat of the sun, your shelter in the cold and the rain, your soft couch in weariness, your strength in toil, and may it finally bring you back to us in perfect health, and full of good works!"

He gave her Holy Communion with his own hand, having previously told her to receive It in honour of the charity of Christ, and "the journeys He took in the interest of charity, the contradictions, the fatigues, and the labours He underwent for it, and to obtain His blessing and the grace to do all things in His spirit, and to bear all sufferings as He bore His."

Thus fortified, Louise set out, accompanied by some devout women, who were themselves members of the association. All the expenses of the road were defrayed by her, whose resources seemed at times miraculously multiplied. She would gladly have lightened the fatigue of the journey to her companions, but in the interest of their common mission she was obliged to let them share the hardships she chose to undergo herself. In order the more easily to gain access to the lives of the poor and to win

their confidence, Loiuse adopted, as far as possible, their habits and manner of living. She travelled in the humblest and most inconvenient way, sometimes riding on a mule, sometimes in a coach, sometimes jolting over the broken roads in a farmer's cart, shaken till her bones ached, often walking long distances, and halting dead beat at the end of her journey at some miserable farmhouse or wayside inn, where there was neither comfort nor cleanliness.

Her plan was, on arriving at a village, to go first to the church, and then to the curé, and ask his blessing and approval on the work she had come to do. She then convened a meeting of the members of the Charity, made acquaintance with them, inquired into the state of the work, the needs and condition of the poor, etc. When these business details had been gone through, she would address the members in words of such burning zeal that those who had heard St. Vincent used to say that he had passed on his gift of unction to Mlle. Legras. Her fervent words had a power in them that at once unlocked the hearts of those who listened, and enlisted their utmost sympathies in the work she was engaged upon. After this little meeting Louise would ask for the names and dwellings of the poor who were looked after by the Charity, and would set out herself to visit them all, dressing

the wounds of those that were in need of it, consoling and cheering all. Then she went to the hospital and the school, which in many places had grown out of this humble work of visitation of the sick, and never left the village until she had made herself thoroughly acquainted with its wants, and the manner in which they were dealt with by the Charity. She increased the number of members in many places, and founded Charities in others where they had not previously existed. She held catechism classes that were especially fruitful, gathering crowds of old and young to hear her lucid and glowing explanations of Christian doctrine.

This first visitation was successful beyond St. Vincent's expectations; and when Louise returned to Paris it was with the blessed consciousness that her labours had been of use, and that her service was henceforth accepted unreservedly, and that she had proved physically equal to it. Her next *tournée*, in the following spring, was to the Charities in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris. The journey, for being less remote, did not involve less fatigue, and Louise, emboldened by the result of her first campaign, was even more unsparing to herself this time. She travelled without the smallest regard to her own comfort, slept where she could, at any wretched hovel on the roadside; ate

anything that came to hand; led, in fact, the life of the poorest among the poor that she went to serve. So marvellous was the energy of soul and body that she displayed during this visitation, that St. Vincent hearing of it, exclaims in a letter, "I praise God who has given you the health of sixty people in labouring for the salvation of others!"

But even the health of sixty people could not long hold out against the unmerciful manner in which Louise abused it. She broke down on the road, and was so seriously ill as to cause alarm to her friends. She reassures St. Vincent, however, and he answers characteristically, "Is not your heart comforted at having been found worthy to suffer in serving God? You certainly owe Him special thanks for this." But when the illness is past, and she is about to resume her work, he adds, with his wonted wisdom. "Now, have a care to preserve your health for the sake of Our Lord and His poor suffering members. Take care not to overdo it. It is a trick of the devil's to entrap good souls by inciting them to do too much, so that they may not be able to do anything. The Spirit of God, on the contrary, gently incites them to do the good they are equal to, in order that they may persevere in it a long time."

The visitation to Beauvais was memorable

amongst many. Abelly, the first historian of St. Vincent, relates that the Bishop was so delighted with the spirit and results of the Confraternity that he expressed a wish to have a branch of it in every parish of his diocese Louise was consequently received in every town and village of the diocese with extraordinary marks of respect and love. At the classes of religious instruction that she held for women, crowds went to hear her, like those that gather round some preacher, and wonders were told of the effect of her fervent, unstudied eloquence. When she was leaving the town of Beauvais, a great crowd accompanied her some way on the road; at a certain point the coach stood, in order that she might bid them farewell; when it moved on, the wheel went over the body of a child: a cry of horror called Louise's attention to the accident, and told her that the child was supposed to be killed. She sent up a hurried prayer, and, to the amazement of all the spectators, the child stood up, perfectly unharmed. The noise of this incident spread far and wide, and, coming upon the repute of holiness and charity that Louise already enjoyed, gained for her the character of a saint. St. Vincent, hearing of these things, grew alarmed. With the instinct of a love pure from all human alloy, he took fright for the humility of his child, and

writes to her in anxiety, "Unite yourself in spirit to the mockeries, insults, and bad treatment that the Son of God suffered. When you are esteemed and honoured, Mademoiselle, let your mind be as lowly and humiliated in these honours as in contempt; be like to the bee that makes honey as well out of the dew that falls upon absinth as out of that which falls upon the rose." But her humility was proof against all trials, and she returned from this journey, which had been a sort of triumphant progress, as simple and lowly, as much the servant of the poor, as ever.

Amongst the companions who shared and lightened the labours of Louise at this period, there are a few who deserve a separate mention as being especially dear to both her and St. Vincent. Mademoiselle Pollalion was, like herself, a widow—young, wealthy, beautiful, endowed with remarkable gifts, and with a certain natural courage which was peculiarly valuable to Mlle. Legras, whose childlike timidity often stood in her way. Mlle. Pollalion had made a brilliant figure at court during the short time that she frequented that worldly centre, and had left behind her there such a reputation for sanctity as to be accredited with working miracles.

Another of Louise's helpmates was a young

shepherdess named Marguerite Naseau. The dream of this ardent young soul while tending her father's flocks had been to learn to read and write, so that she might teach other poor girls to do so, and thus help them to become holy by enabling them to read good books. The simplicity of her character, and probably also the lowliness of her origin, endeared Marguerite specially to St. Vincent, who treated the little shepherdess with a sort of fond, fatherly predilection. Her zeal in the service of the suffering poor made another sweet and potent bond between them. Opportunities soon presented themselves to Marguerite for carrying this service to the point of heroism.

The plague, which had become in a manner indigenous to the soil of France, broke out with sudden violence in the year 1631, soon after Louise's return from the memorable visitation of Beauvais. The worst phase of modern epidemic can give us but a faint idea of what this fearful scourge was in those days. When we read of it in the chronicles of the times, it seems incredible that any were ever left in the stricken country to tell the tale of the horrors they had witnessed. The ravages of the plague, and its consequences, were so appalling as hardly to be realisable in these days of improved sanitary conditions. Two hundred and fifty

years ago sanitary precautions of the most elementary kind were absolutely unknown ; no steps were taken to preserve the public health, and when the pestilence broke out it flourished unchecked. The moment the dreaded cry arose, " The plague is here ! " the population were seized with panic ; the tenderest human ties and duties were forgotten, every sacred bond and affection was swallowed up in the one animal instinct of self-preservation ; husbands and wives fled from each other ; mothers threw their babes into the street ; the dead were left unburied in deserted houses, poisonong the air, and amassing corruption and disease in the lane-ways and courts, where the dead-cart never passed with its ghastly freight and its cry, " Bring out your dead ! "

Everything was paralysed the moment the plague arrived. All social life came to a stand-still. Commerce was suspended in the towns, agriculture in the country. The harvest was left to rot in the fields ; wolves came down and devoured the putrefying corpses, and in the wake of pestilence there came famine, and a new train of miseries fell upon the despairing and exasperated population.

The spectacle of Sisters of Charity braving death in hospitals and on battle-fields is a common one now-a-days, but in the time of St.

Vincent this triumph of Christian love had not yet been manifested to the world; and when Louise and her companions inaugurated it in the service of the plague-stricken, the admiration they excited was in proportion to the novelty of the example. Charity knows no fear; but in order to appreciate the superhuman degree of charity displayed by Louise and her sisters, we should be able to realise the madness of terror that possessed the bravest in presence of the plague. On returning from Beauvais, she found the city panic-stricken. Her first step was to found a new Charity in the parish of St. Nicholas, in order to secure more abundant help in the service of the victims; her next effort was to encourage them by her example to defy alike fear and contagion. A poor girl, whom they were in the habit of visiting, was stricken with the plague; Louise went herself to nurse her, spent hours by her bedside, and after breathing the deadly air, and touching the diseased body, came out of the ordeal unharmed. This courageous example emboldened her companions, and enchanted St. Vincent. "I confess, Mademoiselle," he wrote to her, "that my heart was so moved when I heard of this, that had it not been in the middle of the night, I must there and then have gone to see you. The goodness of God towards those who

give themselves to Him in the Confraternity of Charity, none of whom have so far been attacked by the plague, gives me perfect confidence that He will preserve you from it. Will you believe it, Mademoiselle ?—I not only visited M. le Sous-Prieur of St. Lazare, who died of the plague, but I even inhaled his dying breath ; and yet neither I nor any of our people who assisted him to the last took any harm. No : be not afraid ; Our Lord means to make use of you for something that concerns His glory, and I am persuaded He will preserve you for this."

God made good this last promise. Louise was borne unharmed through the time of the plague ; but some of her sisters earned the crown of martyrdom in their attendance on the sick. Amongst these generous victims of charity was Marguerite Naseau. She gave herself up to her service from the first with an angelic fervour and sweetness that might have warned those who witnessed them that the reward was at hand, and the course of the brave little shepherdess nearly run. From morning till night Marguerite was to be seen going from one sick-house to another, diligent, deft, devoted, nursing and comforting the sick, and helping the dying, and doing it all as simply and naturally as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world to spend herself in the service of charity. One day

she was coming home—that is, to the hired room that she called her home—when, not far from her own door, a woman fell down, stricken with the plague. Marguerite carried her to her own room and put her into her bed, watched by her and at last, worn out with fatigue, she lay down beside her. The woman died, and Marguerite, having stood by her to the last, felt that her own turn had come. She tidied her little room, and went to the hospital, where she had long been in daily attendance, and asked for a bed to die in. They gave her one, and she did die a few days later of the plague; but it was all done, like the rest, quite simply, as if death were an act of charity or piety to be performed like any other, without excitement or alarm.

The moment St. Vincent heard that Marguerite was stricken he sent Louise on a visitation out of Paris, so that she might be spared the pain of seeing her dear little sister a prey to the pangs of that most awful of deaths. When all was over, he wrote himself to break the tidings to her and offer the consolations of his sympathy. "May God strengthen you!" he says; "may we be able to say of you, *Mulierem fortem quis inveniet!* You understand that much Latin: I need not translate it."

This sorrow, which came to Louise in the midst of the visitation for which St. Vincent had

hurried her out of Paris, served only to give a fresh stimulant to her ardour in the service of God, and it seemed to her that Marguerite continued even more efficaciously from heaven the help she had been to her on earth, so many and visible were the graces granted to her and her companions during this journey. She founded a number of new Charities, made collections in the town, and gathered such an amount of money that she was enabled to purchase land and cattle for hospitals that she had previously set going, to buy beds for the sick, and a large stock of linen for their use; in fact, to change the condition of the poor wherever she passed.

These arduous and successful efforts involved, however, an expenditure of strength that ended at last in a sudden break-down. Louise fell ill. Happily, in those days of slow posts the bad news did not reach St. Vincent until it was accompanied by the good news that she was recovering. "Blessed be God that you are well again!" he writes joyfully; "but if you feel any threat of a relapse, prevent it, I pray you, and come home."

Louise needed not to be driven home by the goad of bodily suffering. The thought of her son was like a cord always drawing her heart back when she moved to a distance from him,

and her persevering courage in absenting herself periodically from Paris, in the service of the poor, gave, better than any other sacrifice she could make, the measure of her love of God.

Michel was now a youth full of spirit and charm, but not over-endowed with wisdom or steadiness of purpose, in spite of the careful training he had had under St. Vincent and the Fathers of St. Nicholas. He seems to have won their affection, at any rate, though he failed to realise their expectations, and nothing is more delightful than to hear St. Vincent taking the lad's part, and covering his follies and waywardness, and even his idleness, with the mantle of his saintlike indulgence. While Mlle. Legras is absent on her visitations, the "good M. Vincent," who had all the poor of France on his shoulders, besides work enough to kill any one but a saint, found time to keep her minutely informed of everything about Michel, relating it all with a *naïve* simplicity that makes us love the dear, human, tender-hearted old Saint, while we bow down in veneration before his heroic sanctity. He chides Louise playfully for her over-anxiety, reminding her that she must be patient with the boy's youth and natural temperament, and trust more to the Providence of God than to her own strivings and counsels. He used to call her "the most motherful of

mothers " and try to reason her out of worrying about faults and follies that grace and experience alone could mend. When the worrying persisted unreasonably, he would strike the *Sursum corda*, and warn his penitent of what was sinful and unworthy in this over-preoccupation, " which hampers the mind, and deprives the soul of that tranquillity in which Our Lord wishes it to dwell."

" Don't be uneasy about Michel," he writes to her ; " we are taking good care of him. His mind is opening more and more. He is merry and good with us, and edifies us all. If this continues there is reason to praise God, and to hope that he will be a great comfort to you." When this edifying interval is succeeded by a phase of wayward folly, St. Vincent is ready to console the mother by assuring her that it will pass away ; that the boy is sound at heart, and, with patience and prayer, is sure to come right by-and-by.

There is something comforting in the human weaknesses of saints and souls high in holiness ; it is encouraging to see mothers like Louise de Marillac and St. Frances de Chantal "worrying " about their children, anxious about their worldly future, puzzling how to solve for them the great problem that troubles common mortals, " how shall they be clothed, and where shall they live,

and whom shall they marry?" Surely this strong human motherfulness helped both these holy women to be the grand, generous servants of God that they were; and we may believe that if they had not loved their children so tenderly, they would not have loved Him so heroically.

The De Marillacs were a family group which at this period presented a venerable combination of the most perfect divine and human love. They were devotedly fond of each other, and they were Christians of the antique type—some selling all things and giving to the poor, others leading the lives of anchorites in the world; others, again, devoted to prayer and suffering in the cloister. Perhaps the most remarkable figure in this family of elect souls was Michel, the minister and trusted friend of Marie de Medicis. This trust, and the noble qualities which inspired it, made M. de Marillac's position one of dangerous superiority; it drew upon him the jealous hatred of Richelieu, who was disputing with the Queen for the supremacy of power. According as the young king fell by turns under the dominion of his mother or her minister, courtiers rose and fell in royal favour, and cabinets were made and unmade, statesmen were rewarded or sacrificed. The two brothers De Marillac, Michel and Louis (Marshal of France), were amongst those whom

Louis XIII. showed the highest regard for. He said of the latter, " It is for life and death between us. I would go to the Indies to get him back." But the friendship of the boy-king was no safeguard against the malignant power of Richelieu. He bided his time, and when the Marshal was away with the army in Piedmont he worked upon Louis and extracted from him, in a moment of weakness and suspicion, an order for the Marshal's arrest. It was executed secretly, afraid of exciting a mutiny amongst the troops, by whom M. de Marillac was adored ; and the soldier who had won countless victories for his king was at the weak monarch's treacherous bidding thrown into prison, put upon a mock trial before judges in the pay of Richelieu, and on a charge of high treason condemned to death. He was beheaded, and his body taken from the scaffold to the house of his brother, whose wife received it—his own wife having died of grief before the day of the execution. Louise was in the midst of her family during this terrible moment, broken-hearted, but sustaining them by her courage and faith, while needing in her turn the support of St. Vincent's sympathy and help. It was given wisely and lovingly. He reminds her of the good life and admirable death of her uncle, and, while pitying her with all his heart, he bids her rejoice in the crown that has

rewarded both. "Your uncle has honoured the execution of the Son of God by uniting his own to it," he says, ". . . Ah! what does it matter, after all, how those we love go to God, provided they go!"

But a far heavier blow was in store for Louise than the death even of Marshal de Marillac. Her beloved Uncle Michel, who had been as a father to her, and whom she venerated only second to St. Vincent, was himself in prison, and daily expecting to share his brother's doom. The indignation roused against Richelieu by his cruel and implacable vengeance in murdering the Marshal, who was universally esteemed by all parties, induced the Cardinal probably to delay the execution of Michel, who lingered on in prison, full of joy in his sufferings, and ready to embrace whatever God sent. His letters to his family during this period of anxiety and misery read like the utterances of a saint.

"I wish," he writes to his wife, "I could send you a good share of the graces God has granted me under this trial. . . . If you knew what they are, instead of moderating your grief, you would rather have need to moderate your joy for me." He continues in every letter to speak of these interior joys that changed his cruel captivity to a time of rest and delight. "One single gleam

of the goods of the next life is more than enough," he exclaims, " not only to make us bear patiently all the afflictions of this one, but to make us utterly forget them ! " He occupied his long hours of solitude in making a new translation of the *Imitation of Christ,* and in writing a *Tract on Eternal Life.*

St. Vincent, who enjoyed the favour of the Queen, Anne of Austria, appealed to her on behalf of M. de Marillac ; but the Spanish princess, who went to the hospitals and tended the sick with her own hands—those beautiful hands that were sung by all the poets of the day —remained insensible to the petition of the man whom she honoured as a saint. There was nothing calculated to horrify her conscience or touch her heart in the fact of a powerful minister getting rid of a weaker one who stood in his way ; such things were of daily occurrence ; her own life already counted many similar transactions, presenting as it did a mixture of fervent faith and charity with ruthless tyranny and the most extravagant self-indulgence.

Louise worked on her side with all those friends who had influence at court ; but in vain : she did not even obtain the small grace of being allowed to visit her uncle in his prison. In her helplessness she took refuge in prayer and good works. She spent her days slaving in the

hospitals and the houses of the poor, and going to the convents to beg prayers for the beloved prisoner. Every morning saw her hurrying to the Carmelite Convent in the Rue St. Jacques, where the saintly Mère Madeleine de St. Joseph had the Blessed Sacrament exposed for sixty days and nights, while the community, which counted two of Michel de Marillac's daughters, made constant prayer on his behalf.

These supplications were answered in renewed joys and deeper peace to the prisoner ; but the long confinement, and the hardships to which he was subjected, proved too much for his bodily strength. His health broke down, and failed rapidly. When the doctor told him he was to prepare for death, he exclaimed, " Thank God ! You could not give me better news. I am ready to go, and as there is not much time to lose, let us make the most of it."

His wife and daughter and grandchildren were now admitted to the prison. He received the last rites of the Church with great devotion in their presence, and, having made his thanksgiving, he sat on the edge of his little camp-bed and went on working at his *Tract on Eternal Life*. Presently his sight began to fail, and he saw double ; still he went on writing ; but after a while he could not discern the words he wrote, so he laid down the pen, and said, " I can

see no more ; I cannot distinguish your faces." He embraced his wife and children and blessed them all tenderly, and then, still sitting in the same posture, clasped his hands, and composed himself quietly to die.

Louise was stricken to the earth with grief at his death. The one mercy she and Mère Madeleine were able to wring from Richelieu was the permission to have her uncle's body taken from the prison of Châteaudun to the Carmelite Convent, where it was buried in the Chapel of St. Joseph, with an epitaph composed by Mère Madeleine. Here the Christian gentlemen rested amidst the daughters of St. Teresa, who owed him so much, and loved him so gratefully.

From this great sorrow Louise rose up more detached from this world. Her heart seemed henceforth to grow larger and more ardent in the pursuit of holiness. She had never relaxed her service of the poor even in the first moment of her grief, and she continued it now more generously than ever.

Her visitations had hitherto been attended with the greatest success, both as regarded the co-operation of the rich and the goodwill of the poor, and the approval of the Bishops and clergy. A check, however, came in this prosperous course at Chalons. The Bishop, informed by some ill-

disposed persons that Mlle. Legras was introducing strange practices into the diocese, became alarmed, and withdrew his countenance from her and the Association. She applied at once to St. Vincent for guidance, and he desired her to hold herself entirely at the Bishop's orders; to go to him and justify herself, if invited to do so, or, if he expressed a wish that she should leave, to come away at once. Apparently the latter course was the one preferred by the Bishop, for Mlle. Legras suddenly left Chalons, and returned in haste to Paris.

Humility, as well as a certain timid self-mistrust which was natural to her, prompted Louise to lay the blame of this misadventure on herself, and to impute to her own faults and incapacity the ill-will of the inhabitants and the opposition of the Bishop. But here, as ever, St. Vincent was at hand with his illuminating wisdom and kindness. "Happy you," he writes to her, "to be thus likened to the Son of God, and driven away from a place where you are doing no harm! . . . I beseech you do not now begin to think that this has happened through your own fault. No: it is not so; it is simply a dispensation of God, for His greater glory and for the good of your soul." He goes on to remind her of St. Louis, who accepted unmurmuringly the failure of his great undertaking,

the Crusade, and returned with his arms defeated, but his faith unshaken. This lowly opinion of herself was apt at times to become a drag on Louise's courage, and to check her naturally bright spirits ; and we see St. Vincent combating it, and impressing upon her that the service of God is a service of joy. " Above all, be gay ! " he repeats in his letters ; " honour the holy cheerfulness of Our Lord and His Mother. Let us be gay, let us be merry, Mademoiselle, seeing what a Lord it is whom we serve ! " he exclaims again, like a happy child.

The failure which for a moment discouraged Mlle. Legras was an isolated incident, and never again arrested the progress of the Association. The Charities were going on prosperously in every direction, and had taken a development which called for a more complete organisation in the working of them. It had been found necessary at an earlier stage to enlist the services of women of the humbler classes in the attendance on the sick, the physical strength of women born and nurtured like herself and her companion Dames de Charité being unequal to the manual work that had to be done. Louise had had little difficulty in recruiting as she went on her way through the towns and villages, peasant girls who were piously inclined, and glad to embrace a sort of religious life from which

want of means and education must otherwise exclude them. But piety and physical strength are not the only requisites for a good sick-nurse, and the rough-and-ready ways of the country girls, together with their entire ignorance, often made their assistance a dubious gain in the hospitals and sick-rooms. Louise consequently proposed to take a certain number of them into her own house and train them to be efficient nurses, and at the same time complete their religious instruction, which was generally most rudimentary. St. Vincent had long been considering, on his side, how some such training could be contrived for the helpmates of the Dames de Charité, and he at once approved of Louise's plan. She wished to bind herself by a vow to this new service, and to let her house be opened at once a kind of novitiate for the Filles de Charité, as they were called ; but St. Vincent, faithful to his habit of honouring in all his doings " the slowness of the eternal God," bade her wait a while. The idea of hurrying one step in advance of Providence made him " shake with fear," as he said ; but he consented to her " making a beginning " humbly and quietly, confident that if the scheme were good it would expand rapidly.

The four peasant women that Mlle. Legras took into her house as a beginning in the year

1633, were in reality the first novices of that community of Sisters of Charity destined to spread over the world, like the great mustard-tree under whose shade every wayfarer sits down to rest. This new responsibility involved a great change in her manner of life. Up to this time she had so far retained her independence as to be at least complete mistress in her own house, free to invite there whom she chose, and to arrange her comings and goings according to her convenience. All this was now at an end. Her house ceased, practically, to be her own, and became the common property of a class of persons who were naturally the last that she would have chosen as daily and hourly companions—women who had nothing, socially or intellectually, in common with the refined and accomplished Mlle. Legras—who were constantly jarring upon her delicacy, natural and acquired, by their coarse manners and language, and total ignorance of everything but the Ten Commandments. But this single bond was enough to bridge over every other difference. They loved God and pitied the poor, and were eager to serve and help them. On this consecrated ground the lady and the peasant women met as sisters and fellow-labourers. Nor did the latter ever suspect what the partnership cost their hostess. She confessed to a dear friend that it

was " a constant trial to her to see the diversity of strange faces " about her ; but the most observant would not have detected this in her manner towards them.

The novitiate, as in truth it was, for all its unpretending simplicity, flourished with a rapidity that surprised even St. Vincent. At the end of a year the number of women, maids, and widows, who applied for admittance was so great that the house was full to the attic ; and Louise, in order to make room for more applicants, was obliged to dismiss her own maid, and put up beds in the room she had occupied. This sacrifice was the last left her to make in the matter of personal attendance, but there remained many others yet in the way of comfort and freedom. When every spot where a bed could stand was occupied, she shared hers with a girl who was afflicted with a most repulsive infirmity, but whose piety and good will promised to make her a valuable subject to the Association.

The will of Providence being now sufficiently manifested by the success of the undertaking to satisfy even St. Vincent's exacting patience, he recognised the necessity of giving a rule to the community ; but instead of drawing up one himself, he desired Louise to do so, protesting an illness which for the moment made the effort of writing irksome to him. " I can see that

God so ordains it," he said, " in order that I may not thrust my sickle into the harvest." Louise drew up a rule obediently, and sent it to St. Vincent. He was well pleased with it, made some few alterations, and then proposed that the community should meet, in order to receive the new rule with fitting solemnity, and that he should make a little discourse to them on its spirit and observance.

This was the first of those Conferences of the Sisters of Charity which embody so admirably the sweet and loving spirit of St. Vincent. Mlle. Legras and her companions, Mlle. Pollalion and Mme. Goussault, took notes of this and succeeding ones, and afterwards carefully corrected and put them together. This first conference was more like an intimate family council, in which the father sat in the arm-chair, while his children gathered round him, asking and answering questions, giving their opinions, holding amicable little discussions on the various points under consideration, speaking out freely, but always accepting his decisions with entire docility and satisfaction.

" It strikes me," began St. Vincent, looking round at the group of eager faces, " that Divine Providence has gathered us all here together in order that we should honour the human life of Jesus on earth. But up to this time He has

given us no fixed rule. Now in this He has treated you as He treated His own people, whom He left a thousand years from the creation without a law. He dealt in the same way with the primitive Church ; for so long as Our Lord was on earth there was no written law, and it was the Apostles who, after His death, collated His teachings and ordinances. I have not yet been able to draw up a regular rule for your house, but, until it shall please God to let this be done, let us just see how you can best pass the twenty-four hours that make up the day, the weeks, the months, the years that will lead you to a happy eternity."

In this simple, familiar way he goes on to tell them what has seemed to him and others the best way of parcelling out their time from morning till night. They are to rise at 4 A.M., and to go to bed at 9 ; " because," adds St. Vincent, by way of explaining what may seem too indulgent in this arrangement, " you see we must take care of ourselves for the service of the poor." They are to offer their heart to God the first thing on awaking, " because the devil tries his best to turn our thoughts from God the moment we wake." Then he would have them take flight to God on the wings of mental prayer. " Don't fancy that because you are poor ignorant girls you may not aspire to meditate. Oh, God

is so good! He has called you to the exercise of charity. After that, how could He refuse you the grace necessary to meditate! Oh! my children, never let such a thought enter your minds! Only this very day I was greatly edified by a poor village girl like yourselves, who, through her faithfulness in making her meditation, is now one of the holiest souls I know."

He closes the subject of prayer by an exhortation to them to hear Mass with the devotion they would have felt on Mount Calvary; but assures them that if compelled to leave the Holy Sacrifice for the service of the poor, they are not to grieve as if this were a great loss, "because, my daughters, to go to the poor is to go to God. . . . Bear this in mind, and be careful to give the poor all the help you can. . . . Put up with their tempers; don't get angry with them, don't speak sharply to them. Ah! they have enough to bear in bearing their sufferings. Don't contradict them, unless it is necessary and for their good. Weep with them, pity them; God has appointed you to be their consolation."

