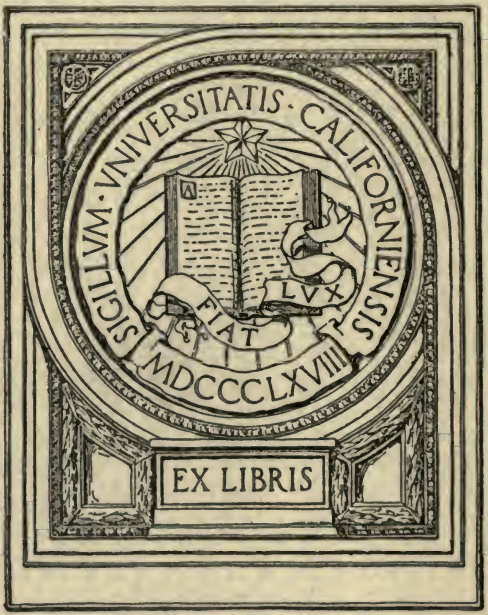

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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PREFACE

IN these pages St Vincent de Paul appears as one of what might be called the modern school of saints—as one of those who had realised with mind and heart the significance of the change of principle and temper introduced by the renaissance dividing the old order from the new, and inaugurating that conflict between them which men of faith believe to be directed to the saving of what is best in both, to the elimination of what is faulty, and so to their eventual reconciliation and assumption into something higher than either.

He may not have been without that hankering after the ages of simple faith which besets every sensitive soul at times; yet his instinctive sagacity told him that the sun will neither stand still nor go back upon its course for all our tender longings; that God fulfils Himself in many ways; that if we would in any degree shape the world better we must begin by shaping ourselves to it as we find it. His attitude towards that new world was not one of blind hostility, but of just and even sympathetic discrimination, of willingness to use and foster and profit by every little beginning of goodness, every little glimmer of truth.

It is principally as almost the originator of the

modern organisation of charitable works that he is deserving of special study, and as offering therein a solution to some very difficult problems.

On the one hand, it is undoubtedly true that the personal and direct ministering to the poor and sick with our own hands is of incalculable benefit to our souls, that we are thus humanised and softened by pity in a way that is not possible when we think or poverty and suffering only in a general and abstract fashion and drop our hard coin into a collection-plate instead of pouring oil and wine into Christ's bleeding wounds. On the other hand, it is to be feared that this same individual ministry is often ill-bestowed through imposture and fraud on the side of the applicant, and through indiscretion and short-sighted kindness on that of the donor. Not but that the real needs of the undeserving are to be respected by the children of Him who makes His impartial sun to shine on the evil and the good, and who bids us deal with others as He deals with our ill-deserving selves; but there is danger lest the alms intended for the relief of necessity be squandered in the service of vice. Nor where real need exists is the shortest and simplest method of meeting it always the wisest and most thoughtful, since the evils resulting from a blind impulsive charity are often far greater than those which it would remedy.

In dealing with these difficulties St Vincent displayed a practical grasp of far-reaching principles, now more generally recognised, but barely adverted to in those days; and in the associations which bear his name he has combined the advantages and eluded

the evils of isolated personal charity on the one hand, and of what we might call "state charity" on the other. By organisation and system he has checked the waste and concentrated the energies of misdirected private charity, while at the same time relief is ministered to the poor not by government officials or paid inspectors, but by the loving hands of those who have learnt that to serve is to reign.

Though we need not be deceived by the sanguine dreams of economists as to the total abolition of poverty through the growth of national wealth, yet it is a manifestly legitimate development of the idea of charity that we should learn from them the remote causes of poverty and remove them as far as is in our power. This was not possible in days when economics were little understood, and when commerce was but in its infancy; but St Vincent did not fail to perceive the change of conditions and the new duties thereby entailed.

Yet he could have done but little had he not been helped by the generosity and liberality of the wealthy and gifted; and here again he shows us a practical solution of the difficulty which stands in the way of so much good work—the money-difficulty. What he effected, says the author, "would remain incomprehensible if it were not an acknowledged fact that the example of charity is infectious. . . . If he demanded much of others he began by spending himself and giving away all that he had, a method which invests a person with a certain authority, and ensures his obtaining all he wants." The world, whatever be its faults, respects and believes in self-sacrifice, seeing

in it the evidence of a spirit higher than its own; but it is only too quick to suspect and observe any tendency on the part of the clergy towards avarice and self-seeking and to make it a pretext for being deaf to their appeals. We find invariably that those who, like St Vincent, by their generous devotion put themselves beyond all appearance of evil in this matter, reap the abundant reward of their faith and receive freely in the measure that they give freely.

No one is more emphatic than St Paul as to the right of those who serve the altar to live by the altar; yet he was no less careful to insist on the expediency of waiving that right as much as possible. "Whereas," says he to the Thessalonians, "we might have been burdensome to you, as the Apostles of Christ we became as little ones in your midst . . . working night and day lest we should be chargeable to any of you"; and to the Ephesians: "You yourselves know for such things as were needful for me and them that are with me these hands have furnished. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring you ought to support the weak and to remember the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, how He said: It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive" (Acts xx. 34).