He tells them to be very devout to the Blessed Virgin; to look upon their superior as representing her, and then they will find obedience quite pleasant and easy. "I must tell you something about this that concerns myself," he adds confidentially. "When God placed me

at Mme. de Gondy's, as tutor to her children, I proposed to myself to look up to her as to the Blessed Virgin in person, and God only knows how much good this practice did me. Honour, therefore, the ladies who are in authority over you (the Dames de Charité), and behave towards them with great respect. Honour the sick likewise, and look upon them as your superiors." He gave them his blessing, and they went about their day's work as usual.

This was how the Community of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul was founded. Saint Vincent always denied that he had done it. "God founded it," he would repeat to those who spoke of him as the founder. And perhaps no order ever arose in whose formation the finger of God was so visibly manifested as in this Association of ignorant country girls, who came to be taught how to serve others poorer than themselves, and, gradually, without influence or protection, grew into a large community. St. Vincent never would allow them to be considered, or to consider themselves, as nuns; they were nothing but Christian women devoting themselves to the service of the sick and the poor. "Your convent," he said, "will be the house of the sick; your cell, a hired room; your chapel, the parish church; your cloister, the streets of the city, or the wards of the

hospital; your enclosure, obedience; your grating, the fear of God; your veil, holy modesty."

It was in truth a most daring innovation, this example of a sisterhood without veil or cloister, in an age which associated the religious life, no matter under what rule, with bars and strict enclosure, and, generally speaking, the concealment of the religious from even the eyes of her own family. It may have been partly out of deference to these conventional notions of the age which made St. Vincent refuse to allow the new sisterhood to adopt any costume that could make them look like nuns, and scandalise the world in whose midst they were to walk about helping and serving. He continually repeated to them through succeeding years, at the weekly conferences, that they had never been "founded" at all; they had been brought together by God's Providence and their own good will in the great needs of the poor; it had come about simply and casually. "God alone made your Association,' he says in one of these familiar talks to them. "We never had a fixed plan about it. How could any one have imagined that there would be Filles de Charité when the first few among you came up from your villages to help in some of the parishes in Paris? Oh! my children, don't believe it. Neither I nor your

sister servant (Mlle. Legras) ever thought of such a thing. You see, it was God Himself who thought it for you."

And yet, for all his desire to keep them lowly, and his constant allusion to their ignorance and their unpretending condition, St. Vincent treats the Filles de Charité with the most profound deference. Very different is his language, in speaking of them, from that in which he speaks of the priests of his own mission. The dignity of their calling, *i.e.*, the service of the poor, placed them, in his eyes, on a pedestal of sublime grandeur. "These most noble women," "those admirable servants of Jesus Christ," are the terms in which he commonly alludes to the "poor ignorant peasant girls"; while for his missionaries, who are carrying the Word of God to the ends of the world, courting martyrdom, and often obtaining it, he has nothing but the language of humility and contempt. "Our mean little Society," "our beggarly Community," "*notre gueuserie*," are his favourite expressions in speaking of the Brotherhood of which he was the undisputed founder.

The erection of the Filles de Charité into an organised body, working under direction, and following a rule, was a great event, and at once enlarged the sphere of their usefulness. The Hôtel Dieu in Paris was in need of reform

amounting to a total reorganisation of its internal system. It held over a thousand patients, and some five-and-thirty thousand were harboured there during the year. The Augustinian nuns who served the hospital had, so far, been unable to cope with the tremendous difficulties that stood in the way of the most urgent reforms; it had taken them twenty years to obtain the elementary concession of a separate bed for every patient. Here was a field for the services of the Filles de Charité, trained as they were to the care of the sick, and in high favour with the Queen, and therefore likely to enlist her interest in behalf of the ill-managed hospital. But when the matter was proposed to St. Vincent, he hesitated, as was his way, doubtful as to whether it was wise or fair to intrude upon the province of the Augustinian Sisters, hitherto charged solely with the service and management of the hospital. These scruples were, however, overruled by Mgr. de Gondy, Archbishop of Paris, and at his desire St. Vincent consented to the Dames de Charité engaging themselves to attend regularly at the hospital. He enjoined upon them the utmost discretion and humility in their intercourse with the Sisters, to whom they were to defer as to persons in authority over them, and worthy of all respect.

Mlle. Legras found the task of propitiating the Sisters an easy one. They welcomed her proffered assistance with gratitude, and gave her and her companions the support of their knowledge and experience in dealing with the wards. Louise appointed four of her best subjects among the Filles de Charité to the service of the Hotel Dieu ; and so ardent was their zeal in the work, that St. Vincent was obliged to interfere in order to moderate it, lest their strength should give way. But this excess of fervour delighted his heart. " Oh ! let us thank Our Lord," he writes to Louise, " for giving our good girls the grace to be so generous and willing in His service ! "

The zeal of the Filles de Charité was, no doubt, encouraged by the example of the Dames de Charité, who entered on their arduous task with a generosity that was truly admirable. They were six visitors to begin with, and at the end of a month their number had increased to a hundred and twenty. Amongst these were many of the noblest ladies of the court, princesses and duchesses, who drove to the Hôtel Dieu in their cumbrous, emblazoned coaches, and, covering their silk brocades with a coarse white apron, performed the duties of nurses in the wards with the utmost efficiency and the most unshrinking courage. They brought dainties and cordials to the sick, and administered

them with their own hands, spending hours every day in the foul and dense atmosphere of the wards. A lovely group they were, these Dames de Charité, that Louise drew in her train from their marble halls to the bedside of the suffering and forsaken ones. There was Mme. Goussault, the widow of the President, young and beautiful, and with the voice of a siren, so sweet that when she sang canticles on her way through the villages visiting the poor with other Dames de Charité, the labourers stood to listen, and threw down their spades and followed the singer like men bewitched by the spell of sweet music.

Another charming figure is that of the young Duchess de Liancourt, long the devoted friend of Louise, and parted from her by the subtle poison of the Port-Royal sophistries—a parting that Louise reckoned amongst the keenest pains of her life.

The Association of the Filles de Charité grew henceforth with a rapidity that soon called for fresh means of expansion and guidance. The crowd of those who came to be trained was so great that numbers were continually waiting for admittance, and Mlle. Legras was obliged to let many leave whom she would gladly have retained longer under her care. It was evident that some larger place must be found to receive

them, as the house in the Rue St. Sauveur was now far too small to satisfy the rapidly growing demands for accommodation. St. Vincent admitted the need of a centre where something like community life might be carried on; but he still shrank from giving the Sisterhood anything like the character of a religious order. It had grown to its present proportions without any much more localised centre than the birds of the air. Mlle. Legras's house was a kind of parent-nest, where the young fledglings were nurtured until they were taught to fly; but as soon as their wings were strong enough to bear them alone, they departed, to make room for a new brood, and alighted where they could, making a nest for themselves in some poor house in a poor neighbourhood, and coming and going thence to their work. It had seemed to St. Vincent that this spontaneity and simplicity and absence of all pretension in the character of the Association were essential to its preservation and perfection; he dreaded the least outward assumption of importance on the part of the members, as keenly as ever sainted founder dreaded the creeping paralysis of relaxation of the Rule. But the fact was forced upon him at last that his "bonnes filles" could not live thus scattered and isolated, "coming and going, and full of goodwill and love of the poor,"

without the control and protection of some material organisation.

Mlle. Legras had long felt that there must be some one central house, larger than her own, and she finally converted St. Vincent to the same opinion, and won his consent to their taking a house in the village of La Chapelle, near enough to St. Lazare for easy communication between him and the community, and sufficiently spacious and unpretending to answer the material and moral conditions to be observed in the home of " poor girls, the servants of the poor."

It was a rambling old farmhouse, situated in the midst of fields, and thus admirably suited to the " children of the fields " who were to inhabit it. They took possession of this abode in the month of May 1636 ; a note written by Mlle. Legras on a stray sheet of paper records the event, and adds that they made this change of residence " in the spirit of honouring Jesus and Mary on their way from Bethlehem to Egypt and other places, and with no more desire than they to have a fixed abode on earth."

Louise made a retreat of six days on coming to La Chapelle, and she derived such comfort and strength from it that she resolved to enable others to enjoy the same benefit. For this purpose she set apart two rooms, which were to be at the disposal of any of the Dames de Charité

who wished to come there at any time for a week's rest and meditation. Several hastened to take advantage of this opportunity and be instructed in spiritual things by the pupil of so holy a master, and whose characteristic advice to them was "to live in all simplicity and innocent familiarity with Our Lord."

Quietly as the community had hitherto gone to work, and closely as both they and St. Vincent drew round them the veil of humility and obscurity, the praise and gaze of the world followed them wheresoever they went, and proclaimed their works before men. They were wanted everywhere, in homes and hospitals and prisons; and wherever they were wanted they went. They had not been two months settled at La Chapelle when they were sent for to nurse the soldiers wounded in the sudden invasion of the Spanish army under John of Worth. Anne of Austria visited Louise and her Sisters, and showed them great honour. Court ladies, encouraged by the Queen's example, became munificent patronesses of the Charities. One of them, the Duchess d'Aiguillon, a noble type of the Christian in the world, being in failing health, entreated St. Vincent to let her have two Filles de Charité to wait upon her personally. St. Vincent, though reluctant to make the precedent, consented out of gratitude for the

Duchess's benefactions, and in consideration of her great piety, to let her have one ; but when he desired Sœur Marie Denyse to go to her, she replied, " I left my father and mother to serve the poor for the love of God, and I will not leave them to go and serve a great lady." St. Vincent, delighted with the spirit that dictated the refusal, sent for Sœur Barbe, a soul of marvellous humility, who signed herself " Barbe l'orgueilleuse," believing herself to be a very demon of pride. Barbe burst into tears, and declared she should not know how to serve a duchess, but yielded at last to St. Vincent's gentle entreaties, and went to the great lady's house. But when she saw the splendour of the place, with its marbles and pictures and gilded ceilings and silken hangings, she was seized with terror, and ran away back to St. Vincent, and, falling at his feet, implored him to let her stay with the poor. We can well imagine how it gladdened the Saint's heart to see his children so true to the spirit of their vocation. He writes to Mlle. Legras, quite elated, " Are you not enchanted to see the spirit of God so strong in these two poor girls, and inspiring them with such contempt for the world and its grandeurs ? You can't think what courage this has given me for the Charity ! "

Sœur Barbe had her heart's desire for the

moment. She was let off serving the Duchess, and sent back to the slums and the hospital, and was soon after promoted to a post of honour in a village outside Paris, where a terrible epidemic, resembling the plague, had broken out, and where her medical skill—highly valued in those days, when the barber's lancet was still the universal remedy—made her self-devotion doubly serviceable.

Wonderful was the change which within twelve years had now been wrought by the joint efforts of St. Vincent and Mlle. Legras in the condition of the poor all over the kingdom. They were no longer left "to rot before they were put into their coffin," to borrow the expression of a chronicler of the times, but were nursed back to health, or at least furnished with such merciful alleviations as robbed of their worst horrors the infirmities and diseases that afflicted them. This was much for the son of a peasant, aided by one lone widow woman, to have done, and yet they were only at the beginning of the work they were destined to accomplish.

The excess of criminal pauperism in the seventeenth century had engendered no more horrible result than the destruction of new-born infants and little children—a crime which prevailed in those days to an extent that would be incredible, were it not proved past denial by

the statistics of the period. These official reports show that from three to four hundred babies were thrown out into the streets of Paris every year to die of cold and hunger or to take their chance of being picked up by the police and taken to La Couche. La Couche seems to have been a sort of authorised refuge, where the poor little outcasts were taken in when any one took the trouble to carry them there. Here a still more miserable lot awaited them than that from which they were thus rescued by chance. In the streets they had but to die and go to heaven. At La Couche their wretched little lives were preserved long enough to endure accumulated sufferings of every description; and if they survived these first miseries of infancy, it was at the risk of far worse future evils to soul and body. Happily, the great majority of them died off quickly. The woman who had the sole management of the house could not, even had she been so inclined, have given proper care to the multitude of babies that kept pouring in upon her; there were no nurses to give them their natural nourishment, and when their cries for sustenance became too tiresome, the woman quieted them with a drug, and sent them off to heaven in their sleep. The more robust, who made a fight for it, and determined to live, were disposed of in various ways.

Some were sold for tenpence apiece to beggars, who used them as a means of exciting charity, and so getting alms; others were bought by families who wanted an heir; and there was a belief current at the time, and supported by much contemporary evidence, that numbers of these little forsaken creatures were sold to necromancers, who used their blood in the practices of the black art.

This emporium of cruelty and crime had been carrying on its hideous trade, not alone with impunity, but under the ostensible protection of the law, when God sent St. Vincent to denounce its abominations and rescue the little children. He was returning late one winter's evening to St. Lazare, when he was arrested by yells of infantile distress proceeding from a doorway. He hastened to the spot, and found a beggar in the act of breaking the limbs of a baby of some months old. "Monster!" cried the dear old Saint, "I mistook you for a human being!" and he snatched the baby from the beggar, and carried it in his arms through the streets, relating to the passers-by, with tears in his eyes, the barbarous torture that the poor little wailing thing had been subjected to. The people listened, and walked on with him, fired with his compassion and his holy anger. By the time they reached La Couche a large crowd had

gathered. St. Vincent entered the house, never dreaming of the sort of place it was. One glance showed him enough to make his heart sink and his soul recoil with horror. There was nothing for it, however, but to hand over the baby from his cherishing arms to the tender mercies of the matron. It was too late that night to do anything, but next morning he hurried off to Mlle. Legras, and begged her to go at once to La Couche, and examine more closely the establishment of which last night's glimpse had given him but too true an impression. The spectacle that revealed itself to Louise made her stand aghast with loathing and dismay. "The fate of the innocents massacred by Herod was infinitely more merciful than that of those confided to La Couche!" was her report. And it was decided at once that immediate measures must be taken to remedy the condition of the cast-aways. St. Vincent was for carrying the lot off bodily, straightway; but this being practicably impossible, they determined to begin by taking away twelve. St. Vincent wept bitterly as, after invoking the Holy Ghost, he cast lots for the ones who were to be rescued. Some charitable friends came to their assistance. The lady visitors of the Hotel Dieu gave money to supply the immediate wants, a house and nurses

to receive the infants. A pious widow, named Mlle. Pelletier, undertook the management of the house, and Louise went herself to reside there for a few weeks in order to set the thing going, to regulate the expenses, and draw up necessary rules for the nurses. Once the work was started, and the charity of the public enlisted, money poured in, and week after week St. Vincent went to La Couche and drew lots for new babies. His dear heart could not rest under the thought of what they were suffering in that foul and cruel abode. For, indeed, he knew no peace ever since that evening when he found the little baby in the doorway. He was perpetually prowling about after dark in the most disreputable quarters, on the look-out for other victims, his ears strained for the sound of their piteous cries. When he was late coming home to St. Lazare, the Fathers would say, " He is looking for babies ! " And so he was. Many a time he came home with the two huge pockets of his shabby old soutane filled each with a baby. It was always at night that he found them. The thieves and criminal paupers had the streets to themselves after dark, and he was a rash man who ventured out alone in their midst ; but St. Vincent was safe ; the kind, worn face, with the eager, glancing eyes, was familiar to them all, and no one ever

dreamed of molesting him. Once, however, on a dark night, he was seized and roughly handled by some good-for-nothing fellows; but when he told them he was "only Monsieur Vincent," they fell on their knees and begged his pardon, and asked his blessing.

This new work of the Foundling Refuge was to Mlle. Legras a tremendous addition of fatigue and responsibility. Well might St. Vincent exclaim, "Here is business for you, all these little ones to look after and keep accounts for!" So long as the money came in, she was willing enough to keep account of it; the worst trouble arose when the money began to fall short; for the number of the babies went on steadily increasing. As it so often happens in undertakings of the kind, the first impulse of enthusiasm which had floated the work stopped short; gifts and alms grew less abundant, and by degrees almost ceased altogether, and Mlle. Legras was sorely perplexed how to support the burden she had laid upon herself. Accommodation had run short in the house that had been hired, and instead of taking a larger one, and so keeping the foundlings under her own watchful eye, she was thankful to distribute them all over the country to respectable women who, for a small retribution, were willing to take charge of them.

While thus devoting herself to the children of others, Louise was not neglecting or overlooking her own child. Acting under the advice of St. Vincent, she had withdrawn him from the Seminary, and placed him for a time under the care of M. Bourdoise. From here he went to the Jesuits, where he seems to have given tolerable satisfaction, and to have again raised hopes of a vocation for the priesthood. But two months saw the end of the passing phase, and Michel grew weary of theology, and impatient to leave Paris. Louise was terrified at the mere thought of his going away from under her eye and St. Vincent's. "Let him go," said the wise old Saint, in answer to her cry of alarm. "If all those who have to go away from their parents' eye were in danger of being lost, where should I be?" he asked, treating her terrors with playful irony; and he sent "little Michel," as he persisted in calling the tall, grown lad, away with some missionaries to a friend whom he wrote to, praying him to receive the boy, and "occupy him in some way, so that idleness, the mother of all the vices, should not bring him into mischief."

This continued fickleness of purpose made his mother very unhappy, and when at last the boy definitely renounced all idea of the priesthood, she accused herself and her own unworthiness

of being the cause of the disappointment, and saw in it a judgment of God upon her for her sins. "Never did I see such a woman as you!" says St. Vincent, combating as usual this exaggerated mistrust of herself; "you ought to remember that the faults of children are not imputed to parents when these latter have had them instructed and given them good example, as you have done, God be praised!" He quotes examples from Scripture and the lives of the saints to reassure her, but Louise continued hard to console. "In God's name," implores St. Vincent, "leave your child to the care of his Heavenly Father, who loves him better than you do."

As Michel's destiny lies outside that portion of his mother's life which chiefly interests us, we may as well mention here that after being for some years more a thorn in her heart and a constant source of anxiety, he married a charming young wife, "chosen for him by God Himself," says Louise, in her deep joy and thankfulness; and after this he settled down satisfactorily, and became in due course the father of a little girl, who was the delight of her grandmother, and a source of great interest to the whole family of the Filles de Charité.

In the year 1639, Mlle. Legras lost her dear friend and valiant fellow-labourer, Mme. Goussault. The last words of this noble woman were

a prayer to Louise on behalf of the sick poor of Angers, where the hospital was in grievous need of reform. She entreated her to go and help them ; and no sooner had the grave closed over her than Louise set out for Angers, in order to fulfil the request that she looked upon as a dying legacy from her friend. The fame of Mlle. Legras' holiness had now spread far and wide ; and as soon as it was known that she was approaching Angers, two of the chief notabilities of the place went out to meet her, and, without allowing her to pay her first customary visit to the church and the Hôtel Dieu, they insisted on carrying her off to a supper prepared in her honour, and to which the most important personages of the town were invited to meet her. This was bad enough, but on her way through the streets she was the object of a veritable ovation, of which she complained angrily to St. Vincent in a letter next day. " They treated me as if I were a great person," she exclaims, aggrieved and indignant ; and St. Vincent seems to have been more amused than sympathetic on the occasion, for he urges her " to bear the annoyance with becoming patience."

This ordeal was followed next by visits so early and so numerous from the dignitaries and their wives that it was with difficulty Louise at last escaped to the hospital. She found it in a

state of neglect and discomfort which fully justified the prayer of her dying friend to "go and do something for the poor sick there." The work of reform, always an arduous one, was made less difficult by the entire confidence Mlle. Legras herself inspired, and the extraordinary good-will of the inhabitants, high and low. There was more to be done, however, she quickly discovered, than the reorganisation of the hospital. The spiritual wants of the poor were quite unprovided for, and the most deplorable ignorance of Christian doctrine prevailed amongst them. Mlle. Legras opened a class Catechism, and went about inviting the poor to send their children to be instructed. They responded with the greatest alacrity to the invitation, and not only sent their children, but came themselves, and at the end of a week the success of the class was so remarkable that educated people crowded in to hear the instructions. Amongst them were several priests, one of whom declared to Louise that he would consider himself happy if he might but end his days in serving her, with no other reward than to hear the words of wisdom that fell from her lips. "If you stayed here a year, you would convert the whole town!" exclaimed an old woman to her one day, coming out from the Catechism class.

No wonder Mlle. Legras took fright at all this. "Father," she writes to St. Vincent, "pray God to bring down my pride by any means He pleases! I am ready to lose all and leave all to obtain humility, which is better than every other good and consolation."

No one else who knew her was alarmed for her humility. She was so simple and natural that a movement of vanity seemed as foreign to her as to a little child. In conversing with the poor, her manner was that of an equal who knew no more about things than they did, but who was trying with them to learn what was right and good. When the authorities were claiming every moment of her time to arrange the affairs of the hospital, she would stay talking to the poor, listening to their tiresome, long-winded complaints with every appearance of the deepest interest and as if her time were wholly at their disposal. One poor old woman whom she went to see begged of her to play a game of back-gammon with her, and Mlle. Legras at once consented, and sat down and rattled away with the dice-box for a whole hour, as if she, too, were glad to have something to kill the time.

The wisdom, firmness, and practical ability displayed by Mlle. Legras in the difficult task of recasting the existing conditions of the large hospital were eliciting, meantime, the warmest

admiration and gratitude both from the authorities and the patients who were benefiting already by her administration. The most important step taken was the installation of eight Filles de Charité in the hospital itself. This arrangement, which grouped a number of them in one permanent abode, inaugurated at last that community life so necessary for the observance of a Rule and so helpful in the carrying on of a common vocation—an advantage which the Filles de Charité had hitherto only enjoyed during the short period of their residence at La Chapelle, while being trained to their duties of sick-nurses. Once they left that sheltering wing, they lodged where they could, in hired rooms, sometimes singly, sometimes in twos and threes. Marvellous, indeed, must have been the strength and vitality of the vocations that had so long withstood the dangers and difficulties of this scattered and unprotected manner of life. It was a most desirable measure, the establishing the Sisters under the authority of the municipality as recognised servants of the sick poor, and with a local superior of their own.

Louise drew up for the community some rules specially adapted to their duties towards the sick, and which, spontaneous and simple like all her utterances, written or spoken, breathe

the spirit of entire self-sacrifice, humility, and simplicity that so strongly marks the likeness between her soul and that of St. Vincent. The Sisters were to rise at 4 A.M., and, after taking "a little bread and wine" (except on Communion days, when they were to "smell some vinegar instead"), they were to begin their service by making the beds of the sick, cleaning and tidying the wards, administering the medicines, and giving the patients their breakfast. The rules included minute instructions for the attendance and comfort of the sick throughout the day, such as "keeping in readiness cooling drinks and pleasant lozenges to refresh them when their lips were hot." All these changes had taken time to accomplish, and given much mental anxiety, as well as great physical fatigue, to Mlle. Legras; but things being finally got into good working order, she was ready to take her departure from Angers. The community, in despair at the prospect of the separation, entreated her to let her portrait be taken, that they might keep it as a consolation for losing her presence. Willing as she was to indulge every reasonable request of her children, Louise could not be persuaded to grant this one, which, it seemed to her, would involve a foolish loss of time and money.

Everything was ready for her departure, when

it was suddenly arrested by the news that the plague had broken out. She at once renounced the idea of going away, and gave herself up to the service of the sick. The example of her courage and self-devotion stimulated her Sisters, who went nobly to work, touching the plague-stricken, inhaling their poisonous breath, risking their lives, as if unconscious of danger and inaccessible to fear. Louise exulted with a holy pride at the sight of their courageous charity, though her heart quaked with motherful terrors on their behalf. But God watched over the little community, not one of whom caught the terrible malady. The severe moral and physical strain proved, however, too much for Louise, exhausted already by previous fatigues. She fell ill, and the report spread to Paris that it was the plague. The consternation and grief of her friends were indescribable. St. Vincent was, fortunately, reassured at once as to the nature of the illness, and was thus free to take pleasure in these evidences of the universal esteem in which his child was held. "I wish you could have seen the tenderness of the ladies of the Hôtel Dieu when they heard it!" he writes to her; and then, after the father, the Saint speaks, and he gives thanks for her sufferings. "I trust that through His goodness He will be glorified by this illness as by so many

others. I ask this of Him incessantly here, and there, and wherever I am. How I wish He would let you see with what heart everybody is praying for you!"

To the venerable Abbé Vaux, whose hospitality Louise had enjoyed during her stay at Angers, and whose guest she still was, St. Vincent writes with the gratitude of a father to one who has befriended his child. "I cannot thank you humbly or lovingly enough for the unparalleled charity that you are exercising towards Mlle. Legras. I thank you as I can, Monsieur, and I pray Our Lord, for whose sake you are doing it all, that He may be Himself your thanks and your reward. . . . And so she is ill again, this dear lady! *In nomine Domini!* . . . I do not commend her to you, Monsieur; your letter proves how much you have her welfare at heart, and hers proves the same. Would that I were there to set your goodness free from all the trouble it has taken upon itself! But Our Lord wishes to add this merit to the crown He is making ready for you."

The illness lasted for two months, during which time Louise continued from her sick-bed the guidance of the community and the direction of the various works she had set going. Her presence was, indeed, more needed than ever, for the whole strength of the workers had gone

co combating the ravages of the plague, and had strained their powers and resources to the utmost. As soon as her exhausted state of health permitted it, she took leave of the kind Abbé Vaux, accepting, in obedience to St. Vincent, the coach of a friend as far as Tours, where she was " thankful to get out of it," and exchange the luxuriant conveyance for the discomfort and poverty of a common cart, in which she jolted slowly on to Paris.

Her health never recovered the effects of this illness. From this time forth (1640) to the day of her death, twenty years afterwards, she lived, according to St. Vincent, " against all human appearance, and by a sustained miracle." She herself acknowledged to one of her Sisters that she went blindly on, dragging her body after her by sheer strength of will, and kept up solely by the conviction that so long as God had work for her to do He would give her strength to do it.

This community at Angers, now prominently placed before the world, independent and responsible, became henceforth one of her chief preoccupations, while it was at the same time a source of courage and consolation to her. The admirable conduct of the young Sisters during the plague, together with the marvellous protection displayed towards them throughout, made her say that " the Sisters of Angers

had evidently a special grace from God for the service of the sick in the hospitals." She continued, nevertheless, to watch over them anxiously from a distance, keeping up a regular correspondence with their chaplain, the Abbé Vaux, and playfully rebuking him for "flattering her motherly pride" by always singing the praises of the Sisters, and never saying a word about their faults.

The remembrance of her refusal to let them have her portrait taken smote her with remorse, and she accused herself to St. Vincent of having been unkind and ungrateful to them. "Every little bourgeoise gets her portrait painted," she said, and after death it is put over her tomb in the church. I am very sorry I refused to let mine be taken. I daresay it was from a false humility of not liking to seem vain enough to have myself painted, whereas the true humility would have been in condescending to have it done."

The work of the Confraternity continued to grow in every direction, and the house at La Chapelle was no longer large enough to accommodate the Sisters, who kept steadily increasing in numbers. After much searching, another house was found, which, while considerably more spacious, had the advantage of being close to St. Lazare, the home of the Mission. But

the more the community increased the more the demands upon it grew. The new house soon became the centre to which all the poor and sick of the city betook themselves for help ; on the other hand, money, food, medicine, and alms of every sort, flowed in to meet these demands, and all who were willing to help in works of charity came to offer their services, and put themselves under the guidance of Mlle. Legras.

Up to this time the Filles de la Charité had held catechism classes in the various parishes where they worked ; but Mlle. Legras now opened, for the first time, a regular day-school for children, where they were taught reading and writing and sewing, as well as their catechism. It was necessary to instruct the Sisters themselves, in the first instance, so as to qualify them for teaching in the school. The task was arduous, but the results were wonderful. Louise was constantly amazed by the rapid progress which these dull, uneducated village girls made under her instructions, and inspired by the ardour of their own good-will. Many, who began by learning the alphabet from her, and to whom she had " to explain the *Pater* and the *Credo*, article by article," proved pupils worthy of St. Jerome, so ardent and humble was the spirit with which they received the instruction

imparted to them, and so admirably taught were they by the Spirit of God. Their virtue and discretion filled Louise with admiration, and she writes to St. Vincent, " Had the great Doctor [St. Jerome] lived in these days, he would have written the lives of these poor country girls, and filled the world with their praises."

And yet the Association had developed to this point without the salutary, and seemingly essential, restraint of vows. The Filles de la Charité worked on from day to day, free to abandon their manner of life without the sin of apostasy or any breach of a distinct pledge. They had carried their services all over the country, bound, so far, by their own free-will alone. The idea of consecrating themselves by vow came to them naturally and spontaneously, after the fashion so dear to St. Vincent himself. He was discoursing to them one day about the joy it was to Our Lord when souls were generous enough to bind themselves irrevocably to Him in the service of " our masters, the poor," and his words were so full of unction that several of the Sisters were there and then filled with the desire to make vows. When the discourse was over, they asked him if they might do so. He smiled, and went on to enlarge on the beauty of such a consecration, and to explain to them the distinction between

solemn and simple vows, remarking that he never would authorise their taking solemn vows, as this would make nuns of them, " and a nun means the cloister, and gratings, and many other things incompatible with your vocation."

The impulse was, with his consent, carried out some days later by five of the Sisters, including Mlle. Legras. It was done very quietly, without any ceremonial ; they received Holy Communion and silently made their vow to serve Jesus in the person of the poor for one year. The title of Sœur Servante was bestowed on the superior some little while afterwards, and in the same unpremeditated way. St. Vincent went to visit a convent of Annonciades one day, and he heard the Sisters call their superior *Ancilla*. He came to see the Filles de Charité in the afternoon, and said, " I at once thought of you. From this forth you shall call your superior *Sœur Servante*."

He had never permitted them to adopt any costume of their own, but desired that they should retain the one common to the peasant women of the period, which consisted in a gown of coarse grey woollen stuff, and for headgear a close-fitting linen cap. Some of the country girls, who had been accustomed to wear kerchiefs or hoods over this, complained of the cold, and asked leave to wear a woollen veil ; but

St. Vincent, fearing, apparently, that anything like a veil might lead to a resemblance to nuns, desired them to adopt instead the somewhat complicated structure of stiff white linen which was then worn by the peasants in certain provinces, and which, though abandoned by the peasantry, has remained ever since the distinctive head-dress of the *Sœurs grises*. St. Vincent held so strongly to this primitive costume, characteristic of the humble origin of the Sisters, that when Louise proposed some slight modification for the sake of convenience, he would not hear of it. "Let no one," he said, "persuade you to make the least change in your grey gown and your *cornette*."

The Association, although it had grown to an important position both in the Church and the social community, had as yet received neither bull from the Holy See nor letters patent from the Crown; it was still a volunteer corps, free to disperse as it had come into life. St. Vincent had, so far, been its guide and director; but it had not bound itself to maintain the bond which united it to him, nor had he, on his side, engaged himself or his successors in the Mission to continue to direct it. Mlle. Legras had long been endeavouring to induce him to appoint the superiors of the Mission as superiors of the Filles de Charité, but he refused to assume this

responsibility until Providence should have made manifest the necessity of the step. As the Association grew, it became clear to him that some provision of this kind was necessary, and that if he died before it was made, the Association would find itself painfully and perilously isolated. He was advanced in years' and his health was broken with infirmities, and Mlle. Legras became more and more urgent with him to place the Filles de Charité under the permanent protection of the Fathers. " For God's sake," she writes to him, " let nothing be done, or left undone, which might furnish the faintest pretext for withdrawing the Society from the direction that God has given it ; for be assured the moment it ceases to be what it is, the sick poor will no longer be assisted, and then, I do believe, the will of God will no longer be in the midst of us."

St. Vincent agreed with all she said, but still he hesitated. This hesitation was very trying to Louise. Every time he fell ill—and these occasions grew more and more frequent—she trembled for the life of the Confraternity. It seemed as if his life were the foundation on which it rested, and that it must fall when he fell. St. Vincent, seeing, perhaps, a certain weakness of faith in these alarms, rebuked her, and prolonged the trial. " You are still too full of human

feeling," he writes, half playfully ; " you think everything is lost when I am ill. Oh, woman of little faith ! why have you not more trust and acquiescence in the guidance and example of Jesus Christ ? The Saviour of the world trusted to God, His Father, for the state of the whole Church, and you, for a handful of women manifestly raised up and brought together by His Providence, cannot trust, but think He will fail you ! Get along with you, Mademoiselle, and humble yourself very much before God ! "

Louise, no doubt, humbled herself as desired ; but she resolved at the same time on taking a bold step. The Abbé Portail, the confessor of the community, and St. Vincent's own right hand and coadjutor, was going to Rome, and Mlle. Legras entrusted him with a letter to the Holy Father, asking for his blessing on the Confraternity and a plenary indulgence for the Sisters at the hour of death. The Abbé Portail duly delivered the letter, and the answer proved how well known the work of the Filles de Charité was to the Father of the faithful. " Although," it said, " his Holiness is not in the habit of granting such an indulgence to so many persons at a time, he willingly derogates from his custom out of consideration for your efforts on behalf of the sick poor. All your Sisters at present living will partake of this grace."

Great was the joy amongst the Filles de Charite when this blessing came to them from Innocent X. Mlle. Legras was now more content to let St. Vincent and patience have their perfect work, and to wait for that sign of God's pleasure that was so slow in coming to him. Meantime, the burden of her twofold motherhood was pressing heavily upon her. The Foundling Asylum, which from the first had claimed a special share in her maternal love, was causing her serious uneasiness. The house of La Couche had been emptied many times of its unhappy little inmates, but it still remained open ; new victims continued daily to be taken there, and St. Vincent kept casting lots and carrying away babies as fast as he could. The journal of the community tells us with touching *naïvete* of the old Saint's persevering hunt after the little outcasts, and the Sisters' share in the work of mercy. Two of them always sat up of nights to be ready to take in any perishing little waif that was brought to them. At eleven o'clock one night St. Vincent arrived with a couple of babies in his pockets—" one about six days old, the other rather more. The poor little things were crying. Sister S—— gave them to a nurse."

" JAN. 25.—We waited late last night, but M. Vincent did not come. The streets are deep in snow."

"JAN. 26.—Poor M. Vincent came late, perished with the cold; he brought us a baby; this one has been weaned. It has fair hair, and a mark on its arm."

And so on, night after night, through the dark, cold winter. The journal describes "M. Vincent running at once to see the little ones," the moment he comes in. "It is wonderful to see his sweet ways with the little things, and the wee creatures listen to him as if they understood, as if he were their father. I saw him shed tears over a little dead baby. 'It is an angel,' he said, 'but it is hard not to see it any more.'"

This continued flow of babies necessitated a corresponding flow of money; and though the work was, perhaps, more popular in Paris than any other of the period, this very popularity was fatal to it. People thought that "everybody" gave, and the consequence was there came a moment when scarcely anybody gave. St. Vincent had appealed to the Queen, and Anne of Austria, herself recently a mother, made a generous response. She handed over for the present use of the foundlings the splendid Château de Bicetre, built by Charles V., and lately restored by Louis XIII.; and to this she added a grant of four thousand francs annually, which brought the revenue of the asylum up to twelve thousand francs. But the

expenses were forty thousand. and the difference had to be made up by St. Vincent and Mlle. Legras. With great difficulty they had staggered on under the burden up to this time; but when it became known that the Queen had so munificently endowed the house, public charity turned quite aside, and flowed in other directions, and Louise was left almost without help from any one. A moment came when her brave heart sank in despair. "I fear me that we shall have to give up the service of these little ones," she wrote to St. Vincent; "God's will be done! This magnificent place, which people imagine to be the property of the children, is a severe tax upon our time and resources."

She had borrowed money where it was possible, and was now in debt on all sides. The nurses were losing patience at being kept without pay, and were bringing back the babies, and the little creatures were pining away for want of their natural sustenance. Louise again and again emptied the purse of the community to help them; but the demand went on increasing, and she knew not where to turn. St. Vincent, broken-hearted, but full of trust in the ultimate help of Providence, called a meeting of the Dames de Charité, and addressed them in a discourse that has remained famous. He began by drawing a true and vivid picture of

the condition of the foundlings when the charity of his hearers came to their rescue. "And now, madames," he continued, "pity moved you to adopt these little creatures for your children; you became their mothers according to grace, when their natural mothers abandoned them. Consider if you, too, are now going to abandon them. Cease to be their mothers, and be their judges: their life and death are in your hands. I am going to take your votes: it is time to pronounce sentence on them, and to know if you mean to have no further mercy on them. They will live if you continue to care for them in your charity; they will infallibly die and perish if you forsake them. Experience leaves you no room for doubt on this point."

His voice broke again and again as he uttered this appeal, and the tears were streaming down his face before he ended it. His emotion was contagious. The sentence was immediately pronounced, and it was a merciful one. The compassion of the Dames de Charité was rekindled, and alms poured in plentifully. After a while, indeed, the flow slackened again, but never so completely as before. Meantime Mlle. Legras, taught by experience not to trust too much to these generous impulses, organised, while it lasted, a variety of ways and means for the support of the work. She got leave to place

poor-boxes in all the churches, and bound the Dames de Charité to make collections amongst their friends at stated periods, and opened a depot where the Filles de Charité made and sold sweetmeats and preserves for the benefit of the foundlings.

This peaceful battle that St. Vincent and his children were waging thus perseveringly against suffering and vice was suddenly broken in upon by a warfare of a very different kind. The *Fronde* had long been disturbing the peace of the country, but at last things came to a terrible crisis. When the President, Broussel, was arrested, the people rose in rebellion, and in a few hours Paris was bristling with twelve hundred barricades. The Queen, acting under Mazarin's advice, fled with the court to St. Germain, and blockaded Paris. The miseries of the population during the siege were too manifold and terrible to be described. Provisions soon ran short, and the starving and exasperated people made raids upon every public building where there was a chance of finding anything to eat. St. Vincent's heart was torn with compassion at the sight of all this misery, added to the calamities inflicted by the army of the Queen without and that of the *Fronde* within the city. The Queen held him in great affection, and he believed her incapable of doing anything

deliberately to afflict her people; he believed that she was misled by evil councillors, and that if he could see her and tell her the true state of things, she would draw away her troops and come to terms with the Parliament and the Princes who were at the head of the *Fronde*, and dismiss Mazarin, now odious to the whole country. He said nothing to anybody except his priests and Louise, so as not to compromise others, but stole out of Paris one dark morning in January (1648), and, after traversing many perils, for the soldiers were on the watch to pick off all unwary persons, he reached St. Germain at ten o'clock at night, foot-sore and hungry and exhausted. The Queen received him most kindly, and listened to all he had to say, and then sent him in to Mazarin for his answer. The minister heard the old priest with profound respect, and bowed him out without any answer at all. Sad in heart, and wearied in body, St. Vincent left St. Germain, but, instead of attempting to re-enter Paris, he took refuge in a neighbouring village, where he devoted himself for a while to the poor and the sick, and then went on to visit some of the Charities.

Meantime the report had spread that M. Vincent had gone to excite the Queen against the rebels. The mob, enraged, attacked St. Lazare, sacked the house from garret to cellar,

and carried off all they could find. The neighbouring abode of the Filles de Charité was not molested, but they lived in constant terror of a similar fate, identified as they were with St. Vincent in the minds of the infuriated populace. Sisters had flocked from every part of Paris, and even the environs, to take refuge at the mother-house when the siege became imminent, and Mlle. Legras had to find food and shelter for this immense community at a time when there was great difficulty in providing for the ordinary inmates of the house and for the foundlings. Everything was at famine price, and even the rich could not procure bread. Added to these material trials were the dangers that beset the Sisters by day and by night from the troops and from the malefactors, who ran riot amidst the terror and anarchy that prevailed throughout the city. In the midst of this reign of disorder, Louise, by nature so timid, rose above all fear, and by her calm self-possession inspired courage in those around her. She and her Sisters performed prodigies of helpfulness in nursing the wounded soldiers, who were being carried in to them all day, and very often through the night.

The *Fronde* came to an end, and St. Vincent returned to Paris ; but the cessation of civil war brought no truce to the anxieties and labours of

the Filles de Charité. The long war with Spain and Austria drew a heavy burden of distress in its wake, and, by driving the population towards the capital, added greatly to the disasters born of the civil war there. Whole villages had been burned down, churches plundered, and every kind of savagery committed by the invading armies. The fields had been left untilled; famine followed on the track of slaughter; after that came a terrible epidemic of small-pox, which had scarcely abated when the plague broke out. Never in the history of France, perhaps of any nation, did misery in so many forms, and from such an array of disastrous causes, prey upon an unhappy people. In Paris more especially the horrors of foreign invasion, civil war, famine, and pestilence met with all the desolating power of a united force, and turned the gay, dissolute city into a vast charnel-house and cemetery. At one moment the number of persons dying of hunger, over and above the normal pauper population of the city, was twenty thousand. And there was no opposing power to stem this torrent of evils. The charitable institutions of the state were temporarily paralysed for want of money: some swamped utterly in the general ruin, others on the brink of a similar fate; their financial resources being either stopped altogether, or so

diminished as to barely keep them alive. It was a state of things resembling more the chaos created by an earthquake than the result of social and political catastrophes.

In the environs of Paris things were, if possible, worse. The villages where the troops had encamped were shorn of their inhabitants, and the few who had survived the plague were starving. At Orange not one human being remained to tell the sad story of its woes. In many places the air was foul with the stench of dead bodies putrefying in the houses and out of doors; whole populations had died, mown down simultaneously by the plague, by dysentery, and by hunger, and the corpses were lying where they had fallen, in their homes, or out in the streets that were strewn with them like a field after a battle. Into these fearful pest-houses Mlle. Legras came with her companions in the wake of St. Vincent and his priests, the latter digging graves, not separate ones, but wide trenches to hold "scores of bodies together"; and while their stout arms were busy at this manual work of mercy, the white cornettes came and went, like doves fluttering about a charnel-house, and strove to give some touch of decency and reverence to the dead who were being consigned to their tardy grave.

The heroic courage which endowed them, even

physically, with a strength that seemed superhuman, drew the eyes of not alone France but Europe on the Filles de Charité, and made other nations long to transplant to their soil this plant of rare and precious growth. Amongst those most envious of the treasure was the Queen of Poland, Louise, daughter of the Duc de Nevers, who in her youth had been a Dame de Charité at the Hôtel Dieu, and seen the Filles de Charité at work there. War was raging in her husband's kingdom—savage war with Cossacks and Tartars, compared to which the slaughter of French and Spanish troops was humane; the passage of these barbarian soldiers was followed, as slaughter seems always to have been in those days, by the appearance of the plague, and so fearful were its ravages, unchecked by the aid of medical skill or the organised efforts of charity, that four hundred thousand souls perished in the kingdom. The Queen, appalled at the miseries of her people, sent out a cry of despair and supplication to Mlle. Legras for help. The latter was appalled, at first, at the idea of sending any of her children such a journey, to a country where they knew no one, and where they would only hear a strange language. But after the first natural recoil, her charity rose up to meet the call upon it. St. Vincent approved of her sending some of the Sisters, and when the

proposal was made to them there was such a unanimous offer for the perilous mission that Louise felt satisfied the spirit of charity had inspired the demand. "Oh! my children, what a grace is your vocation!" she exclaimed, moved with thankfulness to the very core of her heart; "who shall describe it! Not the angels: only God Himself may do it. May His mercy grant you the blessing which reaches, not from west to east, but from time to eternity!"

Three of the strongest and most devoted were chosen from amongst the crowd of generous candidates, and, with many tears, and lingering embraces from Louise, and tender blessings from St. Vincent, they set forth on the journey, fraught then with perils and fatigues that we can scarcely realise in these days of rapid and comfortable locomotion. They reached Warsaw in safety, and were welcomed by the Queen as ministering angels sent to her assistance. She would fain have kept one of the three near her own person to be her companion in the daily acts of charity which made her a model Christian queen; but, like Marie Denyse with the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, the daughter of St. Vincent burst into tears, and said she had left her country and her kindred to serve the poor as a poor servant, and not to be the companion of royalty. The Queen let her go,

and she soon after won the crown of martyrdom in attending the plague-stricken population of the city.

The war-dogs were soon again loose, and spreading death and desolation over the land—the armies of Russia and Sweden fighting for Poland like wild beasts over a prey; and here on these distant battle-fields we see for the first time the Sisters of Charity present amidst the din and slaughter of contending armies. It is no novel sight now; we have grown used to it. Just as certainly as the eagles come after the dead bodies, so certainly do we look for the white cornettes where wounds and suffering are. But in the seventeenth century it was a spectacle that made the world stand aghast with wonder and admiration.

What, we may ask, were three valiant women amongst so many, and with such a work to be done? They were the beacon lights that called others to arise and follow to the rescue; they were the pioneers who went before into the unexplored land of danger and death, and drew multitudes of generous souls after them, as the magnet draws the iron.

The fact of their presence on the field of battle was made known to St. Vincent through King Charles-Gustavus, who, lost in admiration at the sight, wrote to tell a brother prince in Paris

what wonders these humble Frenchwomen were performing before the assembled peoples.

"I am going to tell you something that will give you great joy," says the Saint, hastening to pass on the news to Louise. "Whoever heard the like—women having the courage to go into the midst of armies! Filles de la Charité, from the house in Paris, opposite St. Lazare, going to dress wounded men, not in France only, but in Poland! . . . Did you ever hear anything like this before—that maids went out to battle-fields on such an errand? For my part I never did."

When the little band of Sisters returned to Warsaw, the Queen founded a hospital and placed them in charge of it, and, stimulated by their example, went there daily herself, as did the ladies of her court, to help them in serving and tending the sick. Soon after this we see Anne of Austria begging Mlle. Legras to send some of her Sisters to attend the soldiers who had been wounded at the siege of Dunkirk.

Hearing marvellous accounts of their self-devotion and the ability they displayed in dressing wounds, &c., St. Vincent, again elated like a fond old father, writes to Mlle. Legras, "Did you ever know the like? For me, I know not of any confraternity that has done the things that God is doing through yours."

Two Sisters died at Calais of an infectious epidemic caught in attending the soldiers, and no sooner was the fact made known in Paris than twenty volunteered to fill up the vacancies.

But much as St. Vincent and Mlle. Legras rejoiced to see the Filles de Charité ready to carry their services far and wide, it became at times necessary to refuse the demands made for them. Those engaged in the hospitals were so over-burdened as to be themselves compelled to call out for mercy or for assistance. One of them, writing to Mlle. Legras, declares that she and her companions must break down unless relief is sent to them. "I am obliged to write these few lines to you at night," she says, "while sitting up with the sick, and going between times from one poor dying man to another. I go to one and say, 'My friend, lift up your heart to God; throw yourself on His mercy.' That done, I come back and write a few lines. Then I run to the other, and exhort him, 'Jesus! Mary! My God, I hope in Thee!' and back I come to my letter. In this way I write to you, with constant breaks, and with my mind terribly distracted. . . . I pray you humbly to send us another Sister!"

How few the labourers were in face of the harvest that was whitening on every side! And yet so boundless was their good will that every

fresh field opened to them found them ready for the service, with its increased toil and difficulties.

Five-and-twenty years had Louise and her companions now been working together. They had come to be recognised as one of the great forces struggling against evil—as one of the blessings of the age, raised up by Providence for its relief. Their energies had reached out to every department of human misery and pain and weakness; they were serving convicts in the hulks and in the prisons; they were tending sufferers in the hospitals, in the slums, in the madhouses; they were to be found on battle-fields; they were as ubiquitous as charity itself; and their Confraternity had developed to this point without having received a Bull from the Holy See recognising them as a regular community, and approving their Rule, and appointing their ecclesiastical superiors. Mlle. Legras had, as we have seen, obtained the blessing of the Pope, by stealing a march on St. Vincent; but no more distinct official approbation had followed. St. Vincent still hesitated about naming the Fathers of the Mission perpetual directors of the community, though he tacitly conceded the point. Louise, at last, determined again to take the matter into her own hands, and enlisted the influence of the

Queen for the furtherance of her aim. Anne of Austria wrote to the Holy See, imploring its solemn protection on this society of "village girls, who style themselves servants of the poor, and who are trained to this office by a virtuous widow."

St. Vincent, finding that the virtuous widow had again circumvented him, surrendered at last, fully and with a good grace. He drew up a petition to the Holy See, asking for its sanction on the Society and its Rule, and for the nomination of the superiors of the Mission as superiors of the Filles de Charité. He entrusted this document to Cardinal de Retz, who forwarded it to Rome. In due course he received an answer. It came on a gloomy winter's morning, the 16th of January 1655, but never in brightest midsummer did the sun so illuminate the earth, for Mlle. Legras and her Sisters, as on that day when St. Vincent walked in with the letter from Rome, and told them of its contents. Only a few were present, so it was decided that he should come the next day and read it to the assembled community. You may be sure that no one was absent. They were all too eager to hear the good news—to hear what his Holiness the Pope said to them. What he said was almost too grand to be true of such as they. These Marthas, who for a quarter of a century had been

coming and going through the desolate places, associating with sinners, yet untouched by scandal, busy with much serving and careful about many things for those whom none had cared for, were now admitted within the sacred circle of the Marys who had chosen the better part, and knelt at their Lord's feet in the silent life. The white cornettes that in the broad light of day went boldly forth, penetrating to every den where vice and suffering and foulest peril to soul and body congregated—the white cornettes were promoted to a place amongst the veils! They were to sail in their own special bark, piloted by their own captain, along with the grand and goodly ships that sail in the track of the Divine Fisherman, and cast their nets out into the deep at His bidding.

No wonder M. Vincent's voice shook, and that his eyes grew dim, as he read out the letter of the Holy See, and beheld the tears of joy that were flowing around him. The sister servant, whom the Queen praised and whose generation rose up and called blessed, her daughters, the simple village maids whom she had taught to read and write and serve, could hardly believe that so great an honour had indeed been conferred upon, "their humble little Confraternity." Louise was now an old woman, stricken with infirmities, wasted and weak, and suffering from

so many ills that St. Vincent had declared ten years before, " her life is sustained by a miracle ; and I know not how she lives, except by the force of Divine grace." She had long been anxious to lay aside the burden of governing the community, and her hope was that a new *Sœur Servante* would be appointed as soon as the Holy See nominated the Fathers of the Mission to direct it.

The first article of the statutes ruled that " the Sisters would elect from amongst themselves one to be superior for three years ; that this same one might be re-elected for another three years, but not for a longer term." Louise drew a breath of relief as she heard this clause ; but St. Vincent added, after a moment's silence, " This, *bien-entendu*, will only come into force after the death of Mademoiselle." Louise fell upon her knees and implored him not to set aside the rule, but to let her resign into worthier hands the trust she was no longer fit to hold. A murmur of counter-supplication rose from all present ; and St. Vincent, smiling compassionately at Louise, who was bathed in tears, raised her from the ground. " No, no," he said ; " you must not leave them yet. It is God's way to preserve by extraordinary means those who are necessary to the fulfilment of His designs ; and, if you consider, Mademoiselle, for

more than ten years you have ceased to live, at least in the ordinary sense of living."

Vanquished by obedience and by the joyful acclamations of her Sisters, Louise bowed her head and remained silent, while St. Vincent continued to read the statutes. They ruled that the members were henceforth to bear the name of "Sisters of Charity, Servants of the Poor." "What a beautiful title, and what a beautiful office!" exclaimed St. Vincent; "it is as if you were called servants of Jesus Christ!" He reminded them that what for five-and-twenty years they had been doing of their own free will, they were now to do with all the more zeal, because it was enjoined them by a Rule sanctioned by the Holy See; and after a fervent exhortation to them to love the poor and to remain always themselves poor and humble and obscure in the eyes of the world, he asked their pardon for all the faults he had committed in their service. "I will not pronounce any blessing to-day," he said, "because all these faults make me unworthy to do so; I will ask Our Lord Himself to bless you." He knelt down and kissed the ground in sign of humiliation. Whereupon Louise and her Sisters, moved to tears by the sight of his humility, knelt too, and entreated him to bless them according to his fatherly custom. After a while he consented,

and lifting up his hands he pronounced in Latin, with extraordinary fervour, the solemn formula of benediction, "May the blessing of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost descend and rest on you for ever! Amen."

After this touching and memorable conference, a deed was drawn up and signed by Louise de Marillac (Mlle. Legras) and thirty of the Sisters "who had learned to write," and finally by Vincent de Paul, who sealed it with the seal of the Mission, a figure of Christ, with His arms outstretched.

The old Saint, now in his eightieth year, continued to gather the Sisters of Charity around him as usual for the weekly conference, and discoursed to them in accents of melting eloquence of the love of God and the sweetness and glory of their vocation, and the blessedness of serving the poor. He would turn now and then to Mlle. Legras his dear furrowed face, that wore the candid smile of a little child, and humbly ask if "Mademoiselle was of this opinion," inviting her observations, and often putting her humility to a severe ordeal. It was not surprising that under such a master Louise learned to speak of the things of God with an eloquence that moved hearts. People said that "she spoke like M. Vincent," with the same force of conviction, and simplicity, and unction.

Her exhortations to the community breathed the spirit of St. Vincent in every word; there was the same plain, wholesome wisdom, the same utter disinterestedness, the same horror of worldliness, the same tender compassion for the poor. She continually reminded the Sisters that they were not to fancy themselves nuns any more now than before the Holy See sanctioned their "little Confraternity"; they were sisters and servants of the poor, and never could be anything else. Amongst the many things she recommends to them, none recur more frequently than cheerfulness. She who in her youth and strength had been subject to "a certain sensitive melancholy," that St. Vincent had always fought against, was now in her suffering old age the gayest of the gay. She was the life of the community at recreation, holding her sides with laughter when some Sister told a funny story or made a comical repartee, and "laughing till she cried" while a raw young country girl went blundering with her through a spelling lesson. "Let us be merry! let us serve God with a gay heart!" was the constant cry of her whose body was one pain from head to foot, and whose days were spent amidst every species of misery.

The spirit of poverty and simplicity presided over the spiritual as well as the material with

Mlle. Legras, and she would have the whole library of a Sister of Charity consist in *The Imitation of Christ* and a couple of prayer-books. The Rule demanded no dower with the Sisters, and we have seen how uncertain were the resources of the community; yet Mlle. Legras by her admirable government had brought it to its present expansion free from debt and independent. "You could hardly believe," writes St. Vincent, not long before her death, "to what an extent God blesses these excellent women wherever they go."

But the time was at hand when she who had planted this great tree was to be called to her rest Five years had elapsed since the great event of the Bull from Rome. The miracle to which St. Vincent ascribed her prolonged life was more wonderful than ever; her body was reduced to a mere shadow, and, despite the supernatural strength that upheld it, it fell at times from sheer exhaustion and inability to hold on its way. She was wasted with low fever, and by the barbarous remedy of bleeding which was continually applied to relieve it. Louise bore all these sufferings with the sweet gaiety of a child; the only thing that troubled her peace was the fear that she should die without having St. Vincent present to help her. Every suffering, every sacrifice, seemed light compared to this one.

St. Vincent, now eighty-five years old, had grown very feeble, and though he continued to observe the Rule of the community, rising at four, and fasting rigorously, he was no longer able to come down to the parlour for the weekly conferences. He walked with difficulty, leaning heavily on a stick ; and though his words were as impressive and glowing as ever, his voice was so faint as to be barely audible. He looked like a lamp that was burning out its last drop of oil.

Louise had been watching with prophetic fear these evidences of failing power, and when the moment came for her to lie down to die, she knew her fate ; she knew that she would be called upon to make the sacrifice she had dreaded above all others. In the beginning of her illness she kept writing little notes from her sick-bed to St. Vincent, asking for his blessing and for advice in her direction of the community, etc. At first he answered them, but after a while, mindful more of the perfection of her soul than the consolation of her heart, he ceased to write, and only sent her verbal answers. Louise accepted the trial with her wonted gentleness, and in one of her last notes to him she says, " I accept all for the love of God and in the way He ordains. . . . It seems to me that Our Lord enables me henceforth to bear everything in peace."

And yet many anxieties were weighing heavily on her heart. Her children in Poland were in grievous trouble. War had compelled them to fly to Germany, and they were there without home or protection. She was continually praying for them, and offering up her sufferings in their behalf. These sufferings were very severe, at times terrible even to witness; but they never drew from her a word of complaint; nor would she allow that she deserved any pity. "It is just," she would say, "that pain should abound where sin has abounded. God is just, and He is merciful even in His justice." When her Sisters expressed their sorrow at her being deprived of the consolations of St. Vincent's presence, she replied that she was only too thankful to have this sacrifice to make to God, adding, "It is the one agreeable thing I now have to offer Him."

When the end was supposed to be at hand, Michel came to her with his wife and child, and she blessed them tenderly, praying God Himself to bless them and detach their hearts from this world, so that they might live and die like true Christians. They knelt by her bedside, with the community, while Extreme Unction was being administered. But the end was not yet so near. After the last rites she rallied, and again made a general confession to the Abbé

Gobillon, and lingered for another month. Feeling that the hour was then come, she sent to St. Vincent to ask for a blessing and a word of encouragement written in his own hand; but St. Vincent would not have any human touch come to mar the perfect purity of her sacrifice. "Tell her," he said to the Abbé Gobillon, "that she is only going a little while before me. I hope soon to meet her in heaven." The Abbé was pained to inflict this last disappointment on her, knowing how anxiously she was hoping for the written message; but Louise smiled, and seemed quite content when he told her what St. Vincent had replied.

The Sisters of the Foundling Hospital came to get a last blessing, and she gave it to them with great fervour, repeating the words that she had spoken again and again during her illness to her children. "Be diligent in serving the poor. . . . Love the poor; honour them as you would Christ Himself, my children."

The Abbé Gobillon, thinking that the moment was come for applying the plenary indulgence which had been granted to Louise years ago by the Pope, was about to pronounce the formula, but she made a sign to him to wait, and murmured, "Not yet!" Presently she said, "Now it is time." The indulgence was applied, and after following the prayers with great devotion,

she became silent, her soul seemingly absorbed in the thought of God. From this contemplation she passed softly into His presence, falling asleep like a child. When it became evident that she had breathed her last, the Abbé Gobillon exclaimed, " Her soul has carried its baptismal innocence unstained to the presence of God."

The grief of the public that crowded to see her body proves what an opinion was entertained of the holiness of the humble servant of God. She was interred in the Chapel of the Visitation, and the Abbé Gobillon bears witness to a miraculous incident at her tomb, which was testified to by hundreds of trustworthy persons at the time. There arose from the tomb a cloud which exhaled a perfume like violets and iris, and so strong was this delicious fragrance that those who prayed on the tomb while it lasted carried it away in their clothes, the Sisters taking it thus to those who were sick in the infirmary. " I may add," says the Abbé Gobillon, " that after having taken all possible precautions to examine if this was not the effect of some natural cause, I have failed to discover any to which it can be attributed."

Louise died on the 15th of March (1660), and it was not until the end of July that St. Vincent was able to gather her sorrowing children round him, and speak words of comfort to them. The

meeting was solemn as a last farewell. St. Vincent was himself a dying man, and they felt this was probably the last time they should see him in their midst. He was too feeble to stand, and when he strove to speak his voice trembled and broke into weeping. With a great effort he overcame his emotion, and called up the elders among Mlle. Legras' companions to say what they had "witnessed of the virtues of this great servant of God." One by one they stood forth, and, struggling with their tears, bore witness to her humility, her love of prayer, her love of poverty, her love of the poor. At some more than usually beautiful example of her tenderness for the poor, St. Vincent would raise up his hands and give praise to God. When all in turn had spoken, he said a few words, and blessed the community, and they passed out from his presence. It was not long before he rejoined in heaven her who had shared and solaced so many of his labours on earth.

THE END

Queen by Right Divine

"Sœur Rosalie and her angel guard held to their ranks, stoutly expostulating with the infuriated rioters."

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QUEEN BY RIGHT DIVINE

I

Jeanne Rendu

On the 7th of September, 1787, in a quiet hamlet situated in Gex, under the shadow of the Jura hills, a little child was born, who was destined to be a light and a consolation to her people after the troubled times then dawning upon France.

The family of Jeanne Rendu sprang from that old *bourgeoisie* which had been the mainspring of the nation, and the framework on which many of its social institutions rested in those centuries when the *burgesses* held their privileges, and exercised them as jealously as the nobles did theirs. The Rendus had been settled in Gex since the sixteenth century, and had given many distinguished men—ecclesiastics, notaries and magistrates—to France in remote times, and made a name for the family it had honourably maintained up to the period when it was about to receive from a woman a new and incomparable lustre.

Jeanne Rendu was the eldest of three daughters, who were brought up by a widowed mother in the patriarchal habits which reigned in those sequestered valleys up to the eve of the Revolution. In those days the daughters of well-to-do landowners went, like Rebecca, to the well with their pitchers, while the sons of the family drove their flocks up the heights, making the hills echo to the sound of canticles that were answered from the valley beneath. Jeanne Rendu grew up in this healthy atmosphere. But though the doctrines of the Revolution had not penetrated into Gex, its action had, and the child was early initiated into the perils that awaited those who stood true to their faith and loyal to their friends. Every priest was proscribed. It was death to assist him in his flight or to give him shelter, and to assist at Mass was to incur great risk to life. Madame Rendu was not a woman to be daunted by these perils from doing her duty to God or man. When her friends were in danger, she opened her door to them in defiance of the Convention, though not without such precautions as reasonable prudence suggested.

Jeanne was seven years old when a strange servant, named Pierre, entered the family. The child noticed that he was treated with extraordinary consideration, and that there was a sort

of mystery about him. When any one was present he was addressed and treated as a servant; but as soon as they were alone, Madame Rendu's manner and that of her friend changed; Pierre was given the first place, and spoken to with the utmost deference. The child observed that conversations were carried on in a low voice, and dropped on the entrance of a stranger; sometimes Pierre would disappear, and the door would be locked behind him. All this was out of keeping with the strict principles of truth and straightforward simplicity that Madame Rendu tried to convey to her children, and Jeanne's little brain began to be severely exercised on the subject.

At last one night, or rather early one winter's morning, she awoke, and through the carefully-closed curtains of her bed she descried lights on a table, and before it Pierre, dressed as a priest, and saying Mass. She remained perfectly quiet and no one knew that she had seen anything; but some days later, her mother being angry, and about to punish her for some naughtiness, Jeanne said, " Take care, or else I will tell that Pierre is not Pierre ! "

Madame Rendu had no alternative but to take the child into her confidence, and try to make her understand the consequences of an indiscreet word; for Pierre was, in fact, no other than the

Bishop of Annecy. Jeanne promised to keep the secret, and shortly after she received a terrible example of the danger of provoking the fury of that Government of terror, whose arm had reached to their secluded valley. A cousin of her mother's was shot in the market-place because he refused to betray to the profanation of the rabble the hiding-place of the relics of St. Francis of Sales, which had been committed to his keeping.

It was during these days of shuddering flights and hairbreadth rescues, and massacres and heroic martyrdoms, that Jeanne was prepared for her first Communion by the Curé of Lancrans, who, like an apostle of the early Church, went about amongst his flock, in hourly peril of his life, carrying the Sacraments to the dying, and celebrating Mass in the woods and in dark holes and corners. The child's first Communion was like a scene in the Catacombs—the cellar, the proscribed priest uttering a few burning words in low tones; no music, no lights or flowers, but the flame of a faith stronger than death illuminating the subterranean retreat, where the mother and sisters gathered round the communicant, trembling at every sound that threatened discovery.

When the violence of the Revolution had subsided, Jeanne was sent to school to the Ursuline

Convent. She was a bright mischief-loving child, full of spirit and with a will of her own.

" I want to do all my naughtiness now," she would say, " so as to get rid of it by the time I come to the age of reason."

This desirable date seems to have come rather late, for we hear of her being in perpetual scrapes, throwing her dolls over the garden-wall, and trying the patience of the nuns in many ways, up to the advanced age of twelve. Madame Rendu does not appear to have been alarmed at these mature signs of perversity in her daughter. She had a presentiment, before the child was born, that she would be a child of benediction, and from her earliest years Jeanne gave one sign that justified these prophetic hopes—she loved the poor with an extraordinary tenderness. Her reverence for them was instinctive. If she was in one of her wilful, imperious moods, and a poor person appeared, her maner changed at once ; she ceased arguing or quarrelling, and turned to address the beggar with engaging gentleness. If she saw a beggar passing on the road, she would run out to meet him, and, taking him by the hand, lead him into the house and run to fetch him food, her manner all the time displaying the utmost affection and respect. Many a time she emptied her little purse into his hand, shyly, as if she were ashamed of being so bold.

Her tenderness to the poor included the servants in her mother's house, and the workmen who came there for one purpose or another. She pitied them, and was fond of trying to help them, especially when she could do so unperceived; her attempts to lighten their labour being occasionally more amusing than efficient.

With the exception of this distinct characteristic of holiness, the child was by no means a little paragon. Her impatience and self-will were so great that she could not bear the least contradiction; sometimes a mere word was enough to put the little lady in a passion. From the time of her first Communion, however, she had begun seriously to fight against this natural defect, and with such success that while still very young she became a model of gentleness, and attained in a high degree that angelic sweetness which expressed itself in her countenance, and, in later years, proved one of her most irresistible charms.

Jeanne's piety developed so rapidly during her stay amongst the Ursuline nuns that they were convinced the child was destined to remain with them; but she never felt the least attraction to the Order, although warmly attached to the Sisters. Her heart was drawn to the sick in the hospital, to the poor, shivering and starving in the streets and garrets. She used to say in

after years that her vocation was sung to her accidentally while she was yet a child. She one day heard a girl singing a sort of canticle, in which the life of the Daughter of St. Vincent was described and glorified; the last verse promising that her ornaments should be spits and insults, and her crown the vermin that crawled from the death-beds of the poor. Jeanne was fascinated, as she afterwards declared, by this cry from the Cross, so unconsciously addressed to her, and from that moment the verse kept ringing in her ears with a force and persistence that she felt to be prophetic.

She was not fifteen when she left school and returned to her mother's house. There was a hospital near at hand, and she felt at once, on seeing the service of the Sisters there, that she had found out her true vocation. It was scarcely a vocation in the sense of a deliberate choice, for the service of the poor had been as natural to her from her earliest childhood, as impatience and the love of her own will had been until the grace of God conquered these defects. It was a sharp personal pain to her to witness their sufferings and privations; the sight drew tears from her and made her unhappy, troubling her childish play, and later making the more serious occupations of youth distasteful to her, and its amusements wearisome and repulsive.

When she was enjoying some pleasure, the remembrance of some poor sufferer in the hospital or in a fireless garret would smite her with a sudden pang, checking her merriment, and sometimes taking away her power to swallow the food set before her at her mother's bountiful table. She was driven to help them out of sheer selfishness, she would say, merely to alleviate her own discomfort, until the desire to devote her life wholly to their service grew too vehement to be resisted, and Jeanne implored her mother to let her join the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul.

The blow was none the less terrible to Madame Rendu for having been long expected. She combated the child's resolution at first, and begged her to wait until she was sixteen, and had taken some little time to consider the step. When her sixteenth birthday came, and Jeanne persisted in her desire, Madame Rendu bowed her head, and made her sacrifice courageously. Jeanne took leave of her home, and, accompanied by the brave mother, set out for Paris towards the end of May 1802, went straight to the Rue du Vieux Colombier, and knocked at the door of the Sisters of Charity.

Her vocation, notwithstanding the irresistible attraction of grace which made all things easy, was in one respect eminently a vocation of sacri-

fice. She was delicate in health, and so sensitive to atmospheric influences that the least change in the weather affected her. She was, moreover, morbidly nervous : the sight of a spider made her almost faint, and the neighbourhood of a graveyard would keep her awake at night. Immediately after she entered the novitiate, she was told to wash and lay out a dead body : we may imagine what it cost her to obey ; it seemed to her that she must die of fright in performing the office. She did not die of it, but the struggle of the spirit against the terrors and the shrinkings of the flesh were so severe that nature succumbed, and at the end of a few months she fell seriously ill, and was removed to the Rue Francs Bourgeois.

The Sisters of the Rue Francs Bourgeois had remained undisturbed through the Reign of Terror. They had put aside their religious habit, but continued the community life, and went about in a secular dress ; everybody knew they were *les Sœurs grises*, but even the Communards of the day respected the transparent disguise, and their convent was never violated, nor were they themselves in any way molested.

Jeanne soon won the hearts of the community, not only by her angelic piety, but by the grace and brightness of her youth. She was very pretty, which spoiled nothing ; her clear brown

eyes shone with the light of her pure soul, and the joy and innocence of her heart lent a charm to her countenance and manner that fascinated the elder nuns. Jeanne, in the spring-time of her sixteen summers, seemed to them, what she was in truth, a child ; they used to say of her, " Charity is a perfect passion with that child ; she makes us all do just as she likes." It was not that she tried to have her own way as in the old days ; so perfect was her surrender of her will, and her strict observance of the rule throughout her novitiate, that Sœur Tardy, a mistress of rare discernment, who had formed the young novice, said to her Mother-General : " You will give my little Rendu the habit, and then, I pray you, leave her to me."

II

Sœur Rosalie

Jeanne was professed under the name of Sœur Rosalie, and sent immediately after her profession to the house in the Faubourg St. Marceau.

The Faubourg St. Marceau at that time was on the outskirts of civilisation, the chosen home of poverty in its darkest and most hopeless form. Nearly a hundred years later, it is so still, for there are no rich, or even well-to-do, inhabitants

amongst the destitute population, so that the poor are poorer there than elsewhere ; but then the God-forsaken look of the place and its utter, unredeemed wretchedness were greater than we can now conceive. There was no market, there were no shops, no centres of trade of any description. The people found work in the more distant quarters, and when the day was over they came back like animals to their lairs for the night, and to such rest and food as their sordid, miserable homes supplied.

The Faubourg St. Marceau had gained a dark notoriety in the bloody days of the Terror, and, like a dangerous ruffian wounded in a drunken brawl, it was still cowering in its squalid isolation, savage and sulky, prostrate but not conquered, breathing vengeance against society, without help in the present, or hope in the future. What faith and moral life had survived its long inheritance of starvation and misery had been killed in the fierce strife which had set class against class, had turned the old bulwarks of society into barricades for the Revolution, and had left nothing but smoking ruins to mark its passage.

The narrow, crooked streets crawled in and out of one another, as if to choke out air and the entrance of any better life, packing the inhabitants together so as to foster every moral and

physical disease, until humanity sank so low that it ceased to feel its own degradation. The houses were in a ruinous condition ; they held together while they could, and, when neglect and decay reached a given point, they fell, sometimes suddenly with a crash and loss of life, but mostly crumbling away, and accumulating ruins, and adding to the squalor and desolation of the place. Whole rows of houses stood windowless and doorless ; here and there the roof had fallen in, and gave access by turns to snow and rain and scorching heat. In these abodes, most of which were too damp and airless to serve for cattle, whole families were huddled *pêle-mêle* in one room ; seething together in the heat, shivering together in the cold, starving together in all seasons.

Such was the condition of their bodies. As to that of their souls, it was in no way better. The generality of them hardly knew that they had a soul, neither did they know that they had a God ; He had been abolished by the Revolution ; they had not been taught to pray to Him ; what vague notions of Him had been transmitted to them by their fathers had been swept away with the altar where He had been worshipped under that tyrannical old *régime* that was now a thing of the past. Only here and there a woman was still to be found who said her prayers.

The children were taught what their fathers preached in the wine-shops, and practised on the barricades, and here their education ended. Such was the Faubourg St. Marceau when Sœur Rosalie, clothed in all the graces of her spring-time, came to it with her message of courage and compassion, bearing in her virgin heart the wonder-working forces of a mother's love, the redeeming power of a mother's self-sacrifice, the Christ-like graces and divine blessings that every mother holds for the children that God has given her to love, to labour for, and to save.

In spite of her only eighteen summers and her utter inexperience, perhaps rather because of them, she was not dismayed by the work that lay before her. In truth, it was a battle-field to which her Lord had sent her ; but she surveyed it undaunted. Love had already banished fear from her young heart, and she advanced to the fight with the enthusiasm of youth and its sweet hopefulness and heavenly illusions. Her first impulse, on beholding the loathsome sink of vice and ignorance and poverty that was hence-forth to be her *patrie*, as she called the ill-famed faubourg, was to give thanks to God for having heard her prayer, and permitted her to dedicate her service from the first to the most wretched and abandoned of her fellow-creatures.

It was evident that God alone was to be her

helper in this mission. There was no one else to look to. She was a stranger in Paris, with no acquaintances, rich or otherwise, to call upon for assistance. The charitable institutions which had been broken up by the Revolution were still in ruins and their forces dispersed, and the State had not as yet set about restoring them. Sœur Rosalie came just as the administration were awaking to the necessity of doing something. They saw at once that she was the very person they wanted, and that they could not serve the interests of the destitute population better than by placing at her disposal the resources allotted to them by the State. They took counsel with the youthful nun, and were amazed at the maturity of her judgment, her shrewd common sense, and her practical acquaintance with the needs and difficulties of the population around her. She soon became the guiding spirit of the adminstration, the confidential friend and adviser of every member of it. They made her at once their agent, employed her as their right hand in everything connected with the use and distribution of the funds at their command.

This was a great point gained to begin with. But her influence over the inhabitants themselves was destined to be her best help, and to constitute her real sovereignty. The poor have keen instincts in judging those who come to help them,

and they detected at once that the pretty, bright-eyed young *Sœur* was one of those royal-hearted women who are born to rule over their fellow-creatures by the right divine of love. This was the secret of her power—she loved them; loved them with that love that is born of pity, and so most resembles the love with which God loves us all. They felt that God had sent them a mother, that best representative of His Providence on earth, and they surrendered themselves to her like children. Not always, indeed, like good children. The ignorant, besotted pariahs did not change their natures or their characters at the bidding of the young queen, who bent her brown eyes on them from under her white *cornette*, but they gave her their good will, and made her welcome in their midst; above all, they believed in her love for them, and this grandest conquest that one soul can achieve over another enthroned Sœur Rosalie as Queen of the Faubourg St. Marceau.

She set to work to make acquaintance with her subjects, first in their own homes, climbing up their staircases, which required no little dexterity to travel up and down without accident; and then she invited them to come and see her. They accepted the invitation with such *empressement* that soon the little parlour where she held her court was filled all the day

long, and the convent in the Rue de l'Epée de Bois came to be more their house than hers. She was soon the *confidante* and intimate friend of the whole community. Wives and husbands came to her with their quarrels and conjugal grievances; fathers and mothers with their complaints of refractory sons and daughters; young girls confided their love-affairs to her; young men sought her advice and help in various ways; the very children brought their little sorrows and disappointments to "our mother," as they took to calling her. The most ill-conducted among them came to her without fear; however bad their character, she never made them feel that she was ashamed of their acquaintance, or that they were a whit less welcome than their better-behaved neighbours. But she never minced matters with them. She scolded them soundly when they deserved it, and they took a scolding as respectfully, if not as gladly, as they did encouragement or help. They soon found out that her severity never held out long against her inexhaustible tenderness and compassion. She raged fierce war against drunkenness, but the drunkards discovered that there was a very soft corner in her heart even for them. One of the number, an old offender, who was in the habit of taking the pledge and breaking it several times a month, and whose

blanket, which had been given him by Sœur Rosalie, had been repeatedly redeemed by her from the pawn-office, was at last turned away by the Sisters when he came to ask for help. The winter set in suddenly, and one bitterly cold morning the drunkard presented himself again, and asked for the loan of a blanket. The Sisters refused it, and he went away ; but that night, as Sœur Rosalie lay perishing in her own bed, the thought of the poor man who was lying in the cold without any blanket smote her to the heart, and banished sleep from her eyes. The next morning she sent off a nun with a blanket to him, remarking apologetically, " so that both of us may be able to sleep to-night."

The sufferings of the poor were personal to her, as if they had been those of her own flesh and blood. The thought of their perishing from cold often prevented her enjoying the warmth of a fire, and she would keep away from it with a sense of satisfaction, sharing voluntarily the privation they were enduring from necessity. Many a time she arose from dinner leaving her food almost untouched, and, in answer to the inquiries of the Sisters whether she was ill, replied, " No ; but the thought of those poor creatures that I saw this morning in their garret chokes it in my throat. I can't swallow a mouthful till I have taken them something."

Her tenderness for the poor increased tenfold when sickness came and added its culminating trial to the hardships that already pressed upon them. She ran to their bedside, and only the strong sense of duty, calling her to more urgent claims, could induce her to leave them. Her heart drew her to the sick-room and held her there, and hurried her back again, as if the sufferer had been her own near kith and kin. Her anxiety about them became contagious, and not only the community, but her friends outside, were drawn into sympathy with her distress, until the miserable cellar, or the garret, or the bed in the *chambrée** where a dozen or more were huddled together, became the centre of widely diffused interest and kindness. She waylaid the doctors, and would so move them, that they would keep a rich patient waiting, or risk being late at a consultation, to go to one of her poor people, and would return and watch the case out of sheer pity for Sœur Rosalie. No wonder that she wrought real miracles amongst the poor, and that many an unforeseen recovery was attributed to her presence in the sick-room. She carried light and hope with her into the dark places, and, such was the power of her maternal love, her entrance often caused a sudden change in the moral condition of the

* A room let out in beds is called a Chambrée.

seemingly dying person, which marked the crisis, and turned the scales from death to life. The confidence that " Notre Mère " inspired throughout the entire Quartier Mouffetard was so boundless that they believed her capable of anything ; and if, now and then, they gave her credit for working a miracle, no one was inclined to gainsay them.

A lady whose help she had enlisted from one of the respectable quarters of the city came to her one day in an agony of distress. " Ma Mère," she said, " our child is dying ! The doctors can do nothing. Come you and save him ! Come and pray over him ! "

Sœur Rosalie in her humility cried out at the idea that her prayers could prevail where science and the prayers of a mother failed ; but, yielding out of pity to the poor lady's entreaties, she went with her, and, kneeling by the cradle where the child lay on the point of death, she sent up her heart in one of those prayers that take Heaven by storm and wrest from God one of those answers that we call miracles. The child suddenly called out, gave signs of consciousness, and in a few days was in full convalescence. He was destined after many a long year, as we shall see, to pay back his debt to Sœur Rosalie on an occasion which she little dreamed could ever have presented itself.

Her tenderness for the sick did not stop short when the extremity of illness was passed. As soon as they entered on the period of convalescence, which is often a time of greater suffering than that of the actual illness, she had a thousand little delicate cares for them ; she would go about to borrow or beg a comfortable armchair, a warm dressing-gown, a curtain to shelter them from draughts or the light ; if she received a present of fruit, or some sweetmeat, she would carry it off with childlike glee to her invalids, and enjoy their pleasure in partaking of the dainty as a mother might.

But nowhere did Sœur Rosalie's divine gift of sympathy shine out with such efficacy as when death approached, and nothing remained to be done but to make ready for his summons, and prepare the victim for the last awful passage. Sœur Rosalie had many a hard fight for it with the dying soul, and there are innumerable instances of her having won triumphs that might be indeed called miracles, miracles of God's grace and mercy ; there is no instance on record of her having been defeated, and compelled to go away sorrowful from one of these momentous battles. The door of the worst den in the faubourg opened to the priest when Sœur Rosalie led him there ; but it sometimes needed all her influence to make his ministry acceptable.

A man lay dying in dogged impiety. The priest had been by his bedside for a long time, striving in vain to move his sullen obstinacy; but he persisted in saying that he did not want God—he did not believe in Him. At last the priest said, "I will go for Sœur Rosalie." "Ah, I believe in her!" exclaimed the dying man, and the hard expression of his face relaxed. Sœur Rosalie was sent for, and before she left him he had become as docile as a child, and was calling out humbly for the priest to come back. He made a good confession, and died contrite.

Another man, whose life had been a scandal even in that godless region, was stricken with a mortal illness. He had been notorious amongst the worst rioters during the Revolution, and many remembered seeing his hands dyed with blood from the slaughter of "the aristocrats." There was no depth of crime into which he had not plunged; even his worst comrades feared him; and, now that he was dying, no one dared go near him. Sœur Rosalie, hearing how it was, went to him at once, installed herself by his bedside, and nursed him with the devotion of a daughter, never speaking of his soul, but doing her utmost for his bodily sufferings, and circumventing him with her sweet wiles and ways, until by degrees, with an angelic tact all her own, she began to hint at the world that he

was going to, where things were to be better than in this. He took no offence at first, but, when she at last spoke of confession and M. le Curé, he grew savage, and bade her leave him. Instead of obeying, she went on her knees, and, with the tears streaming from her beautiful brown eyes, she prayed him to have pity on her, to spare her the life-long sorrow of seeing him die impenitent, till at last she so melted him by the eloquence of her burning charity that his hard eyes grew moist, and he told her to go and fetch the curé. He made his confession, and afterwards told Sœur Rosalie that he owed his conversion to her prayers and to the compassion of the Blessed Virgin. He said that one day, during the Terror, he had seen a batch of victims going to the guillotine, singing a hymn to the Queen of Martrys. The words, made more striking by the circumstance, thrilled him strangely and impressed themselves on his memory, and ever after he felt impelled to recite the hymn daily, nor did he ever omit it throughout his long career of violence and vice. "I could not help myself," he said, "something stronger than my will seemed to force me to say it every day." He repeated it with his dying breath, his eyes fixed on the crucifix that Sœur Rosalie held up to him.

The poor sometimes left her strange com-

missions when they were dying. The Faubourg St. Marceau is the central quarter of the rag and bone trade—the *chiffonniers*, who live by turning up dust-heaps all over the city. They are a race apart, and their chronicles furnish many a curious legend not devoid of a certain picturesque romance. Some of them grow rich. One of these Fortunatuses, who was known to Sœur Rosalie by evil repute, was dying in a garret alone; he had driven away his wife, after treating her with brutality for years; the only living being in whom he showed any human interest was his daughter, who had been to the Sisters' school. When he felt the hand of death upon him, he sent for Sœur Rosalie.

"Ma Mère," he said, "I am going to die, and I wish you to take the money I have saved for *la petite*, and keep it for her till she is old enough to take care of it herself."

He pulled out from under his straw bed a parcel, which contained notes and gold to the amount of fifteen thousand francs. Sœur Rosalie explained to him that she could not take so serious a trust, and that she must give it to a notary, adding that she knew one, a friend of hers, who would receive it and take care of it for him. "But before I go to fetch him," she said, "I must go for the priest, in order that you may receive the Sacraments, and die at

peace with God."

"Never mind the priest," replied the rag-and-bone man confidently; "whatever has to be done in that line, you can do; you know more about God than M. le Curé, I'll be bound. Talk to me about Him, and I'll say any prayer you like."

Sœur Rosalie had great difficulty in making him understand that this would not do, and that she was no more a priest than a notary. Finally, they compromised it: she consented to take charge of the money, on condition that he let the priest come and see him. When he had made his confession, she went off in search of his wife, and the old man received her, and made her a tardy apology for his evil behaviour.

III

Servant of the Poor

At the age of twenty-eight, Sœur Rosalie was named superioress of the house in the Rue de l'Epée de Bois, after ten years' service there. The members of the administration showed their personal satisfaction in the appointment by an attention which touched her deeply: they made her a present of a trousseau. The present was as unexpected as it was unprecedented, and the young superioress took such care of it, that, at

the time of her death, fifty years later, she was still wearing some of the articles of that trousseau.

The face of the wicked faubourg was gradually changing under her rule and influence, and, though it was not growing beautiful, it was at least growing less hideous. The houses instinctively made an attempt, like their occupants, to " clean themselves " in her honour. The denizens of the *chambrée*, who noticed that she lost her breath when the foul air of the place first seized her, took to opening the window, or the door, if it happened to be the only ventilator, so as to renew the atmosphere before her next visit.

Though the spectacle that met her daily in these *chambrées* was revolting to her refined delicacy, as well as harrowing to her sensitive heart, she never let the poor feel that she suffered. She would sit and talk to them with seemingly great pleasure in a loft with the roof sloping down so as to make it impossible to stand upright many steps beyond the entrance, and where some twelve or twenty human beings, huddled together on the floor at night, had poisoned the little air there was, and made it horrible to inhale. The rooms lower down were often not much better ; for in proportion to their space they were still more densely peopled, the lodgers crowded together as closely as they could pack

men, women and children—like so many beasts.

The sight of the children in those wretched abodes was above all pitiable. The healthier among them drew together and played at some games that childhood invents to cheat its own joylessness; the sickly ones sat on the floor, looking before them with that stupefied gaze which is the expression of the worst of human woes, the absence of hope. Yet these represented the more fortunate of the little ones; for they, at least, had a shelter, and were owned by some one. Outside these, there was a floating population of children who had neither homes nor families; they sprang up no one saw whence, and grew up uncared for, feeding on what refuse they could pick up in the streets, or pilfer from stalls and the carts of itinerant vendors, sleeping at night under a bridge or a doorway like stray cats and dogs, but less independent than these to choose their lodging, for they were liable to be shaken up by the police and told to move on, or else, if he were a zealous official, to be marched off to the lock-up. The prisons of Paris are full of "gaol-birds" whose first acquaintance with their dismal hospitality began in this way. The offspring of the lowest class of poor in the Faubourg St. Marceau graduated for the gaol and the hulks and the guillotine, just as the children of

gentlemen graduate for the professions and the public service. It was no light thing to undertake the regeneration of such a race. They were little better than savages. Born of criminal and besotted parents, they inherited every moral and physical disease, and carried their evil inheritance in their faces; many of them looked more like animals than human beings with souls, and repelled every one who beheld them. But they never repelled Sœur Rosalie. Hers was the love of a mother; and like a true mother, the more repulsive and ill-favoured the child, the more tenderly her heart yearned to it.

One of her first cares on coming to the faubourg had been to found a *crèche*. Here, the babies whose parents were compelled to leave them during the day while they went to their work were taken in. There was a great outcry at first that the *crèche* was going to encourage mothers to abandon their offspring; but Sœur Rosalie held on her way, and took in the babies, trusting to the mother's love—the one solitary love that God did not see necessary to enforce by a command or even guard by a counsel—to defend its own prerogative and justify her faith in it. And the mothers justified her. The babies were washed and better cared for because Sœur Rosalie would see them. It was one of her treats to go to the *crèche* of an

afternoon and play with the babies. Her appearance was the signal for a general commotion; there was crowing and cooing from the cradles; the larger babies rolling on the floor or toddling about on rickety legs, and clamouring to be kissed; babies crying and wanting to be comforted. It was wonderful, the Sisters used to say, how the babies "took to her." One day she was passing by a cot where a little creature that had been picked up in the streets that morning sat sucking its thumb; it was only there for the day, waiting to be taken to the Foundling Hospital; but, on seeing Sœur Rosalie it held out its small arms and began to cry, *Maman! maman!* and when she took it up, it clung to her so that there was no getting it to let go.

"You see, it calls me *mamma*," she said at last; "how can I let it be sent away? We must keep it here, poor little thing!" And so she did, and adopted it and watched over it like a true mother during the mercifully short space of its life.

She established infant schools with wonderful success. The municipality discovered that she had a genius for training children, and referred to her in all matters connected with the schools in the district. When it was proposed to open *internats*—schools where the children are lodged

and boarded—Sœur Rosalie opposed the scheme on the ground that *internats* were not suited to a district where life was so hard and poverty so extreme. A wealthy benefactor offered to defray the expenses of an *internat;* but she replied, " It is not the expense that deters me ; it is that I am convinced that the gentle rule of the Sisters would unfit the children for the rough life and hard ways that await them with their parents afterwards. It would disgust them with the people they are destined to live with, and make their homes unbearable to them."

The effect of the day-school, on the contrary, was, she maintained, wholly beneficial. It did not unfit the children for the comfortless bed, the bare walls, the scant, coarse fare, the troublesome task of looking after the baby brother or sister. The children, moreover, carried home to their parents at night the lessons they had been taught in the day, and the parents became interested in what they learned, and by degrees fell unconsciously under the influence and direction of the Sisters themselves. Thus the children became little apostles in their homes ; the drunken father would keep sober on Sunday morning that he might go with *la petite* to Mass, and the mother would wash herself and yield to the child's persistent assurance that the Sisters had promised that " Mamma would

take her to Mass when she was good."

This was the education Sœur Rosalie aimed at chiefly. She cared very little for the book-learning the children acquired in the schools, compared with the moral effect of the training on themselves and their parents. The variety of claims that divided her time did not allow of her teaching personally in the classes; but through her busiest years, when the care of the sick and the receiving of hundreds of persons in the afternoon, an enormous correspondence, and the government of the community, made it a very miracle how she got through each day's work, she made a point of visiting the classes, and making the round of the desks, inspecting the work and the copy-books, and distributing rebuke and encouragement with that rare tact and *à propos* which acted better that punishment or reward.

If she met a child in the street during school-hours, she inquired at once why it was not at school; and, if the fault lay with the parents, she went straight off to them, and pleaded for the child, sometimes in a tone of severity, which seldom failed of the desired effect. If it happened that the child's absence arose from there being no vacant place in the school, she would take the little one by the hand, and, entering the class, say, " It seems there is no

room for this poor little thing. She is so small, you might surely slip her in amongst you. *Voyons!* If you could squeeze her in somehow, it would make me very happy, my children." Immediately there was a general movement along the benches, and an assurance from every side that there was plenty of room.

The want of space in this first school induced Sœur Rosalie to collect money amongst her friends to open a second, which she did in the Rue du Banquier, and, thanks to her influence, the municipality of Paris consented to take charge of it, the classes being intrusted to the Sisters. An *ouvroir* was attached to it, where manual work of various kinds was taught by the Sisters.

These ordinary duties of the Sister of Charity which so amply filled the life of Sœur Rosalie did not suffice for her all-embracing sympathies and the inexhaustible zeal of her soul. The field of labour which demanded her exertions in the Quartier Mouffetard alone was enough to overpower a less vigorous mind, but her capacious heart stretched out its helpful sympathies far beyond it. We have seen that she came to the Rue de l'Epée de Bois a total stranger, not only in that district, but in Paris, yet it was not long before she had a larger acquaintance than the most fashionable lady in the great city. It came to be known that a very remarkable woman

was living in the Faubourg St. Marceau, and people went to make her acquiantance on one pretext or another, until soon Sœur Rosalie held a court that was more assiduously attended than that of any princess in Europe. Like a true princess, she exercised the royal prerogative of receiving visits without returning them; but the time she devoted to these receptions, and the amount of kindness, of active help and salutary consolation that flowed from them, form one of the most striking facts of her life.

When charity in its heavenly character of personal service of the poor, and tender realisation of their sufferings and participation in them, takes blessed possession of a soul, it is apt to become rather exclusive, to shut out other claims, to make us callous, for instance, to the sufferings of the rich as deserving no pity compared with those of the poor. Here again, love—a wider, more comprehensive and perfect love—must set the balance right, supplementing experience, and, if needs be, reaching even beyond its ken, and enabling us to see all things in their true proportions.

IV

The Poor Rich

This was the grand, royal characteristic of Sœur Rosalie's charity—it knew no limitations;

universal as the sunlight, it took in all classes, it embraced every sorrow, every pain, every joy that a human creature can feel. The poor had undoubtedly the largest share in her heart; but they never robbed the rich of theirs. "Pray for the rich," she would say to her Sisters; "they are more to be pitied than we think; they have griefs and trials that the poor know nothing about. If the poor knew what those poor rich often have to suffer, they would not envy them as they do."

She lost no practical opportunity of acting on this truth; but she never preached it. Her knowledge of human nature and her experience of the realities of life taught her to avoid mocking by a seeming fallacy. For it looks like a mockery to tell those whose lives are made wretched by the want of money that riches do not constitute happiness; they constitute the happiness that the poor can best understand: food and warmth and plenty, and peace of mind. The poor man can see only this bright side of the rich man's lot; the canker that may lie beneath the brilliant outside is hidden from him, and, unless the hearts of the poor are filled with the spirit of Christianity and thirst for the happiness that it promises in another world, it is hard for them not to hate the rich. Sœur Rosalie, in her intercourse with the poor, was

always on the watch to deprecate this hatred, and to disarm that fatal envy so general in France, which breaks out periodically in savage upheavings. But her pity for the poor did not make her less compassionate towards the sufferings of the rich. She was as ready to sympathise with the great ones of the earth as with the lowly. The parlour, where this uncrowned queen held her court every day for hours, saw people of the highest rank waiting patiently for their turn of audience: an ambassador sitting on his straw chair next to a rag-and-bone man, a duchess side by side with a charwoman, no one claiming precedence, but exemplifying unostentatiously that equality which the Revolution preaches, but which the Gospel alone puts in practice. The great lady and the beggar-woman had just the same welcome from Sœur Rosalie. She was often sorely tried by fine ladies who came to her with stories of their troubles, sentimental grievances where self and sin and vacuity of life were the chief factors; but her patience never failed; she would enter into them with an attentive kindness that gave her the right to counsel, to blame, to suggest remedies, sometimes even punishments. Nothing shocked her, and she never despaired of any one. No matter how sunk in selfishness, or worldliness, or folly a person might be, she

always saw a green spot where the good seed might be dropped. This divine virtue of hope would seem, indeed, to have been often as powerful an agent with Sœur Rosalie as her burning charity in helping souls. She hoped so much of them, and so persistently, that they were ashamed to disappoint her. Her Sisters sometimes remonstrated with her on the time she "lost" listening to the complainings of the rich worldlings who drove to the Rue de l'Epée de Bois to enjoy the luxury of her sympathy, and kept her occupied, while "our poor" were waiting; but Sœur Rosalie would reply: "The time I give them is not lost: you don't know what a comfort it often is to these poor rich to find a sympathetic listener! And besides, I turn their gratitude to account, and it makes friends of them for our poor. We can do no greater kindness to the rich than this—to make them do good; and there are numbers of them who would be so glad to help the poor, if they knew how to go about it."

Sœur Rosalie had a rare talent for turning to account persons of goodwill, both rich and poor. Indeed, had it not been for the number of auxiliaries that she thus secured on all sides, it would have been impossible for her to get through a tithe of the work she accomplished; but the desire to oblige her was so universal

that she never lacked helpers and commissioners. It was part of her creed of holy hope never to despair of a case, any more than of a soul, however desperate it seemed. When, during her long audiences, some one appeared whose trouble it was altogether beyond her power to deal with, she would never say no, but would send away the petitioner with a hopeful word, and, keeping the matter in her mind, wait till some influential person turned up during the afternoon—as was sure to happen—and then, after giving him the counsel or sympathy he needed, she would say, " And now I am going to ask a service at your hands. I shall be so grateful if you can help me in a matter that I have at heart."

Many a time the persons whose assistance she thus invoked came back to thank her for making them acquainted with the misery beside which their own trials grew utterly contemptible. Many a time some woman of the world, after rolling along in her softly-cushioned carriage to the convent-door, and waiting impatiently to pour out her imaginary woes to the large-hearted Sister of Charity, left her presence to visit some sick mother and hungry children in a garret close by, and came back to give thanks for her own cure, humbly acknowledging that her trouble had been but that aching void which

the world creates in a heart made for better things.

But it was not the idle ones only whom Sœur Rosalie requisitioned to the service of the poor: ambassadors, ministers, courtiers, military men, naval officers, railway directors, merchants, the heads of manufactories, men of science, artists, lawyers—she utilised them all. As a rule, the service was volunteered before she asked for it. After drawing largely on her wisdom or sympathy, the visitor would say, "And now, *ma Sœur*, is there nothing I can do for you?"

Then out would come that capacious pocket-book that her friends knew well, and the man of goodwill was requested, with gracious alacrity, to draw up a petition, the heads of which were already jotted down on a leaf of the pocket-book; or to write a letter to some official personage; or, if he chanced to be a lawyer, to make out a legal statement of some case that required technical wording. She often had three secretaries employed in this way—all seized promiscuously, and kept hard at work, while the audiences went on all round. Nothing gratified her more than when some young workman who wrote a fair hand turned up at the same time, and consented to lend her his pen; she would set him down near a gentleman, and make much of his kindness. She was grateful

to any one who did her the least service, but to the poor more especially, and she would take occasion to thank them before others, making the very most of what they had done for her.

"I am so grateful to you for writing that letter! It just arrived in time, thanks to you, and the poor mother will bless you all her life!" she would say to some poor man, whose self-respect was raised by this public tribute from *notre Mère*. But for these numerous recruits who lent her their services Sœur Rosalie could never have got through a correspondence which extended to every part of the world. A young man whom she kept busy one day as a secretary counted five hundred visitors in the parlour during the day, and she was still receiving when he left.

She took a special interest in educated persons who were trying to gain their livelihood. Perhaps no one ever found more situations and lessons for governesses and professors of every sort than Sœur Rosalie. She always had a number of servants to place, of workmen to get situations for; and it was one of her arguments in defence of the time she lost with worldly people, that they brought her all these opportunities of placing her friends among the unemployed.

As years went on, she came to exercise a sort

of sovereignty in the domain of charity, and nothing was done in Paris without her counsel, or left undone that she set her heart on. Her protection extended to every part of France, and even beyond it; but Paris was especially her tributary, and kept her charitable coffers filled as fast as they were emptied. Parisians took foreign visitors to see Sœur Rosalie as one of their most remarkable personages, and enlisted their generosity in behalf of her good works. Many a gift was left at the Rue de l'Epée de Bois by some wealthy stranger, who, after revelling in the splendours and amusements of the brilliant capital, was taken to see that other city that lay on its outskirts—a hideous and perilous growth of our imperfect civilisation.

V

Good Counsellor

Sœur Rosalie's little parlour witnessed many a strange and touching scene, heard many a confession, beautiful and sad. One day a father came to implore her help to make up a quarrel with his son, and was weeping bitterly as he told the story, when the son came in, bent on the same errand. Neither of them knew the peacemaker except by name.

Similarly, a mother came to her once with a

tale of sorrow and sin too bad to be confided to less divinely pitiful ears, and entreated her assistance in discovering a daughter who had fled from home. Before the day was over, the daughter found her way to the little parlour to seek Sœur Rosalie's good offices in reconciling her to her mother.

Families of every rank took her for the *confidante* of their most private griefs and difficulties. The amount of correspondence which this part of her mission alone brought on Sœur Rosalie was enormous. One who had experienced their efficacy through a great sorrow said, "Her letters of consolation are like pages from Bossuet." She never grudged the time these letters cost her, but would write often and at much length when she saw that her sympathy or counsel was of use. The following extract from one of her letters, to the family of a young man whose evil courses were inclining them to extreme severity, shows how wise, as well as tender, her charity was:

"What you tell me of his conduct afflicts me deeply. It is awful to see vice carried to such an excess; and yet he is not bad at heart. You must not be too hard on the poor fellow; he is as much to be pitied as blamed; and you know as well as I do that hard words and severity, even when deserved, seldom succeed with men.

Gentle persuasion—an appeal to the past, its pure and good memories—touches a heart not entirely hardened. . . . God has reserved for Himself anger and justice ; pity and prayer are our portion. If you could but bring him to shed one tear by speaking to him of his mother and the innocent days of his childhood, you would have made a great step towards his conversion. Keep me *au courant,* I entreat you, of whatever God does for him through your means, and may He shed upon us all His spirit of love and persuasion and peace ! "

Yet she could be inflexibly firm where convinced that severity was necessary. A young man from the provinces brought her a letter of introduction. She took a lively interest in him, and watched over him like a mother. He had not been long in Paris when it came to her ear that he had committed a grave fault. Sœur Rosalie sent for him, and said, " If this happens again, you must leave Paris immediately." It did happen again, and the young man was summoned to the Rue de l'Epée de Bois.

" Monsieur," said Sœur Rosalie, when he appeared in the presence chamber, " there is a situation waiting for you at Constantinople. Here is your passport. You have just time to pack up and leave Paris to-night."

He begged a few days' delay to write to his

family ; but Sœur Rosalie had already communicated with them, and taken all the necessary steps to facilitate his departure, and, so great was her ascendency over him that he left Paris for the East that night.

A young artisan, on coming to Paris, went to Sœur Rosalie, introduced by a friend. She found him an excellent situation ; but, mistrusting his youth and high spirits, she stipulated that he should bring her regularly every week a certain sum out of his salary, which she was to remit to his parents. He consented to the arrangement, and kept to the engagement punctually during the years that he remained in Paris.

Sœur Rosalie was equally ready to help those whose difficulties were on a larger scale, and less likely to touch one who saw so much of the cruel extremities of poverty. The head of a large house of business was absent on a journey when a bill for a considerable sum was presented, and there was no money to pay it. His wife, after applying in vain to all her husband's friends, in despair went to Sœur Rosalie merely to get sympathy in her distress. To her amazement, Sœur Rosalie offered to lend her the money out of her own purse.

Perhaps her ingenious charity was nowhere more admirably displayed than in her inter-

course with that class called *les pauvres honteux*, the poor who are ashamed to beg. This class is, perhaps, more numerous in France than in other countries, owing to the frequent revolutions and changes of government that throw out of employment many whose livelihood depends on situations in government offices and the public service generally. The uncertain tenure of these situations, instead of driving educated men into the liberal professions or trade, would seem to have a contrary effect, for in no other country is there such an eager demand for government places. The consequence is that the social wrecks after every revolution are more numerous than would seem credible to those unacquainted with the state of society in France, where a man in recepit of a good salary under government may be thrown penniless on the world to-morrow, and plunged with his family into absolute want. The comparatively low rents of the Faubourg St. Marceau attracted many of these victims of the revolutions of 1830 and 1848; moreover, they were safe here from the humiliations that would have embittered their position in the quarters where they were known; however poor they might be, there were deeper depths of poverty all around them. Sœur Rosalie's compassion for this class of sufferers knew no bounds. She found

them out no matter how carefully they hid themselves, and had a variety of devices for helping without wounding them. When some wealthy family sent her a cast-off wardrobe of good clothes, she would select what was suitable, and send word to the father or brother, as it might be, that she wanted to see him ; when he appeared in the parlour she would call out before everybody present, " Ah, my good Monsieur X—— ! you will do me a little service while you are waiting, I am sure ? It is to take this bundle for me. Here is the address. I shall be so much obliged to you ! " On looking at the address, the commissioner found it was his own.

The family of a bankrupt merchant took refuge in one of the most wretched houses of the faubourg, and were on the verge of starvation when Sœur Rosalie found them out ; but not liking to intrude upon them brusquely, she contrived to supply them with food and money for a long time without letting them know whence the help came. She would take some rich woman of the world sometimes to a family of this kind, and induce her to undertake the education of the children so that they might regain in time the position they had lost.

Sœur Rosalie's shrewd worldly wisdom and strong common sense acted as a balance to her

character, and prevented her from being carried away by the warmth of her compassion, which never degenerated into foolish softness; her heart never ran away with her head, but the two worked together in harmonious concert. Love of almsgiving never hurried her into forgetfulness of more obvious claims, and many a fine lady, on offering her money for the poor, was startled by the blunt inquiry as to whether she had paid her milliner's bills. "Because," Sœur Rosalie would remark, "the payment of debts comes before almsgiving; you must give to the poor out of what is your own, not out of what you owe to others."

She was equally firm in checking the injudicious zeal of those who thought they had vocations for the religious life. A young heiress, whose family strongly opposed her vocation to a cloistered order, determined to run away from home, and confided this resolution to Sœur Rosalie. To her dismay, the wise religious snubbed it emphatically. "What is it you want to do?" she demanded; "to sacrifice yourself to God? Well, begin by sacrificing your own will to Him. Sacrifice yourself by submitting to an authority which, even when it errs, it is your duty to respect."

This stern discretion which she exercised in the matter of vocations was the more admirable

on account of her natural impulse to foster and encourage them. There was scarcely an order in France to which she had not sent recruits. The number of those for whom she opened the door of the religious life by obtaining money for their education and afterwards for their trousseaux and dowries was one of the wonders of her capacious charity and far-reaching influence. Her own convent was open to exiled nuns from Poland, and, when her slender resources did not suffice to help them, she begged for them what they needed. She received the Little Sisters of the Poor into her neighbourhood like the heaven-sent angels they are, and went round from door to door begging for them the dregs and scraps on which they feed when their aged guests are served; she levied contributions for them in the schools and convents, and gave them, from her own limited store, mattresses, and the pots and pans they needed for their simple cooking, and when they were thus far installed, she presented them with their first old man.

Sœur Rosalie's reverence for all religious orders and communities was universal as her charity; dearly as she loved her own Sisterhood, she never extolled it as more perfect or higher than any other; on the contrary, she spoke of the Daughters of St. Vincent as the servants of all,

and her love of silence and prayer sometimes led her to speak of the contemplative orders with a yearning admiration that surprised those who saw how fully the active service seemed to satisfy her heart.

VI

" No Law but Charity."

The daily life of a Sister of Charity affords ample scope for zeal and self-devotion ; but now and then some special appeal is made to her powers of self-sacrifice which reveals them in a new aspect. The terrible winter of 1829-30, one of those immediate causes of the Revolution which was to send Charles X. into exile, put a heavy strain on Sœur Rosalie's forces. Her sagacious instinct taught her to dread those extra trials which add to the inevitable privations of the poor that degree of suffering which reaches the unbearable, and, by exhausting their powers of endurance, drives them into open rebellion against God and man. It was this feeling which made one of her Sisters say, " I fear the devil, but I fear the coming winter much more." When it came, Sœur Rosalie multiplied herself and her community in order to stand between the poor and its bitter severity.

She worked and begged for them, and gave

them to the last farthing of her resources. One day, when she had nothing more to give, she took off her one flannel petticoat to cover a shivering woman at the convent-gate. The act was discovered, betrayed by its consequences to her own health ; but Sœur Rosalie checked the remonstrance of her Sisters with, " Hush, my children ; I gave it to the Mother of our Lord when I saw her hungry and perishing. We, at least, can make a fire and warm ourselves."

The winter passed ; but the people waking from the torpor of cold and hunger, broke out into madness. With the summer came the Revolution. The ascendency which Sœur Rosalie had gained over the inhabitants of the ill-famed faubourg was marvellously manifested during this saturnalia of 1830. She had by her service of love earned the right to command them, and it is to the honour of our common nature that they remembered it in the worst hour of their frenzy, and listened to the voice of " our Mother " when no other could make itself heard above the storm. She went out into their midst like a mother who knows she has nothing to fear from sons quarrelling amongst themselves, or waging war against their enemies. At her bidding, more than one barricade was stopped in process of erection, and the paving-stones laid back into their places. When the

way was barred to the police and to armed authority, it opened before her, and the barriers fell to let her pass. If she saw men forcing others to mount the barricades against their will, she would go forward and order them to desist, laying her hand on their arm, and addressing them in a tone of authority ; and no one was ever known to resent the firm and loving touch.

While the frenzy of the populace lasted, no priest might show himself abroad without danger. Many fled to the Convent of the Rue de l'Epée de Bois for safety, and Sœur Rosalie took them in and hid them, reckless of the risk she was running. One of the rioters, to whom she offered a bread-ticket, replied : " We don't want any more of them, Mother. We are going to pillage the Archbishop's palace to-morrow." And these same men, who sacked Monseigneur de Quélen's palace, constituted themselves into a guard of honour to protect their Mother's convent and that of a community whom she desired them to take care of, and whose house some ruffians had threatened to burn down.

When the insurrection was over, and the work of dealing out justice to its agents began, she took the side of the guilty ones, as she had done that of their victims. She hid the men who had been fighting on the barricades, just as she had

hidden the priests who fled from them. Prices were put on the heads of several, and Sœur Rosalie helped them to fly from France. She tricked the police, sometimes putting them on a wrong scent, so as to leave the pursued man time to make good his escape. At last her misbehaviour came to the ears of authority; she was denounced as conniving with the late rebels and defying the Government. M. Gisquet, the Prefect of Police, signed a warrant for her arrest, and ordered his chief coadjutor to have it executed without delay.

"Monsieur," replied that officer, "I dare not do it. The whole faubourg would rise to a man if a finger were laid on Sœur Rosalie."

"She seems to be a very powerful person, this Sœur Rosalie," said the Prefect; "I have a mind to go and see her."

He ordered his carriage, and drove straight to the Rue de l'Epée de Bois, where he found the small room next to the parlour filled to overflowing, as usual. He made his way through the crowd, and, without giving his name, asked to see the superioress at once, on urgent business. Sœur Rosalie came to the door, politely begged him to wait until she had finished with a poor woman, whom she could not dismiss without a hearing. The time seemed long to the impatient functionary until the door opened again,

and Sœur Rosalie graciously invited him in, and inquired what she could do to serve him.

"Madame," replied M. Gisquet, "I am not come to ask any service at your hands, but, perhaps, to render you one. I am the Prefect of Police."

Sœur Rosalie received the announcement with perfect equanimity and redoubled graciousness.

"Do you know," continued M. Gisquet, "that you are very seriously compromised? You assisted, some days ago, in the escape of a man who by openly rebelling against the Government deserved the severest penalty. I had signed a warrant for your arrest, but, at the entreaty of one of my subalterns, I suspended its execution, and now I am come to ask you how and why it is that you dare thus to defy the law."

"Monsieur le Préfet," replied Sœur Rosalie, looking at him with fearless candour, "I will tell you why: I am a Sister of Charity, and I know no law but Charity; I must help all who want help; it is my duty to do what I can for them without judging them; and I promise you, moreover, that if you ever get into trouble, and are running away from the police, and come to me to help you, I will do it."

The coolness of this was too much for the gravity of the State magistrate. He burst out

laughing, and then they entered into a conversation which soon grew confidential. Sœur Rosalie was not to be frightened or persuaded; she endeavoured to make the magistrate see that she was right and he wrong; that it was quite as much her duty to save the rebels from the penalty of the law as it was his to enforce it, and that she was bound by her vow of charity to be always on the side of the unfortunate, whether they were guilty or not.

M. Gisquet was fascinated and disarmed. "Well, *ma Sœur*," he said, "I will shut my eyes on the past; but, I beg of you, don't begin again: it would be too painful for us to be obliged to proceed against you."

"Monsieur le Préfet," replied Sœur Rosalie, accompanying him to the door, "I can make you no promises; I feel that if the temptation presented itself again, I should not have the courage to resist it. You see, a daughter of St. Vincent de Paul has no right to withstand an appeal to her charity, let the consequences be what they may." This appeal to the generous human sympathies of the magistrate was unanswerable; he took leave of her, declaring she was incorrigible—and irresistible.

Incorrigible she certainly was, and not many days after this visit she proved it. A Vendean leader, for whom the Government was keeping

a sharp look-out, came to ask her help to escape; she hid him in the convent, and then got him a disguise, and sent him off under cover of the night. A friend of his, for whom the police were also on the watch, came to see her some days later, to tell her that her *protégé* was safe. It so happened that, when this gentleman entered the room, the Commissary of Police was with Sœur Rosalie, trying to get information that might lead to his discovery. Without losing her presence of mind, Sœur Rosalie managed to make a sign to the new-comer, warning him of the danger, and she kept the Commissary talking for over an hour, exercising her brilliant conversational powers so successfully that he forgot the time, and had nearly forgotten the purport of his visit when it came to an end. Somehow, the truth got out, and the next day the Commissary arrived very angry, declaring that he would report to the Prefect the trick she had played him.

"No, you won't, Monsieur," replied Sœur Rosalie, "because you know that I should have done just the same for you. Indeed, I felt that I was doing you a service too, and sparing you the trouble and pain of arresting him. Now, own that in your heart you are obliged to me?"

Her offers of protection to the representatives of the law were no vain mockery, as she once had

occasion to prove. One of the police agents had, in the execution of some decree, roused the anger of the district; a crowd of roughs assembled before his house and clamoured for him to appear, threatening violence. The agent bethought him of sending for Sœur Rosalie. She hurried to the spot, scolded the rioters for their unseemly conduct in neglecting their work to get up a row, and sent them to the right-about. They dispersed like chidden children and the Commissary was not molested again.

VII

Comforter of the Afflicted

Scarcely had the havoc made by the Revolution begun to be repaired, when another calamity bore down upon the Faubourg St. Marceau. The cholera, after devastating Eastern Europe, was marching steadily towards France.

Sœur Rosalie, when first the announcement reached her through public rumour, expressed a degree of alarm that surprised those who were acquainted with her courage, and accustomed to see her buoyant energy rise instinctively to meet every trouble. As the ghastly visitor drew nearer, her alarm increased, and when it became known that the cholera was close to the gates of Paris she was like one paralysed by fear.

Her Sisters, accustomed to lean on her for support, and to look to her clear, cool head for guidance, were dismayed at the faint-heartedness Sœur Rosalie made no attempt to disguise. She confessed that she trembled for them, for the poverty-stricken people whose sufferings they were going to witness and to share, and—she owned it with unabashed simplicity—she trembled for herself. Her soul was disquieted within her ; she became a prey to overwhelming apprehensions, and could only cry out to God to save her when the hour came. It came at last, and then a wonderful thing happened. The moment the cholera appeared in the Faubourg St. Marceau, Sœur Rosalie's fears vanished. It was as if the Angel of Gethsemani had come and given her to drink of the chalice of strength ; her courage rose, and never again faltered while the pestilence lasted.

It is an idiosyncrasy of the French people that when a calamity, external or internal, befalls the nation, they instinctively attribute it to treachery or malice, or some malignant cause outside themselves. The Government is sometimes the scape-goat on whom the accusation falls. In the present instance, the doctors divided the odium with it ; they were accused of being in league with the State to punish the people for the late Revolution, by poisoning

the water and food, and thus bringing on the cholera. The fact that half Europe had been already devastated by the scourge proved nothing in the eyes of the infatuated population. In Paris several apothecaries' shops were attacked, and the owners obliged to fly for their lives. Medical men became a mark for the popular vengeance, and were molested in the most respectable thoroughfares of the city.

Sœur Rosalie's influence and authority kept this dangerous panic within bounds in her own unruly faubourg, and reached sometimes with salutary effect beyond it. The celebrated Royer Collard was hurrying on to the nearest hospital by the side of a man who had been struck down with cholera in the street, when some one recognised him. In a moment a crowd had assembled and followed on, crying out: "Away with the murderer! To the river with the poisoner!" A woman flung a knife at him, and this was the signal for a general onslaught. The doctor threw back the coverlet from the stretcher, and, showing the patient in the agonies of cholera, told them he was going with the poor man to try and save him. This only excited their fury the more; they laid hands on M. Collard, and were dragging him away to the river, when he had the happy inspiration to say: "I am a friend of Sœur Rosalie's!" "Ah, that is

different!" they cried, and let him go, and quietly dispersed.

The plague, as had been anticipated, raged with special fury in the Faubourg St. Marceau. In the parish of St. Médard alone there were one hundred and fifty deaths a day. Sœur Rosalie and her Sisters worked during this awful crisis with untiring energy of love. For one week they never undressed, never sat down to a meal, and never went to bed. When sleep and fatigue overpowered them, they dropped down where they stood, slept for a few minutes, only to be aroused again to go to some dying person who was calling for them. Sœur Rosalie, so timid and faint-hearted before the pestilence appeared, was transformed amidst the scenes of horror around her. She cheered on her Sisters; her serenity never flagged; her care and thoughtfulness for them never deserted her for a moment. It is not surprising that they looked to her as to an angel with power to shield them from the plague, and that they attributed their preservation to her prayers and protecting presence. The stricken population clung to her with the trust of love and the egotism of terror. Torn to pieces as she was, her great motherful heart never wearied, never thought of rest. It is related how once, after helping a sufferer through the last pangs of an awful death-struggle,

she dropped down from sheer exhaustion by the dead woman's side, and was roused from her momentary swoon—it could hardly be called sleep—by the cry of the little newly made orphan pulling at her sleeve.

This voice of the little ones crying to her for help was the keenest goad that could have been applied to Sœur Rosalie's fainting powers, and when the visitation was over, their fate became her chief preoccupation. Children and the aged, it used to be said, were her predominant passion, and she left behind her enduring monuments of her care for both. She founded a *crèche* for babies, an *atelier* for young girls, another for boys, an asylum for old men and women, with an infirmary attached. She created them all out of nothing, as far as visible material means went; her sole resource was the bank of charity, but the unlimited cheques which she drew on it were never dishonoured.

VII

The "Long Arm"

The face of the faubourg was changing under her government; the inhabitants now had a friend in the midst of them whose power to help them seemed as unlimited as her will. There was nothing "our Mother" could not do, ac-

cording to them. "She has a long arm," the rough men were fond of saying, and they went to her for the most unlikely services. She would sometimes laugh at these proofs of their faith in her arm's length, but she never rebuffed them, and seldom disappointed them.

A carter, a friend of hers in the neighbourhood, lost his horse; the poor animal had died from old age. The man was in despair, for he had no means of buying another, so he went to Sœur Rosalie. "Mother," he said, "if you don't get me a horse I am a ruined man." Sœur Rosalie took her umbrella, and went straight off to an ambassador, whom she had made great friends with, and told him she wanted a horse. He led her to his stables, and bade her choose the one she liked best; she selected a valuable thoroughbred, and a groom was sent on with it to the Rue de l'Epée de Bois.

Her goodness to the poor was not limited to helping their necessities; she loved them with that personal fondness which alone wins a return of love. She took their part; she was touchy if they were attacked or criticised, and she was impatient of hearing them lectured. It sometimes looked as if this sympathetic touchiness led her away from strict common sense. A poor woman who was almost starving was given a ring to sell and get herself food; but the

feminine love of finery was so strong in the poor soul that, despite the pangs of hunger, she kept the ring two days for the pleasure of wearing it. This folly was denounced to Sœur Rosalie. Instead of bearing down on the culprit, Sœur Rosalie began at once to excuse her; "Poor creature! how silly! But I daresay it is the first time in her life she ever had a pleasure, and very likely it will be the last. Don't let us be hard on her."

Once, while the Sisters were at dinner, a thief stole into the parlour, and carried off a sum of money from the drawer of Sœur Rosalie's table. The robbery caused great indignation all over the faubourg, where it was looked upon as little short of sacrilege, and every one was loud in calling down the penalty of the law on the thief; "but," said Sœur Rosalie in relating the incident some months afterwards, "luckily the poor man was never caught!" She constantly impressed on her Sisters that they should be infinitely indulgent to the faults, even the wrong-doings of the poor. "O my children, don't be hard on them," she would say; "don't be so ready to blame them. The world is quick enough to do that; it is always down on them. The poor, according to it, have every vice: they are lazy, they are liars, they are cowardly and ungrateful. Never give in to this way of judging

them. Hate vice, but love the poor."

She reminded her companions constantly of the immense disadvantages which the poor had to contend with on all sides. " I wonder," she would say, " if we were put to the same trials, whether we should come out of them as well ? If we had grown up without any Christian teaching, we should probably not be nearly as good as they are. Virtue comes easy to us, because in nine cases out of ten its practice involves no sacrifice ; but with the poor it is quite different ; they have to resist not merely the pleasure of doing wrong, but the need that is driving them to it."

We complain of being so often disappointed in the poor. We forget how often the poor are disappointed in us, not merely in their expectations of material gifts, which may be sometimes unreasonable, but in those gifts of sympathy, compassion, reverence for the mystery of their condition, which need have no limitation but the narrowness of our own hearts. Our self-love may be sometimes disappointed in the measure of thanks which the poor bestow upon us ; but they seldom disappoint us in the richer return of example and encouragement. We go to visit them, clad in comfort, our hands in soft furs, and we sit down in their wretched tenements and assure them of the blessedness of their

miserable lot; and they listen to us with the courtesy of angels and the patience of martyrs, and they take our good words and our dole of bread with thanks, and give us in return a blessing, and an example of Christ-like meekness, humility and faith.

Even that spirit of envy, which sometimes disheartens those who come to the service of the poor with the most genuine charity, found a word of excuse from Sœur Rosalie; she was prone to turn on the virtuous rich, and bid them beware how they made themselves answerable before God for provoking this deadly sin of envy in the poor by the arrogance of their bearing, their egotistical indifference, and their extravagant self-indulgence. For it is not necessary to do people an injury in order to provoke their hatred; even when trying to serve them we may do this, by the haughtiness of our manner, and that air of condescension which borders so closely on rudeness. In poverty the soul needs, above all, the alms of respect, without which our material alms are but bitterness and insult. The world, as a rule, withholds this sweet salve of humility from its bounties to the poor, and Sœur Rosalie was bold in warning good people of this flaw in their charity.

"Take care!" she would tell them; "God will hold us responsible for many of those sins

of the poor that we are so ready to throw at their heads. Much of their revolt and bad feeling towards society may be laid at our door. In proportion as we are above them in intelligence, in fortune, in position, they should find us gentler, humbler, more affectionate, and more obliging."

We of the educated classes, however sincerely we may commiserate the sufferings of the poor, find it difficult to stretch our sympathies to their interests, their pleasures, their ambitions; the lives of those fellow-creatures who live in slums and back alleys are, in their details, so sordid and vulgar, and lie so far outside our own experiences, that we are, in a sense, as remote from them as if they were the inhabitants of another planet. Charity alone can throw down these barriers, and, detaching us from the world and our own prejudices, bring us into those tender personal relations with the poor which engender the fellow-feeling that "makes us wondrous kind." Sœur Rosalie's relations with them were of this familiar sort that enabled her to realise every detail and circumstance of their lives, and enter into the feelings and the heart-hungers of the most wretched. "Why should they not have their pleasures, too?" she would say; "and why should we be so amazed and scandalised if sometimes they snatch at them at

the expense of prudence ? "

It is easier to ask than to answer. We exact too much from the poor, as if they had no right to expect any pleasure, any respite from the appointed hardness of their lot. We forget that the child of a beggar longs for a lollipop or a toy, and the poor lad for a drive on the top of a " 'bus," and the jaded man and over-worked woman for an hour in merry company, or a trip into the green fields, just as naturally and as irresistibly as we long for the more refined and expensive pleasures that we take without always looking too closely into our right to them. It was one of Sœur Rosalie's self-indulgences to provide these treats now and then for the heavily laden ones. When the burden, from one cause or another, pressed more cruelly than usual on a poor family, she would contrive to send them out to the country for a day, asserting that the momentary break in the dull round of their toilsome lives was a help to their souls as much as a refreshment to their bodies.

The love of the country is so strong in the Parisians that, for the pleasure of smelling a lilac-tree and hearing a bird sing on the bush, they will walk beyond the city for miles under a burning sun, and squat on the grass to eat a scanty meal, and come home more dead than alive, convinced that they have enjoyed a day's

pleasuring. Nor must we fancy it has been too dearly paid for. Amidst the ugliness that surrounds their lives, the poor are apt to forget there is any beauty in the world ; and nothing, as we all know, so lifts the heart to God as a glimpse of this beauty of the quiet woods and fields. Sœur Rosalie, who herself so needed this occasional rest by the way, could never be persuaded to take it. Her Sisters often tried, on one pretext or another, to make her take the relaxation of a day in the country ; but for fifty years they tried in vain. At last, one morning, she consented to make a *partie de campagne*, which consisted in crossing the court-yard, and mounting and descending a double flight of stone steps that led to the garden of the Maison de Secours attached to the convent, and gathering some dozen of pears from a tree which formed the chief glory of the garden. The Sister, who had long been trying to induce " our Mother " to take this excursion, had got her as far as the top of the stone stair, when a ring sounded at the gate.

" I will be with you in a moment, Mother," she said, hurrying away to admit the visitor.

" No, no," replied Sœur Rosalie, turning to go with her ; " our Lord is calling me back. You see He does not approve of my quitting my post to go pleasuring."

In this, as in most things, severity to herself was the measure of her indulgence to others. She would brave public opinion, its ridicule and its censure alike, not merely to render a service, but to procure a pleasure, a little passing satisfaction to the poorest beggar. Whatever germs of vanity lurked in that humble heart took the form of a desire to make herself personally agreeable to the poor; and it was one of her grievances against the rich—the good benevolent rich—that they take so little pains to do this; that they show their real characters to the poor, without any of that restraining courtesy which checks brusqueness or impatience in company with their equals. Sœur Rosalie had a natural charm of manner which few could resist; she pleased without the least attempt to do so; but in her intercourse with the poor she laid herself out to be charming, to amuse them, to make them laugh; and if she was accessible to flattery of any sort, it was to a compliment in this direction—to hear that some beggar-woman or some ill-conditioned rough had spoken of her with admiration, as pleasant or sympathetic.

The soup-kitchen, established by the Government under Sœur Rosalie's direction in the convent, was one of her grand opportunities for paying court to the poor. She enjoyed few things more than to escape from a crowd of

visitors of a very different class, and go to serve out their portions to the poor people. She would spend hours there in conversation with the men who came for their plate of rice or beans, and by the charm of her manner often won them to confide to her, almost unawares, some secret of moral or physical misery worse than the hunger they had come to assuage.

This ceremony of serving out the soup reminded many who assisted at it in the Rue de l'Epée de Bois of the repasts of the early Christians and Sœur Rosalie would convene her Sisters to it as a recompense and a relaxation. Before entering the room, she would say, " Let us salute the angels who are conducting the poor, and God who resides in them."

The famine which visited France in the winter of 1847 was an awful experience for those who were in the service of the poor. The stagnation of trade brought about the terrible stand-still that is the certain prelude of a popular storm. The bread-winners of the Faubourg St. Marceau were thrown at once into the direst want; starving men took refuge in the public-houses, and strove to drown their misery in drink and that fiery rhetoric which is more intoxicating to the French *ouvrier* than alcohol. As usual, the famine was laid at the door of the Government. Wild theories of reform, that were to

insure plentiful meals to every hungry citizen, were propounded ; savage threats were uttered against the existing state of things, and the men went back to their wretched homes drunk with their own eloquence as much as with the poisonous drugs served out to them.

Sœur Rosalie's experience and shrewd sense warned her where this sort of thing was to end. She called up all the resources of her heart and head to fight against the hunger that was exasperating the poverty-stricken population. She begged, and set her friends to beg in every direction, and for a time succeeded in keeping the demon at bay. The famine was felt more severely by the population of this district than any other, and yet it was not from the Faubourg St. Marceau that the signal for revolution sounded. Sœur Rosalie, who always stood up for " our faubourg," made a point of this fact in its favour, and would declare that it was better than its reputation. " Besides," she was wont to add, " we are so wretched, and have so much to suffer in the best of times, that people ought not to be hard on us. I am sure Almighty God will not."

When, finally, " our faubourg " did catch fire and join in the Revolution, the dismay and terror in the convent were great. Sœur Rosalie alone never lost heart, but cheered up her

frightened Sisters.

" O Mother ! " they exclaimed, remembering 1830, " how wicked they are going to be ! "

But she answered gaily, " And how good we are going to be ! "

And yet, when the paving-stones were torn up, and barricades rose, and the murderous faces of men gone mad with passion were visible everywhere around her, her heart sank. She was so struck by the sinister horror of the scene, the fierce looks and bearing of the rioters, then brutal threats as they bullied and dragged reluctant comrades to the bloody work in hand, that she said afterwards in describing it, " I believe if we had gone to hell that day, we should not have found a single devil there ; they were all above ground in the streets of Paris. Never shall I forget their faces."

The horror with which the " devils " inspired her did not, however, prevent her devoting herself to them as heroically and tenderly as if they had been angels. She was in the midst of them all day long, dressing their wounds, receiving them into the convent, braving death to go and assist them out in the streets, praying by the side of the dying, and helping them to make their peace with God, while the bullets rained about the crucifix she held up before closing eyes. She, who was by nature so timid

and sensitive, and used formerly almost to faint at the sight of a wound, seemed to lose all sensibility as well as all fear, so little did she mind the bloodshed, so recklessly did she brave the danger. It was characteristic of the people she thus trusted that not once through the murderous frenzy of those days did any of them forget what was due to her and to her Sisters. Not a rude word was spoken to them, not a shot was fired nor a stone thrown at the convent. Stranger still, the rioters were seen to lower their muskets and suspend the work of slaughter to assist Sœur Rosalie or one of her companions across a barricade, or to clear the way for them to some wounded comrade.

One day, when the battle was at its hottest, an officer of the Garde Mobile led his men to attack a barricade in the Rue Mouffetard, at the corner of the Rue de l'Epée de Bois. He himself mounted first to the assault, and his men were following him, when a murderous volley from the insurgents beat them back, and the officer found himself on the other side of the barricade, alone, surrounded by the enemy with certain death staring him in the face. He turned suddenly, and made for the Rue de l'Epée de Bois, and, seeing the convent-gate opened, rushed in, and fell into the midst of the Sisters who were coming and going amongst

the wounded in the courtyard. Sœur Rosalie, seizing the situation at a glance, thrust him into a doorway behind her, and, standing forward with her Sisters, made a barrier between him and his pursuers, who came rushing after him, yelling like madmen. At the sight of the rampart of white cornettes they were staggered for a moment, and, falling back, begged Sœur Rosalie to stand aside and let the assassin of the people come out. Even at this crisis they did not forget what they owed " our Mother," and it was a strange medley to hear their threats and blasphemies addressed to the officer, alternating with terms of respect and endearment to her.

" Come, now, *bonne Mère*, let go that hell-hound." " We love you well, Mother; but you must give up that devil." " You are our good angel; we won't touch one of the cornettes, but by —— we will have his blood ! "

But Sœur Rosalie and her angel guard held to their ranks, stoutly expostulating with the infuriated rioters.

" No, no; we must have his life ! " they cried. " He has been butchering our kith and kin for days, and now his turn has come ! "

" What ! " cried Sœur Rosalie, " you would stain these stones with the blood of a disarmed man ! You would commit a murder within the gates of the house of peace and charity that is

always open to you! You will never do that, my friends!"

"You are right, Mother, we won't kill him here; we will take him into the street and shoot him"; and they pressed closer, laying the muzzles of their guns on the shoulders of the nuns, and pressing the trigger with a click to frighten them into giving way. But not one moved. At last the men grew impatient, and began to swear and threaten. Sœur Rosalie then, with one of those inspirations that sometimes came to her in a great crisis, pushed aside the gun that was brushing her cornette, and, throwing her arms wide open, fell upon her knees.

"For over forty years I have given up my life to you," she cried; "and now in return for my long service, for any good I may have done to yourselves, your wives, or your children, I ask you for the life of this man!"

They were conquered. A loud hurrah rose from the crowd, every musket fell, the courtyard rang with cries of "Vive Sœur Rosalie!" "Vive notre Mère!" and the rioters rushed back to the barricade.

Two days later the insurrection was crushed, the fighting was over, and these same men were in prison, or hiding from justice; and their wives and mothers were crowding into the Rue

de l'Epée de Bois, imploring Sœur Rosalie to go and intercede for their pardon; and she, crying as heartily as any of them, made reckless promises, assuring them that they had only to trust in God, and all would come right.

One young artisan, whom Sœur Rosalie had long known as a most respectable, hard-working fellow, had been carried away by the delirium of the hour, and from his superior intelligence had become one of the leaders in his quarter; he was now in prison awaiting trial for his life. His only child, a little girl of five, came every day to the convent, crying for "papa"—she had done nothing but cry ever since his arrest. One day General Cavaignac came to see Sœur Rosalie. When his visit was over she took him to see the school. They entered the room together, and, taking the little child by the hand, she led her up to the General. "My child," she said, "this is the gentleman who can pardon your papa and give him back to you."

The baby knelt down, and joining her small hands, as if General Cavaignac were a saint that she was praying to, "Ah, good little Monsieur," she sobbed out, "give him back to me! he is so good—my papa! Forgive him!"

"No; he has been very wicked, I cannot forgive him," replied the General; and, turning brusquely, he left the room. But two days

afterwards the wicked man came home.

By degrees the prisons were emptied, the debt of justice was paid in the measure which the Government felt it prudent to exact, and there only remained now the work of conciliating the insurgents, of appeasing the angry passions which were only the more fierce from being baulked and crushed down by the strong arm they had attempted to break. Sœur Rosalie resumed her mission of peacemaker and conspirator, as in 1830. She knew better than most others how many had been compelled against their will to join in the movement, and she looked upon these men now solely as objects of pity, and left nothing undone to rescue them from the pursuit of justice. But, indeed, when they had been voluntarily guilty, she was just as eager to help them to escape. During these fifty years of her service and sovereignty in the faubourg, she had made great friends with the police, and many were willing enough to connive at her illegal proceedings, and shut their eyes to "our Mother's" treasonable practices. When the Commissary of the quarter came to the convent to look for arms after the general disarming, he said to Sœur Rosalie that he only presented himself for form's sake, as he knew he was not likely to find arms in her house.

"You are much mistaken," she replied, "we have a good collection here"; and she took him to where a large number of guns and sabres were piled up, having been deposited with her by men who had been forced to take them, but who could not be induced to use them, and who fled to her for shelter while the fighting went on.

It required nothing short of heroic love and hope not to lose heart before the task of moral and social restoration that now awaited Sœur Rosalie amongst her people. The material misery, which followed on the breaking up of the machinery that kept life going in the poorest of the working classes, held smouldering fires of revolution, which it was essential to put out, under pain of seeing the flame leap up more fiercely than ever. Sœur Rosalie maintained that love and gentleness alone could accomplish this work of pacification; that the time was past for harsh measures; that society now should make a generous peace with the people, and treat them as convalescent sufferers rather than as conquered enemies. Incorrigible optimist that she was, she persisted in viewing the Revolution as a sort of malady which the people caught like any other epidemic, and she impressed on persons of all classes—politicians and philanthropists—that it was no use attempting to deal with it unless they were prepared to see

it in this light. She held that the rioters were, to a great extent, no more responsible for the wild deeds they committed when the fumes of blood and gunpowder had got into their heads, than the patients in the hospital were accountable for the ravings in the delirium of fever.

She stood up for her faubourg with a warmth of partisanship which it was hard to withstand, and which, if it failed to rehabilitate the rioters, at least enlisted pity in their behalf. They were now paying dearly for their hour of criminal madness; and, although the administration was dealing out large sums of money for relief in the worst districts of Paris, it was found extremely difficult to cope with the miseries to be relieved, and with the abuses inseparable from indiscriminate official almsgiving; the most deserving cases sometimes were left unassisted, while others were assisted several times. The Mayor came to Sœur Rosalie to see if no remedy could be applied to this confusion. She suggested that a band of visitors should be organised to go round and discover the most needy and deserving, and then add to the alms of food or money the sometimes more necessary ones of kind words, sympathy, and good counsel. This proposal was met by a great outcry of opposition. It was alleged that the gentlemen who volunteered as visitors would be insulted,

molested; that their lives, in fact, would be endangered if they ventured into the slums and purlieus where the Revolution was still crouching like a wild beast made more savage by its wounds. Sœur Rosalie maintained that this was a calumny. The rioters, who had been lately shooting down their fellow-citizens from the barricades, were now, she declared, sitting broken-spirited and penitent amidst their wives and children, no longer tigers, but tame, beaten dogs, ready to lick any hand that was held out to them; the frenzy of revolt had given way to despair or stolid resignation, and their hearts, that were represented as hardened and inaccessible, were ready to melt at a kind word. These arguments prevailed; the fraternity of visitors was formed, and the result entirely justified her counsels.

The visitors had many curious and consoling experiences in the Faubourg St. Marceau. One, too characteristic to be omitted, was related to me by M. de Melun himself, though in his interesting notice of Sœur Rosalie he mentions it as having occurred to "a disciple of Sœur Rosalie's."

After a long round through the district, he came to an attic where a young foreman was living, or rather starving, with a wife and several children. He had had a superior education,

and was quite an artist in his way, and this had given him a kind of leadership amongst his fellow-artisans. Carried away by the wild visions that had lured so many to join the insurrection, he was elected a sort of leader; he had flung his whole heart into the desperate venture, and was now sunk into a torpor of despair; his wife and children were dying of hunger before his eyes, but even their cries could not move him to go forth and try to get bread for them. M. de Melun knocked several times without being answered; at last the door was opened by a man wearing that air of sullen desperation which is the forerunner of madness induced by hunger; his eye had a wavering light in it, his beard had been allowed to grow, and his hair was unkempt for days, his whole appearance was defiant and savage. M. de Melun, who was little more than a boy at the time, was for a moment intimidated, but with that grace of inborn courtesy which was all his own, he apologised for the intrusion: "I heard," he said, 'that you were in trouble, and I have come to see if I can be of any service to you."

The artisan was staggered by his visitor's gentleness, and allowed him to come in. M. de Melun directed his attention at once to the sick wife and the children, and, without putting a question to force confidence, he soon induced

the poor fellow to relent, and before long to open his mind freely, which he did by bursting out into a tirade against society, accusing it of all the misery he had brought upon himself, and vowing to be revenged on the classes that had ruined and humiliated him. M. de Melun let him rave on, and then, leading the conversation to the past, he brought him to talk of his childhood, of his mother, of the early days before he knew anything of social theories and reforms, until, softened by these tender memories, he consented to accept, as a loan, a little money to buy bread and to pay for a visit from the doctor.

That evening, when the visitors met to give an account of their day's work, M. de Melun told this incident, which so moved his companions that on the spot they contributed a round sum, and M. de Melun set off with it there and then to the Rue Mouffetard.

"Forgive me," he said, "for disturbing you at this late hour; but I have come from some of my friends. I was telling them this evening that one of our brothers had got into temporary difficulties and had need of a little money to begin his work again; they immediately begged me to take to you this trifling sum, as a loan that you can repay at your convenience."

The poor man was too overcome to speak;

he grasped M. de Melun's hand in silence.

"You see," continued his visitor, laughing to hide his own emotion, "that wicked society that you have vowed vengeance on is not so bad as you make it out, after all!"

"Ah, Monsieur!" exclaimed the artisan, "I am sure you are not one of the rich; if you were, you would not have done this!"

To appease the spirit which found utterance in this cry was Sœur Rosalie's lifelong aim. She held that nothing so tended to conciliate the poor as personal intercourse between them and the rich, and she lost no opportunity in striving to promote it. When Frederic Ozanam and his seven enthusiastic comrades founded their brotherhood of St. Vincent de Paul, it was to Sœur Rosalie they went for direction, for poor families to visit, and it was she who supplied them with their first bread and soup and coal tickets. A conference was founded at once in her parish, and she watched its growth and that of the society all over France with a keen and helpful interest, and was often heard to say that no work of our time had produced such widespread results for good as this brotherhood of her own great patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

The welcome and the success which so soon rewarded the labours of the confraternity were the more remarkable from the fact that genial

intercourse between the rich and poor was greatly hindered in France by that spirit of inexorable logic which expresses itself, from time to time, in savage revolutions. These fierce reprisals were simply the practical outcome of that democratic axiom, "The superfluity of the rich is the patrimony of the poor." Those who have experience of the poor in England and in France cannot fail to be struck by the difference which the predominance of this principle creates in the latter country. If you give sixpence to a poor man in England, he takes it thankfully as a gratuitous gift; but if you offer it to a French beggar, he looks at it, and says to himself, "This sixpence is over and above that rich man's wants, therefore he owes it to me; and how do I know but that it ought to be a shilling, and that he is not keeping back another sixpence that belongs to me?" And the worst of it is that, nine times out of ten, the poor man is right: we are keeping back the other sixpence, and consequently, instead of being his benefactor we are his debtor. Assuming that we grant his premises, I don't see how we are to escape the conclusion; but it is evident that intercourse carried on upon this logical basis is not apt to ripen into that warm sympathy and mutual kindly feeling which rewards our service of the poor at home.

VIII

The Daily Care.

The famine, the cholera, and the Revolution which closed the reign of Louis Philippe were the last public events that broke in upon the calm tenor of Sœur Rosalie's life. Henceforth her mission pursued its placid course, free from the exciting solemnities and tragic terrors of pestilence or politics. It was still, in the truest sense of the word, heroic. The battles sustained, the victories won, the unsurrendering courage evinced during the remaining years of her life displayed an amount of energy and self-sacrifice more rare and admirable than those passing acts of heroism which flashed out with a splendour of dramatic effect, and won the applause of men.

Her apostolate of love embraced every stage of human life, as it did every form of human suffering. If her charity had a special attraction, it was to the aged and to children; but this predilection for the two ages most pathetic in their helplessness did not make her less devoted and pitiful to the intervening ones. She took the baby into the *crèche*, and cherished it till it grew to be a toddling child, and then she led it to the asylum, and watched over it till it was of an age to pass on to the school;

here she guarded the child growing into girlhood, taught her her duty to God and to man, gave her the means of gaining an honest livelihood, and sent her forth, thus armed, into the world.

It might seem that she had now done all that was possible, and that her work of helpfulness was fully accomplished; but it soon became apparent to Sœur Rosalie that it was not so, that she was abandoning her children at the very moment when they most needed her support and vigilance. The young girls, whom she had so far guarded from sin and harm, left the protection of the convent, to find the workshop and the *atelier* ready, like an open gulf, to devour them. Corrupt principles and alluring companionships suddenly replaced the salutary influences of the Sisters; pious canticles were exchanged for ribald songs, and innocent mirth for coarse jokes; everything that the apprentice had been taught to respect and admire she now heard ridiculed and attacked; evil influences and opportunities surrounded her on all sides.

It frequently happened that Sœur Rosalie's children, on leaving the warm pure shelter of her wing, felt such a repugnance to the vicious atmosphere of these centres of work, and to the coarseness and sometimes the impiety of their own homes, that they would fly from both,

and hire a garret and take in work to support themselves. But Sœur Rosalie was quick to detect the grave perils which awaited them in this life of isolation, where they were thrown entirely upon their own strength and their own resources, and her maternal solicitude found a remedy for this new danger. Nowhere did the genius of her charity show itself more remarkably than in the invention of the *Patronage*. This work, which put the crown on her careful training of these young lives, was like a cord by which she continued still to hold them, and maintain the good influence that she had hitherto exercised over them.

The scheme was warmly taken up by a number of ladies, who went round to the various *ateliers* where her children were apprenticed, and persuaded the employers to co-operate in the idea, which was as much in their interest as that of the apprentices. The object of it was to create for the young girls a centre of interest where they could go during their free time for advice, amusement, and sympathy ; where they could spend part of every Sunday and holiday, and be rescued from the danger of bad company. The nuns proposed to let the convent serve as the meeting-place for them ; here they would have confidential talks with their old teachers an instruction from the chaplain on Sundays,

recreation in the garden, and serviceable books. The ladies of the Patronage were to come and make acquaintance with them, giving them wider opportunities of finding employment and good protection in case of need, thus adding the chance of material advantages to the spiritual and moral ones already secured. The good effects of the work soon became manifest, and employers, who had at first showed themselves hostile, became its warmest supporters. They found that the apprentices who belonged to the Patronage and accepted the conditions it imposed—viz., frequentation of the Sacraments, steady conduct, and regular attendance in the workroom—were more satisfactory than those who did not, and the result was that they encouraged all their apprentices to join it; it served, moreover, as an advertisement for their own *ateliers:* the ladies of the Patronage came to know them, and employed them in preference to others.

The work had beneficial effects in other ways. It enabled Sœur Rosalie to interest her grown-up children—*mes grands-enfants*—in their younger or more destitute neighbours, and gave them occasions for exercising that blessed spirit of helpfulness that she had the gift of communicating to those who came in contact with her. The young girls would save up their pence to

buy food or clothing for a little orphan Sœur Rosalie was interested in, or they would go to teach some poor sick child who could not come to school. Two young washerwomen, who had no pence to spare, agreed to go every Sunday to fetch the clothes of a poor old cripple, and wash them during the week and mend them, and bring them back the following Sunday. A little dressmaker devoted her recreation hours to patching and darning for the ragged children of a charwoman. When these traits of kindliness came to Sœur Rosalie's knowledge, they would bring tears of thankfulness into her eyes, and her heart would swell with pride and joy, as that of a real mother at the good and generous deeds of her children.

But, alas! it was not always golden deeds that she had to chronicle of these young lives. Many made shipwreck at the outset, and drifted out of harbour, far away into stormy and troubled waters. But Sœur Rosalie remained their mother still; and when they returned, as many did—floated home by some strong current of grace—those motherly arms and that great heart were open to them with a welcome made more tender by the extremity of their need.

Sœur Rosalie, who was the veriest woman that ever lived, was naturally fond of making a match. Many a droll page might be filled with

her achievements in this line, the trouble she gave herself to find a " brave garçon " for one of her children whom she thought called to the marriage state, and the clever devices she employed to test his qualifications as a good husband ; and when these preliminaries were settled, the interest she would take in the trousseau, the way she would condescend to the feminine weakness of the bride in her anxiety to make a pretty appearance and sport a smart gown on the wedding-day ! All this was eminently characteristic, and presents to us another aspect of Sœur Rosalie's lovable nature.

Nor did her solicitude end here. She followed her children to their new home, kept herself in touch with their troubles and their interests, watched to see that the husband kept clear of the wine-shop, and the wife of ribbons and frippery and idle gossip, and woe to them both if " our Mother " found them tripping !

She lived to see a generation of " grand-children " grow up around her ; and in her later years, when making the round of the schools, she was apt to hold up the example of the mothers to the emulation of the daughters : " Fie, for shame ! Your mamma would never have put her copy-book in such a mess ! " or " Your mamma was a great comfort to me, child ; she was obedient and fond of her work." These

compliments were carried home, and took the sting out of many a rebuke that followed them.

When the men and women, whom she had known young, and seen toiling painfully through life, came to be old, they still found Sœur Rosalie waiting for them with her tender kindness and practical help. Nothing seemed to her to claim so imperiously the compassion of us all as the lot of the poor when they have grown past their work, and are thrown destitute on the charity of the world. Old age, with its infirmities, its disenchantments, its pains and aches, is a season of trial for the rich; but for the poor it is a stage of unmitigated suffering, without hope and without even that consideration that it has the right to claim. The great trouble of the aged poor is to find a lodging, any corner where they may wait for their release in security, free from the dread of being turned out by the landlord; but even a bed is a refuge they cannot count on being able to pay for out of the uncertain alms that drop to them from one day to another. Sœur Rosalie determined to secure a roof for at least a few of the most deserving aged poor of her quarter. With the help of her friends she got a house, which she divided into as many rooms as possible; she furnished these with the strict necessaries, and here installed a number of old men and women. Here they might

sleep in peace, with no fear of being molested by landlord or police ; here they might wait, doing what little work they were still equal to, until the summons came for them to die and go to rest. During the latter years of Sœur Rosalie's life her most frequent visits were to this asylum for the aged and to the babies at the *crèche*, the two extremities of life her heart held in deepest compassion.

And, all the time, this mother of the poor, who lived with them, and found her delight in serving them, was a woman whom distinguished men admired for the charm of her conversation and the grace and intellectual qualities of her mind. It captivated M. de Lamennais, whose genius Sœur Rosalie was capable of appreciating while she loved him for his love of the poor. He drew some of the most elevated of his commentaries on the *Imitation of Christ* from his conversations with her. After his fall, their intercourse ceased. She went to see him once, when he was in great trouble ; he seemed moved by her kindness, but, when she attempted to approach the subject that was uppermost in both their minds, he turned the conversation with a coldness that made it impossible to go further. When M. de Lamennais was dying, Sœur Rosalie tried to gain access to him, but the same inexorable hand which shut the door

upon the priest kept it closed against the Sister of Charity.

Amongst other remarkable men who sought her friendship was Donoso Cortez, Marquis de Valdegama, for many years ambassador from the Court of Spain. He was meditating, one day, on the account he would have to render of his life, and it occurred to him that it was not enough to fulfil perfectly the functions of an ambassador and a man of the world, that something more was demanded of him. He knew Sœur Rosalie by report, as all Paris did, and it struck him that he would go and take counsel with her.

" My Sister," he said, " I have been thinking that my life is not what it ought to be ; I spend all my time paying visits ; now, I don't want to have to answer, when I come before the Judgment-seat and am asked what I have done, " Lord, I paid visits." Can you help me to turn my life to better account ? "

Sœur Rosalie reflected a moment, and then replied : " I think you cannot do better, since you have the time, than go on paying visits ; only, instead of paying them always to fine ladies and gentlemen, you should sometimes pay them to the poor." She gave him a scheme of work, and a list of poor families, and it was agreed that he should come once a week and

report what he had done, and receive fresh instructions. For the too short remainder of his life, M. de Valdegama was punctual in his visits to Sœur Rosalie and to the garrets and cellars to which she directed him. He called himself her disciple, and she numbered him amongst her dearest friends and most munificent benefactors; when he came to die, she nursed him through his last illness, and mourned for him when dead.

But it was not alone the envoys of royalty, but sovereigns themselves, who found out this large-hearted Mother of the poor, and came to do homage to her virtues. The fame of her charity and the wonders it worked reached the Tuileries, and alms came flowing from the palace gates to the far-away faubourg. The Emperor and Empress went to see the Daughter of St. Vincent, who, herself a queen, reigned by serving in the dark places of their bright city. Sœur Rosalie was neither flattered nor abashed by the honour, but received the august visitors with her natural grace of manner and that full measure of courtesy which their rank commanded. She won the heart of the Empress Eugénie, who ever after remained her friend and a noble benefactress to her poor. Napoleon III. questioned her about the condition of the people, and she answered him freely, entering into the

needs, the perils, and the capabilities of the population with the knowledge of close experience and with a wisdom that won him. He was charmed with her, and at parting invited her to come to the Tuileries, where he said she should always have free and direct access to him.

Sœur Rosalie accepted the invitation; but she used it sparingly. On the rare occasions when her white *cornette* was seen in the Imperial ante-room the Emperor would come himself to greet her, and confer with her on those arduous social problems that she spent her life in trying to solve, and understood, he used to declare, better than any of his ministers. She was, in truth, the most practical of political economists, for her science did not stop short at pointing out the evil, it discovered and applied the remedy. People are much given to speaking of the present time as bad, and of past ages as much better than the present. It is idle work comparing one age with another; we have not materials for a real comparison; but, by dint of hearing it said that egotism is the predominant malady of the present age, we have come to believe it In France, certainly, this disease has been so distinctly prominent as to mar, in a measure, the charm of a sympathetic and brilliant society; but when we include our age in general, and

our English selves in particular, in this sweeping accusation of egotism, we are, perhaps, only saying, in other words, that we are trying to do better, and accusing ourselves with a generous and contrite exaggeration of not having begun sooner. We have let in the light that was kept out, partly by selfishness, partly by ignorance ; it has penetrated into the dark places, revealing the rank, foul things that generated there and throve under cover of the darkness.

Thank God, we have made a broad rent in that old black cloak of ignorance that so long staved off the day of reckoning which, sooner or later, overtakes every reign of injustice, even in this world. The tongue of the dumb beast has been loosened, and he has turned upon us, and is asking, " Why should there be suffering classes ? If God's justice is on earth anywhere, it ought to be everywhere : in our squalid slums and echoing tenements and workshops, as well as in the Senate and the courts and the well-ordered respectabilities of your lives. If there be any sincerity in this doctrine of solidarity that your humanitarians are preaching, if it be true that all humanity is so closely knit together in the bond of an indissoluble kindred that no single member can sin or suffer without all the others participating in the suffering or the sin, then why are the vast

majority of the members so weighed down with misery and beset with temptation as to be doomed to wretchedness in this world, and threatened with it in another ? "

The suffering classes of every nation ask in chorus this tremendous " why ? " From the poor, the condemned, the disinherited it is clamouring up to heaven, like a challenge and a portent : " Why should we suffer while the minority enjoy ? Make room for us at the well-spread board ! It is our turn to eat and drink and be merry. Make room for us ! "

And we, who are thus fiercely challenged, instinctively hug tighter our threatened inheritance, our immunities, and our treasures—all those pleasant things which, to those who suffer from the want of them, constitute the supreme good of life. But the tide is rolling in, and our alarmed, resentful protest will not stay its coming. The prophets, from their watch-towers, saw the danger and sounded a warning fifty years ago. " Let us fill the empty stomachs and light fires on the perishing hearths, and there will be an end of rebels and revolutions," said Sœur Rosalie. " The avenger is bearing down upon us ! Let us come to terms with the people or we are lost ! " cried Frederic Ozanam ; and he rallied the forces of charity under the flag of St. Vincent de Paul to meet and stem the

advancing wave.

In 1854 a great misfortune befell Sœur Rosalie. The Emperor sent her the Cross of the Legion of Honour. The shock of this "bitter humiliation," as she called it, was so severe that she fell ill. Her Sisters for once did not sympathise with her in her trouble; and, as to the faubourg, it rose in open opposition to her. As soon as the event became known, the population went wild with joy. Every beggar, every rough, felt that he had been personally honoured, and there came from every dingy court and den congratulations that contrasted strangely with Sœur Rosalie's woe-begone countenance. She remained inconsolable in spite of the general rejoicing, and never could be persuaded to appear even once amidst her people with the badge of honour on her breast. The Emperor and Empress came to see her soon after, and the Emperor, in his gracious way, reproached her for not wearing the cross.

"Sire," she said, "St. Vincent de Paul would not like it. I should, in fact, be ashamed to let him see such a grand affair on the breast of one of his daughters. I don't think he would know her."

"In that case, *ma Sœur*," said the Empress, "I will give you another cross that you will not be obliged to hide from St. Vincent."

That summer, on her way to Biarritz, the Empress made a pilgrimage to the old oak-tree in the Landes, called St. Vincent's Oak, because he used to sit under its shade to discourse on holy things and teach the children their catechism. She carried away a branch of the tree, and had it made into a cross, with a silver Christ attached, and presented it to Sœur Rosalie on her return, saying, "You need not hide this from St. Vincent."

Sœur Rosalie valued this relic of her holy Founder doubly for the sake of the august lady who loved the poor like a true Catholic queen, and once earned the title of *Sœur de Charité* for her courage in going to assist them in the cholera. Sœur Rosalie kept this cross on her writing-table in the parlour, and had a habit of looking to it as if asking an inspiration while she listened, or gave advice to anxious petitioners.

IX

After Fifty Years

More than half a century had now elapsed since Madame Rendu had made the sacrifice of her child to God, and during that long interval they had met only once. Year after year Sœur Rosalie had held out the hope of paying a visit to her old home; but when the time came the

claims that detained her were so urgent and manifold that there was no breaking loose from them.

At last the community made a plot to get her portrait painted, and send it to Madame Rendu as a tribute of their grateful love to her, the mother of their mother. It required a great deal of pleading and persuading to win Sœur Rosalie's consent, but finally she yielded, and the result was an admirable likeness, which is now to be seen in that little parlour where the original passed so many hours of her life. It is a noble face; the features are finely proportioned, the expression of the countenance calm, ardent, delicate, and energetic; the hands, modestly folded, have a character of their own, the lines indicating at once refinement and strength. This portrait of her child gave unfeigned delight to Madame Rendu. She used to sit for hours gazing up at it in a kind of tender ecstasy, talking to it, consulting it.

It was a great and constant sacrifice that Sœur Rosalie made in denying her mother the consolation of a visit; but the very strength of her natural affection made her shrink from listening to the promptings of her heart, and snatching at a consolation that was not a duty. Love of the poor had not weakened these sweet and holy ties of nature in that capacious heart:

she remained to the last warmly attached to her early friends, and in her community she was the most affectionate Sister. Any one she loved took root in her heart, once and for ever. She was absolutely broken-hearted, when a young novice, at being separated from Sœur Tardy, her first mistress, who had formed her to the religious life. For years Sœur Rosalie cherished tenderly an old shoe of hers as a precious relic, and only parted with it finally during a retreat, in a moment of heroic detachment.

Later she grew so warmly attached to all her Sisters, and wept such bitter tears over them when they died, that she made a scruple of conscience of this too great natural feeling; but a venerable ecclesiastic, whose pardon she asked for having one day given way before him to uncontrollable grief at the loss of one of her Sisters, replied comfortingly, "Don't be unhappy about such want of detachment, *ma Sœur*; if you did not cry over your Sisters, you would not be so tender-hearted to the poor."

This tender-heartedness made Sœur Rosalie's rule as a superior as gentle and generous as it was stimulating. She would have carried the young postulants in her arms like babies, had it been physically possible; but when the first efforts were made, and she became convinced that their vocation was solid, and their health

equal to the strain of the rule, she pushed them onwards and upwards, sparing them nothing; whatever was loathsome to nature, repugnant to its fastidiousness, or painful to its self-love was freely laid upon the soul that aspired to be the servant of Jesus in the person of His poor. The religious that she formed came out of her school bearing the stamp of her own character: they had learned her ways with the poor, her gentle compassion, her indomitable courage, her sunny spirit. But love of the perfection of her Sisters never led her to relax her watchful care of their health. At the least sign of illness she, who was so exacting and pitiless to herself, took fright like a veritable mother, and would have them rest, and take better food and many little indulgences that she never dreamed of granting to herself. She seemed to grow in tenderness for others as the years went on. Although she had overcome that shrinking from the sight of wounds and sufferings which as a novice had made her vocation so painful, Sœur Rosalie remained as sensitive as ever to the spectacle of the sufferings of the poor, so much so that she actually found matter for confession in this too great softness of heart towards them. How the accusation would have delighted St. Vincent de Paul, who nearly laughed out loud for joy in the confessional when a young

novice accused herself of too great love of the poor!

It would, perhaps, seem that in a life so absorbed by active work, so filled with external cares and business as was Sœur Rosalie's, leisure was hardly left for the cultivation of those interior virtues on which the sanctity of a true religious is built. In this short sketch it has been possible to dwell only on that side of her life which shone so visibly to the world outside her convent; but one rapid, reverent glance must be cast within the veil, so that we may get a glimpse, however faint, of those hidden virtues that flourished under the shadow of that charity which is the greatest of all.

Her humility was so deep and sincere that those who knew her best were wont to say it was her ruling virtue. It was a wonderful triumph of grace over nature and the evidence of the senses that it should be so, for seldom have the doings of the right hand been more obviously forced upon the knowledge of the left than in Sœur Rosalie's case. Facts are stubborn things, and a well-won victory is amongst the keenest delights that the heart of man can taste; this delight was served to her with a fulness of manifestation and development rarely granted to a conqueror in this world. She lived to see her hard-fought battle crowned with magnificent

and lasting triumphs; to see herself victorious over obstacles that had baffled all previous attempts to cope with them; to see enemies conquered who had refused to surrender to all other forces. She had, by sheer strength of personal influence and self-devotion, overcome the antagonism of classes, the indifference of the rich and the mistrust of the poor; she had lived to see God worshipped by a population who hardly knew Him by name when she came amongst them; to see a generation growing up under the blessed influences of religion, men and women obeying its laws, living and dying with all that is implied by a devout exception of the Sacraments of the Church—the mission that she had begun solidly established and bearing abundant fruit. She saw all this, and she knew that her name was in benediction far and wide; yet Sœur Rosalie honestly believed that she was an unprofitable servant, that she had been a hindrance to the graces that would have been poured out upon her people had not her sinfulness impeded the flow; she was convinced that all the good accomplished was done, not by her, but in spite of her, and that infinitely more would have been done had some one less worthy had been in her place.

It was a constant wonder to her, and the subject of her deepest thanksgiving to the end

of her life, that God should have called her to His service and tolerated her amongst His favoured spouses. When people came flocking to seek her counsel and ask her prayers, she would say to her Sisters, but rather as if speaking to herself, "What can they be thinking of? It passes all understanding!"

It frequently happened that people came to thank her for the success that had followed her suggestions, or the answers that had come, as they believed, to her prayers; but she would stop them at once with, "Ah, yes, I remember I set a very holy soul to pray for your intention, an old paralytic who helps me wonderfully." And from this she would go on to speak of the efficacy of the prayers of the suffering poor, and the wonderful favours they obtain from God.

It was the same in the community. If any good came, she was lost in wonder at God's mercy in sending it, in spite of her unworthiness; if any trouble came, it was all her fault: her sins were visited on her Sisters. "Ah, this poor faubourg!" she would sometimes say, with a sigh; "when will God have pity on it and send some one who may draw down a blessing on these sorely-tried people?"

Yet this profound sense of her own unworthiness never engendered discouragement, that cowardly foe which St. Francis of Sales

somewhere says has wrecked more souls than all the passions put together. Sœur Rosalie was preserved from it by her childlike trust in the Divine Love. "The surest way not to fall," she used to say, "is to walk with two crutches: confidence in God and mistrust of ourselves."

She was fond of telling a dream that she had one night some years before her death. She saw herself dead, and standing before the Judgment-seat, covered with confusion at the sight of her sins, and awaiting in terror the condemnation to be pronounced upon her. Suddenly she was surrounded by a crowd of miserable-looking people carrying old hats and boots and tattered clothes of every description; they all began to cry out interceding for her, and saying that it was she who had given them these things, until Our Lord, turning to her, said, "In consideration of all these rags given in My name, I open to you the kingdom of heaven for all eternity!" This dream, which Sœur Rosalie used to tell with glee, and a sort of lurking belief in it as a prophecy, was in truth the outcome of her humility, and expressed very faithfully her estimate of her own worth.

It gave her positive pain to hear herself praised and none whatever to hear herself blamed, or even calumniated. On receiving a letter of gross abuse from a wretched man whose conduct

had worn out the patience and resources of an honourable family, and whom she had succoured while it was possible, she exclaimed, in a tone of musing satisfaction, "That man knows me well; I am just what he describes; he has taken my true portrait."

She was humble, too, for her community, and dreaded the world's applause for it far more than its blame. It sometimes happened that the work of the Sisters, some heroic act of charity, or some startling result of their efforts, got spoken of in the newspapers; this was a great trial to Sœur Rosalie. "We shall have Sisters of Charity sticking feathers on their *cornettes* by and by!" she exclaimed angrily one day, on reading a laudatory article in a journal; "a poor Carmelite, hidden away in her cell, is often more useful to the Church than people whose works appear before men and get lauded to the skies!"

Indeed, the lot of the Carmelite always seemed an enviable one to the busy daughter of St. Vincent. She had little time for that silent prayer at the feet of her Lord which consoles the daughter of St. Teresa for the trials of her crucified life; but her heart turned to the Tabernacle as the flower opens its chalice to the sun, and in the midst of her countless and distracting occupations she was able to commune

with God in prayer. She confessed to one of her Sisters that she never made a more recollected meditation than when hurrying through the streets on her errands of charity. "The passers-by," she used to say, "don't distract me any more than if they were trees in the forest; I feel like that Saint who compared the world to a great wood where the soul should never let itself be distracted by the briars and brambles."

It was the same everywhere and at all times: in the hospital dressing a wound, in the parlour receiving visitors, in the school, in the kitchen, no matter what she was doing, her heart kept watch, and the eye of her soul remained fixed on God. One day, some of the Sisters had been detained so long with the poor outside, that they had to spend over the wash-tub the hour of meditation. "What is to prevent your making your meditation here, while doing your washing?" Sœur Rosalie said; "you have only to consider how your souls ought to be white as these soap-suds, buoyant like them, so as to rise easily to God, and that, in order to make your consciences pure and snowy as this linen, you must wash them in the waters of penance."

This practice of the presence of God became so habitual to her that it pervaded her countenance and her manner, and lent an air of

extraordinary dignity to her simplest actions. Her Sisters would watch her sweeping out a room, or performing some other humble duty, and used to draw edification from the modesty and devout recollection of her demeanour. They said it reminded them of what our Blessed Lady must have been in the house of St. John. But to see her at prayer was like seeing a Saint in an ecstasy: her whole being prayed; her senses were closed to external things; people might come and go, and watch her, without fear of disturbing her. Sometimes, when she fancied herself unseen, she would stop in the midst of her sweeping, or sewing, or writing, and fall upon her knees, and begin to pray with intense fervour, as if stealing a moment with a beloved friend; on hearing footsteps she would rise quickly and go on with her work.

The Eucharist was the centre that drew her as the magnet draws the iron. It was said by one who knew her interior life that Sœur Rosalie lived for her Communions and her poor. The special characteristic of her piety was its child-like simplicity. Her favourite devotions were what she called "the old-fashioned ones," and foremost among them the Rosary. She seldom spoke of spiritual things to outsiders; but, when invited to do so, her words were full of the deepest spiritual wisdom and an emotion that pene-

trated souls, sometimes changing the current of a life. She never " preached " to worldlings, and she made large allowance for that elastic code which they call their " duties to society " ; but she denounced with unqualified severity the system of compromise that began to be the fashion in her day : the mixing up of piety and dissipation, spiritual reading in the morning, with scandal-mongering in the afternoon, and dancing in semi-pagan attire in the evening—good works taken up between times, as a tonic to stimulate an appetite satiated with pleasure —this sort of thing found no quarter with Sœur Rosalie. She had infinite indulgence for out-and-out sinners, but none for these half-and-half Christians. " They make me shudder," was her expression in speaking of them.

During the fifty years that Sœur Rosalie had served the poor with untiring devotion, the days that she had been free from physical suffering were few and far between. She had been all her life subject to palpitations of the heart, which increased with age, and rendered walking extremely painful, and she suffered from intermittent fever, which confined her to her cell for months at a time, causing serious alarm to her medical attendants. During these long illnesses, when worn with pain and fever, she would gather up her strength to rise and go to receive Holy

Communion, and then drag herself back to bed, where the rest of the day passed in an unbroken act of thanksgiving. Her greatest trial in these illnesses was being cut off from her regular Communions and the service of the poor, and more than once her recovery was compromised by her impatience to resume both. On one occasion, just as the worst was over and she was beginning to sit up a little in the afternoon, a man came to the convent and asked to see *notre Mère ;* he was told she was too ill to see anybody, but he insisted that there was something he wanted done which no one else could do. The Sister infirmarian protested that she had strict orders from the doctor, and dared not disobey them. The man grew violent. Sœur Rosalie, attracted by the noise, opened the door, and, hearing what it was, staggered down the stairs, heard his story, and soothed him in the gentlest way, begging his pardon for having kept him waiting. When he was gone, the Sister infirmarian, terrified at the probable consequences of this imprudence, began to remonstrate :

" Mother, you know what the doctor said ! "

" Yes, child. Let the doctors do their duty, and let us do ours," was the mild but authoritative reply ; " and remember, when that man comes again *always* let me know."

"But, Mother, he was so violent and unreasonable."

"My child, do you expect the poor fellow, when he is distraught with worry, to stop to put on his company manners? You must not take fright at a hasty word and a rough outside. The poor are always better than they seem."

It was very touching to witness the meeting between Sœur Rosalie and her beloved poor after one of these enforced separations. Her tenderness for them always seemed to have increased in the interval. She would gaze on them, her eyes alight with joy, her whole face beaming with fondest complacency, while they crowded about her, plying her with questions, always sure that what they had to say was of interest to her. Before she was well enough to come downstairs, she would sit at the window and watch them coming in and out of the convent yard, and hold communication with them by nods and smiles. She called this her recreation. The sight of these sad faces made glad by her presence was one of the keenest enjoyments of Sœur Rosalie's life; so much so, that not long before her death she came to reproach herself for having indulged in it too greedily.

When, on emerging from these severe illnesses, she gathered up her strength for making

the round of her diocese, as her Sisters playfully called these visitations of the Faubourg, she suffered such agonising pain that she confessed to the doctor every step was like a thorn driven up into her foot. The community at the suggestion of some of her friends, entreated her to take a cab for these long rounds; but she could never be persuaded to do so; it was too gross an infraction of the rule of poverty to be tolerated—for her. She would remind them how, when St. Vincent in his old age was compelled to drive, instead of walking, he used to speak of his "shame at this humiliation."

For many years before her death Sœur Rosalie was threatened with cataract; when it reached a certain point, her sight failed rapidly; she could no longer see to read, then she ceased to be able to guide herself, and in due course she became blind—stone blind. She continued to receive visits as usual in her little parlour; but for a long time the sight of their Mother, led like a little child, feeling her steps with a stick, and groping for the chair before she sat down, was one that few of her children could witness with dry eyes. They suffered for themselves as well as for her; they missed that glance of recognition that had been so comforting, that bright direct glance that was so full of sincerity and sympathy.

Instead of coming to the door, and beckoning to each in turn, or going round from one to another, she remained seated, and each person came up, and told her who he was. This inability to recognise people was a bitter trial to her, and, though no word of repining escaped her lips, she could not hide the fact that she suffered intensely from it. She acknowledged to one who had her confidence that, had God given her the choice, she would rather He had sent her painful disease than this infirmity of blindness. Yet her cheerfulness never flagged. When her Sisters lovingly complained for her, she would rebuke them in her gentle way, and answer penitently, " I have deserved it ; God knows best where to punish us. I took too much pleasure in looking at the poor. He has punished me just in the right place."

X

" To be with Christ, which is far better."

For a long time before the cataract was in a condition to be operated upon, Sœur Rosalie had to undergo a treatment that caused her intense pain. The Sisters who attended her, knowing what she was enduring, expressed surprise that she bore it without even a sign of impatience. " How could I be impatient,'

she would reply, " whilst you are giving me such an example of patience ? "

In the month of October 1855 it was decided that the cataract was in a state to be removed. Sœur Rosalie received the announcement with smiling cheerfulness, and went to the operation with the docility of a child, a docility which the happy use of anæsthetics has since made easy. When the oculist asked if he had hurt her very much, " No," she replied, " you did not hurt me at all ; I was thinking, while your hand was doing its kind office, of the contrast there is between my position and that of the poor when they have to undergo an operation : they are obliged to leave their family and go away to the hospital, whilst I am here in my convent and surrounded by the loving care of my Sisters and friends."

She was obliged for a certain time to remain seated in an upright position and immovable, which was seen to be fatiguing ; but when they wanted to make her more comfortable by propping her up with pillows, she would not allow it. " I will try and keep myself in the presence of God and my guardian angel, and that will prevent my feeling tired," she said ; and they ceased to urge her.

Even in this extremity of helplessness, she continued to govern the community, to direct

its affairs with her wonted wisdom and sense, and to receive all who cared to come to her. These were many. People came as in the old days, with their sorrows and troubles, and Sœur Rosalie listened to them, and counselled and cheered them with the same compassion, the same clear-sighted wisdom as of old.

The operation was not successful. At first a few rays of light stole in upon the darkness, she was able to distinguish forms, and even occasionally colours; but it was only a passing glimmer; the darkness gathered again, and night closed round her. Early in the following year, the oculist proposed a second operation; and, although Sœur Rosalie shrank from it, she consented at once on seeing that her Sisters had their hearts set upon it and were full of hope. Moreover, her health, severely tried by what she had suffered, had rallied surprisingly, and seemed quite equal to a fresh strain upon it. Before the day for the operation was fixed, the community and many friends proposed that a novena should be made to obtain her cure without further recourse to science, but Sœur Rosalie besought them not to attempt it. "I should be frightened at being the subject of a miracle," she said; "I should feel that God expected something extraordinary from me in return, and my mind would be disquieted.

Besides, if it was granted, people who don't know me might think it was because of my virtues."

These arguments did not convince her friends; they persisted in making the novena, so Sœur Rosalie yielded; but she refused to join with them in it. "I like best to leave myself entirely in the hands of God," she said; "and, besides, I should only spoil everything if I mixed up my prayers with yours." The answer to the prayers came indeed in a redoubling of the courage and serenity of the sufferer; but it was evident that she must still seek the aid of science, so a day was fixed for the second operation.

On the evening of the 4th of February, 1856, one of the Sisters happened to mention, at recreation, that that morning, while she was giving out the soup, she had noticed a nice-looking old man, who, after eating his portion, got close to the stove, and stayed there while the distributions lasted; she asked if he were ill; he said he was not, but that he stayed in the warm room because he had no wood or stove to make a fire at home. She told him to come every morning and that she would give him a good portion of food. Sœur Rosalie was greatly affected by this incident, and rebuked the Sister for letting the man go away without obtaining his name and address, and at once sent out to

buy a little stove and a small quantity of wood to be given to him next morning. This was her last act of charity on earth.

That night she was seized with a cold shivering and great pains. She would not wake up the Sister who slept in the room with her, but waited until the appointed hour for rising, and then called to her. The doctor was sent for in haste, and found that inflammation of the lungs had set in. He saw at once that there was danger, but he did not alarm the community by telling them so. For two days the remedies seemed to be acting successfully. Sœur Rosalie herself was free from apprehensions; she was chiefly preoccupied about the trouble and fatigue she was causing the Sisters, and spoke of the long convalescence that was before her and the loss of time it was going to cause them all. Her sweetness and patience were more remarkable than ever, and her love for God and the poor seemed to glow with a more intense fervour. But this did not strike any one as a warning; every illness, by exercising her virtues, had made the likeness to her Divine model more vivid; her Sisters used to say that her soul expanded in suffering like a flower in the sun.

In continued pain and consequent weakness, her sensitiveness became extreme, and remedies which she had once found it easy to bear were

now an agony ; but she never asked to be spared anything ; she accepted the most painful applications, and took the most nauseous drugs without a word of expostulation. One morning the Sister infirmarian found that a blister, badly dressed, had become a wound. The thought of what her Mother must have endured through the night quite overcame her as she removed the cloth that was saturated with blood, an operation which must, she knew, cause excruciating pain to Sœur Rosalie ; looking at her face to see how she bore it, she saw the sightless eyes uplifted and a sweet smile on her countenance. The infirmarian's first thought was that paralysis had set in, and that the dead flesh felt nothing. " Mother," she cried, " am I not hurting you ? " No answer came ; the agony was so acute that Sœur Rosalie could not speak ; " Mother, say, do you feel nothing ? " repeated the Sister. " Yes, my child," she said, " I feel a nail from the Cross of my Saviour, and I wanted to keep it a little longer. How much better off I am than are our blessed poor ! "

In speaking of her death, as she was fond of doing, and saying what she would like Our Lord to do for her in the great crisis, Sœur Rosalie was wont to add, " And I will want a good three months to prepare quietly before the end comes." This longing for quiet sprang chiefly from the

idea that the constant activity of her life might have a dissipating effect on her soul, and that she would need more than others a spell of repose to recollect herself before the act of dying. Humility did not let her see that she had been beautifully performing that "act of dying" all her life by this very service of self-surrender and immolation.

A friend of hers, the Superior of a cloistered Order, who had recently sent for Sœur Rosalie in her last illness in order that "the presence of an angel might give her courage," shortly before expiring said to her, "Courage, Sister! you will soon follow me." Sœur Rosalie had been greatly impressed by these words of her dying friend; but though she repeated them during this short illness, it was evident that she had no idea their fulfilment was so near at hand. "I don't know why my dear and holy friend said that to me," she remarked; "if God sees good to leave me some years longer on earth, I am in no hurry to go." This was on the 5th of February—her last day before eternity.

On the following morning, Sœur Rosalie was much better; all cause for anxiety seemed gone. Shortly after midday, however, a change took place; she was seized with pain in the side, and her pulse beat rapidly. This did not prevent her continuing a familiar discourse she

was making to her religious on the needs of the poor, and the best means of meeting them. Her breathing was affected by the pain, and made speaking difficult; still, although her Sisters entreated her to rest awhile, she laboured on, as if conscious that the time was short, and that what she had to say must be said quickly. At last speech failed her; that tongue, which had been as a tuneful instrument from which the Spirit of God had drawn sounds of heavenly sweetness and wisdom, became embarrassed; her mind began to wander; her head dropped suddenly on her breast, and she breathed heavily like one asleep.

Her Sisters, in alarm, sent with haste for her confessor. He proceeded without delay to administer the last rites, for he saw that Sœur Rosalie was dying. She still remained like one asleep, apparently unconscious; but the moment they knelt down, and the magnificent sacramental rite began, she lifted her head, made the sign of the Cross, and rallied to receive its graces into her awakening soul. She joined in the prayers, murmuring inarticulate words; then her head drooped again, and there was no more awakening until she breathed forth her spirit, and the light of the vision of God broke upon her darkened eyes.

A great silence followed. The loss was so

sudden, and found the Sisterhood so unprepared, that at first they could not believe in it; but quickly the truth was realised, and the news flew from the death-chamber through the convent and the schools, and thence out into the streets, and the cry, "Our Mother is dead!" rang through the faubourg, and was caught up by the great city beyond, passing the palace gates, and entering the dwellings of the rich, and the desolate places, and waking everywhere an echo of sorrow and dismay.

Friends who had heard that Sœur Rosalie was ill came to inquire, and learned that she was dead; but the greater number heard of their bereavement without that slight preparatory warning. The news spread with the electric rapidity that attends a national calamity. The virginal tabernacle was still warm when a crowd had already invaded the room where it lay; while down below a larger crowd filled the courtyard, pressing eagerly for a last look on the beloved face.

In a *chapelle ardente*, with lights burning round her, Sœur Rosalie was placed, clothed in her habit, crowned with her white cornette, her crucifix clasped to her breast, her rosary on her arm. She was very beautiful to look at, every wrinkle smoothed away by the perfecting touch of death, the beam of immortality on

her brow, and a smile of heavenly sweetness on her lips. One of the beholders involuntarily exclaimed, " See, she is smiling at God ! "

Long processions from various points of the Faubourg came steadily on—a coming and a going stream, patient, orderly, silent, breaking the silence only to pray, or to speak the praises of her who was gone. They called her a saint. They told wonderful things about her, they confessed secrets that had never found utterance before ; for death, even on this side of the grave, is a revealer as well as a concealer : it brings to light secrets that pride or humility, or reverence for the humility of others, keeps closely guarded till the object of them is taken away, and then the impulse to bear witness to glorify God in His servant, becomes irresistible, and tongues are loosened.

All that day, and all the next, until night closed in and the gates were shut, the stream came flowing from every part of Paris ; but the vast influx, far from disturbing the neighbourhood, seemed to breathe a deathlike stillness over it. Every shop was closed, every window that had a shutter put it up ; the people spoke in low tones as if the whole district were a house of mourning. Artisans left their work, the *ateliers* were emptied, and the busy bread-winners forgot their need, and came to do homage

to the memory of Sœur Rosalie. Old men and women, too infirm to walk, had themselves carried to the convent, and there, in the presence of her whose humility could no longer be wounded, and of a multitude of strangers of all ranks, they lifted up their voices and proclaimed what she had been to them and done for them. It was a wonderful scene. It recalled those grand, simple ages of faith, when the death of a great servant of God was a family festival in which all the faithful shared, coming from long distances to give glory to God in the triumph of the just soul that had fought the good fight and won the reward.

The people pressed round the coffin, kissing the virginal hands, the tender, firm, helpful hands that for these sixty years had been labouring for others, always outstretched to help or uplifted to bless. Venerable prelates, priests, religious of all orders were there, asking as a favour to say Mass in the presence of the dead Mother, and touching her brow with their rosaries and crucifixes.

Just as the coffin was being closed, a message came—for Sœur Rosalie. It was a letter bearing the post-mark of her old home. It was the announcement of her mother's death: Madame Rendu had died the day before, at the age of eighty-eight. There had been no

illness, no agony; she had fallen softly asleep, like one tired after a long day's work. The news of Sœur Rosalie's death had never reached her, so they met in heaven unexpectedly, these two; another perfect joy amidst the joys that awaited them.

And now all was ready. The hearse that was to carry the Sister of Charity to her last resting-place was the poorest of the poor, the hearse of a pauper, as became the servant of the poor; but the Cross of the Legion of Honour, which she had never worn in life, was placed upon the pall, and round it a military escort formed a guard of honour. Thus right royally she went forth amidst her people, as befitted one who had reigned over them by divinest right of sacrifice and love.

By a delicate instinct of tenderness for the living and the dead, the Community desired that their Mother should pass through the midst of those poor whom she had loved so dearly, making one more "visitation of her diocese," on this her last journey. Instead, therefore, of going direct to the church, the procession wended its way through the narrow streets where Sœur Rosalie had long been a familiar presence, and where, the people said, "she had left a virtue." Everywhere, as the hearse came in sight, men and women fell upon their knees as

if to receive her blessing.

Paris was very grand that morning, and Sœur Rosalie, if she was permitted to look down upon the city, must have been consoled for many other days when it had made her sad; when these same men who were stepping with mournful tread behind her funeral-car had been slaughtering one another and sending blood flowing through the streets. It was more like the triumphal pageant of a sovereign, or the apotheosis of some hero, than the funeral of a humble religious.

As it had been with her in life, so it was in death: all distinction of rank and class was effaced in her presence; rich and poor, gentle and simple, walked side by side, drawn together by the noblest bond that can unite men, a common worship for whatsoever things are pure and lovely and brave and of good report, for innocence and courage and self-sacrifice. Courtiers were there representing the sovereign; the Empress sent her chamberlain to lay flowers on the grave of her friend; ministers and ambassadors were there, functionaries of every rank, military men and officers in the navy, soldiers and sailors, lawyers, doctors, financiers, merchants, artists, tradesmen, learned professors, journalists, and politicians of every party: all differences were set aside, all strife was at rest

to-day. Strangers who saw the vast concourse —forty thousand men, marching bare-headed in serried ranks through the city—asked what great event was being commemorated, and learned with surprise that it was only a nun who was being carried to her grave.

At Père Lacordaire's funeral a peasant cried out in the crowd, " We had a king, and we have lost him ! " The same cry was going up from many hearts that day as that lowly coffin passed out of view, " We had a queen, and we have lost her ! "

A crowd was waiting at the gate of the cemetery to meet her. As the hearse passed in, a poor woman rushed forward and laid her sick child against the coffin, praying out loud to Sœur Rosalie to heal it. When they reached the place set aside in Mont Parnasse for the burying-ground of the Sisters of Charity, the mayor stood forward by the open grave, and, in the name of the Faubourg St. Marceau and of all the people, said a few words, made eloquent by the emotion that broke his voice. The last prayers were said, the last blessing given, and then the crowd dispersed and went back to its busy life, for a moment interrupted and solemnised by a sacred emotion. A little group of poor people alone lingered on, weeping and praying till nightfall, when the guardian of the cemetery told them they must go.

XI

The Legacy of Love.

If love did but reign over us here below, this life would be a heaven on earth, for love is the manna that souls are hungering for; it is the factor that moves the world.

The love that burned in Sœur Rosalie's heart was so strong that it set the spark alight in the most selfish; the coldest took fire, the hardest melted in its glow. For the long spell of half-a century this flame, like a sacred altar-fire, burned steadily in the midst of her people; then it flickered and went out. France heard, one cold spring morning, that Sœur Rosalie had finished her day's work, and died and gone to heaven. So large was the place she filled, and so supreme was her influence, that it seemed as if the work she had set going must now come to a standstill. But it was not so. Others, consumed like herself by the divine passion of charity took up the burden, and went on with the interrupted service. The convent continued to be a centre of help for the surrounding population. Her spirit lived on there, her example shone like a beacon-light, her name was a watch-word, rallying the strong to the rescue of the weak, bidding the sorrowful take hope.

Her picture was to be seen in many a garret

—sometimes the only ornament of the blank wall, sometimes side by side with a crucifix or a Madonna. A year after her death, her bust in marble was, with the Emperor's permission and at the prayer of the inhabitants, placed in the Town Hall of the 12th Arrondissement. The installation was performed with great pomp of ceremonial and every manifestation of popular love and respect. For five-and-twenty years the bust remained the pride and ornament of the district, and during that time her *œuvre* flourished. Then a change came. The Empire fell, and the Republic rose. The talismanic words, "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," were blazoned on the public edifices and over the porticoes of the churches. Freedom was the watchword of the hour; a new era had dawned on the world; humanity was to be emancipated from the slavery that degraded it under the old order of things; under the new order, everybody was to be free—free to do evil, to make war on God, and drive out His servants from their homes. For the others—for those who worshipped Him, and followed His laws—there was to be no freedom. It was only by degrees the people found this out. At first they believed the writing on the wall; but the prophets of the new order came in good time to translate the legend to them. They wanted

no God tyrannising over them with His Commandments: He had had His day, and now He must go.* They drove away first one group of His servants and then another, and then it was the turn of Sœur Rosalie's Sisters.

One lovely summer's morning the Faubourg St. Marceau was making holiday. It was the distribution of prizes at the Sisters' of Charity. Five hundred little scholars in trim white frocks were reaping the reward of the year's diligence. They were a merry company; even those who drew no prizes had their share in the day's glory, for they took their part in the glees and canticles that all were singing in presence of M. le Curé and many other notable personages invited with the parents to assist at the distribution. Those amongst the little choristers who had won distinction or reward carried away brightly bound books or wreaths of white roses, or crowns of green and gold laurel on their learned little heads. As they trotted home they made the dingy streets gay with their white frocks and pinafores and shining garlands, and their chatter and laughter. All the faubourg turned out to see the glad procession pass. There were happy dreams that night on hard pillows in many a poor garret. But a rude awakening was in store for them. The reign of

* See Appendix.

Freedom had decided to do away with these innocent coronations, and next day there came a decree ordering the Sisters of Charity to leave their convent, and within fifteen days to clear out their children and their sick, their infirm old men and women, and all belonging to them, from the Rue de l'Epée de Bois.

The decree fell on the whole faubourg like a bombshell. It meant not merely the expulsion of a band of harmless and devoted women from their home, but the turning adrift into the streets of over a thousand of the most helpless of God's creatures. At one fell blow the labour of eighty years was destroyed. The consternation of the people was so great that for a moment they were stunned; they knew that there was no appeal. The Government had dealt the stroke at the right moment. It was the dead season, when all who might have helped were out of town. Paris—rich, money-giving Paris—was away, either in its chateaux, or bathing on fashionable beaches, or drinking the waters of healing springs. After the first shock, however, the people stood up, and vowed that this work of iniquity should not be done while they were there to prevent it. Some twelve or fifteen brawny fellows marched off to the convent.

"*Ma Sœur*," said a grimy smith, the spokesman of the deputation, "it seems the Govern-

ment has turned you out. Now, how much money will it take to hire premises and keep you going for a year ? "

" Alas ! less than eighty thousand francs would not do it," replied the Superioress.

" Then cheer up, Sisters ! By Sœur Rosalie, you shall have the money ! Call your friends together, and count on us. There are no traitors in the faubourg."

The Sisters began their packing, and their champions went forth and set about getting the money for them. It was as if Sœur Rosalie herself had risen from the grave, and was walking " the diocese " as in old times, visibly present, her voice audible, her spirit firing all hearts, conducting the generous movement with that calm wisdom and energy that were her special characteristics. The chivalrous fellows, who were pledged to find the money, went round the faubourg asking for eighty thousand francs as confidently as if the getting were a mere question of asking, as if they did not know that the collected captial of the entire district could not have made up eighty thousand francs !

For three days the collection went on ; heavy copper coins and bright silver ones came dropping in with bountiful rapidity. Then Paris outside the faubourg heard of what was going on : " Sœur Rosalie's *œuvre* was threatened,

and money was wanted to save it." In less than one week *a hundred thousand francs* were paid in to the evicted Sisters! A loud "Hurrah!" rang through the faubourg.

But there was a good deal to be done yet, in order to complete Sœur Rosalie's triumph. A building had to be found to lodge the Sisters and their family of a thousand members. This was no easy matter, and for a moment it looked as if they would be forced to leave the neighbourhood and pitch their tent in some other quarter. But Sœur Rosalie loved her wicked faubourg too well to abandon it. She sent her kinsman, M. Eugène Rendu, to the rescue; she led him one day, unexpectedly, to a deserted tan-yard close by the old convent—a long straggling block of buildings, with dependencies, and a vast square in the centre. The buildings were in a dilapidated condition; but they were spacious enough, and otherwise easily adaptable to their new purposes. The tan-yard was hired. The next thing was to find an architect of goodwill brave enough to fly in the face of the enemy, and undertake the necessary alterations, and compromise himself as a "clerical." "Our Mother will send us some one," said the Sisters confidently, and they began to consider where they had best turn to look for this man of goodwill. They were interrupted by the portress

coming to say that a lady wished to speak with the Superioress in the parlour.

"*Ma Sœur*," said the visitor, "I want to know if I can be of any use to you in this trouble. I owe a great debt to Sœur Rosalie. When my son was at the point of death, she saved him by her prayers. There is nothing in the world he would not do for her Sisters. He is an architect, and very clever at his profession; is there any use you can put him to?"

The lady's name was Jourdain. She was that mother who, distraught with grief, had come, thirty years before, to entreat Sœur Rosalie to pray over her child. That child now came to pay his debt. He reconstructed the buildings, and quickly made them ready for occupation. When asked for the bill of what the Sisters owed him, M. Jourdain replied: "It is I who am in their debt; they owe me nothing."

All that remained to be done now was to furnish the house. The Faubourg proved here again that, as Sœur Rosalie used to say, its heart was better than its head. It gave out of its poverty with that cheerful alacrity which makes the poorest gifts so precious. It brought tables and chairs; sometimes there was a leg wanting, or some other trifling flaw; it brought pots and jugs, and other odds and ends of presents to "our Mother."

By the month of November everything was ready. The Cardinal Archbishop of Paris was invited to inaugurate the new schools and preside at the re-opening. It was one of those festivals of earth to which the angels are glad to be invited. Sœur Rosalie must certainly have been a degree happier in heaven that day than she was the day before. There were one hundred and fifty more children than when the school had broken up, and the population were celebrating her triumph over her enemies and theirs like a family festival, as in truth it was. They had saved from destruction the work of her life, and had proved to her that she still lived in their grateful memory. Her *crèche* was still to be full of babies, as when she was there to dandle them; her children were to be taught in the schools, her young girls watched over by the *Patronage*, the aged and infirm sheltered, and the sick ministered to in her infirmary.

The white cornettes, like carrier-doves, still flutter up and down the Faubourg, carrying a virtue through the noisy thoroughfares, brightening the slimy cellar, painting sunbeams on the black attic-wall, purifying the crowded slum, redeeming all vile and hateful things with their innocence and love.

We are told—and the tradition is so beautiful

I think it must be true—that some of the anthems which the Church sings in our day were sung by Our Lord and His disciples in the Temple two thousand years ago. What a wonder it must have been to hear Him sing! To hear that voice leading the choir, the Eternal Word uttering Itself in praise to the Father, and making supplication for the sinful multitude around! But the multitude heard without hearing. They distinguished nothing but an ordinary voice; they were deaf to the divine harmony of those tones to which the angels in heaven were hearkening enraptured; they heard the melody, but they missed the message.

As it was then, so it is now. He is singing to us still, as in the days when He went up to the Temple and sang out loud with His dear human voice. He sings to us in all His works: in the roll of the forest, in the surge of the sea, in the mystic dance of the mountains; He sings to us in our own hearts, in sorrow and in joy, in failure, in strife, in disappointment; He is singing to us from the hearts of those we love; but, like the Jews of old, we miss the voice within the voice

If we hear Him in the vibrating stillness of the night, when star calleth unto star, it only lulls us to softer slumbers, like some faint echo of Olympian music. If we hear Him in a life of holiness, of martyr-deeds, in a glorious death,

we are, perhaps, thrilled for one moment to more awakened life, or we stand and listen, as to the sound of martial music from a battle-field to which we have no call. But we *are* called. That trumpet-blast is calling us to the rescue of those who are perishing in the fight. Let us be up and doing; for it may be that in the measure of our response we shall answer for their life or death.

APPENDIX.

"He had had His day, and now He must go" (p. 127). Fifty years later, a French publicist's boast that he had hunted Christ out of France," received the following rebuke in verses published in *The Saturday Review.*

THE FUGITIVE

"Nous avous chassé ce Jésus-Christ."
—French Publicist.

Yes, from the ingrate heart, the street
Of garrulous tongue, the warm retreat
Within the village and the town ;—
Not from the lands where ripen brown
A thousand thousand hills of wheat ;

Not from the long Burgundian line,
The Southward, sunward range of vine.
Hunted, He never will escape
The flesh, the blood, the sheaf, the grape,
That feeds His man—the bread, the wine.

Alice Meynell.

PRINTED BY
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS
411A HARROW ROAD
LONDON W.