Even where there is no ground whatever for any uncharitable suspicion of a tendency to press their right unduly, the ministers and labourers in God's Church, urged by the innumerable claims upon their treasury, and harassed with anxieties and uncertain ties, have often been disposed to trust too much in a certain timorous and short-sighted parsimony in

questions of expenditure, which very frequently defeats itself through failing to recognise that boldness is sometimes prudence, and seeming extravagance the truest economy. It is not reasonable to expect heroic confidence and courage in average men, but when one here and there is found with faith equal to the venture we are always given a fresh verification of the law: "Give and it shall be given to you." Of this true spirit of poverty—so different from its counterfeit, the spirit of economy—St Vincent gives us an eminent example, being, one might say, a conduit-pipe rather than a reservoir in regard to what he received, giving out instantly all that he gained and keeping nothing. To act thus as a channel between the pockets of the rich and of the poor, and so in some measure to equalise the distribution of wealth and to divert to the common good what else would be selfishly wasted by the few, is one of the great offices of the Christian Church which she fulfils through her clergy and devout laity, and through such institutions as the societies of St Vincent de Paul.

But we must not ignore another cause of the money-difficulty which is to be found in the prevalence of luxury and extravagance among the possessors of wealth, so that when perchance they are moved to give, they have not the wherewithal. St Vincent, like his friend St Francis of Sales, would be the last to deny that each state of life has got its style to maintain; that men may and sometimes should strive to advance to better circumstances; that beyond the bare necessities of life a certain

fulness of culture is desirable and can be made to minister to the common good. Both were far removed from the puritanism that would make incumbent on all that austerity which is the higher vocation of a chosen few.

Yet when all these legitimate needs are satisfied there is still such a thing as extravagance, waste, and luxury. The throwing of wealth into the sea, and the consequent sacrifice of those services and utilities it might have procured, cannot be justified by even the most ingenious economist if he has fairly apprehended the principle of the conservation of energy. Nor is the case different when great wealth is expended on insignificant utilities, as if one were to purchase a library in order to build up a bonfire. If a poor man finds a diamond and sells it to a rich man for a thousand pounds, the latter is not guilty of luxury. So far, the conventional value of jewels and such objects is most useful, and it is a happy law which creates in the wealthy an appetite for goods that satisfy the fancy and imagination, and for which they are glad to exchange goods that minister to the more imperative needs of the majority. The rich man has an abundance of bread that he does not want, and the poor man has a diamond that he does not want; they exchange and thereby create wealth. But if hundreds employ the time, energy and labour that might go to the production of bread in searching for diamonds to sell to the rich, who can fail to see that the community at large is poorer by such waste however the loss be distributed. It is not then in paying five

pounds for a flower for his buttonhole that a millionaire sins by luxury. Had he instead given the money as an alms to the flower-girl, who would not praise him? But it is when things of as slight utility are produced at the sacrifice of energies that might have gone to feed the hungry, that luxury cries to heaven for vengeance.

It is not merely among the wealthy that waste of this kind prevails, but among all ranks of life. Indeed it is not so often the man with five talents or with two that lets his resources lie idle as the man with one. The very consciousness of wealth forces upon one the sense of responsibility whether we attend to it or not; but those who can do little are far more prone to think they need do nothing, and as these constitute a vast majority it is to the sum of their little wastings and luxuries rather than to the conspicuous squanderings of the wealthy that the leakage of wealth should be chiefly ascribed. St Vincent knew well that could these wastings be saved and avoided Lazarus might in many cases find sufficiency in the crumbs from the table of Dives; that it was because so many not merely spent but wasted so much on their necessities and enjoyments that many others had not enough to spend. He was therefore an advocate by word and example, not necessarily of Spartan austerity, but of that greater simplicity of life in the matter of food, clothing and lodging, which is really more conducive than lavishness to health, happiness and reasonable comfort, which counteracts the vulgarising effects of material prosperity, harmonises with the requirements of elegance and

good taste, and secures leisure for the development of our best faculties.

He was then pre-eminently the Apostle of Charity, of that social unitive virtue which takes us out of ourselves and merges us in a public life wider than our own, nay, as wide as the family which calls God its Father; which conceives society not as a self-interested but as a disinterested union of many in one. He took this idea of Charity and developed and adapted it to the needs of modern life. And we do not hesitate to say that he held in his hand and bequeathed to his children the keys of many of those problems whose solution social and political philosophers are still groping after, but will never find until they return to those deeper religious principles from which St Vincent de Paul drew his most practical conclusions.

G. T.

WIMBLEDON, 19*th July* 1898.

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ST VINCENT DE PAUL

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

THERE are some names whose mere sound is more eloquent than any commentary that can be made, any panegyric that can be pronounced upon them, the impression produced by them is only weakened by praise. Among them may indisputably be reckoned the name of St Vincent de Paul.

Everyone, be he believer or agnostic, is conscious, when he hears it pronounced, of a movement of admiration and veneration for one of the greatest benefactors of the human race, for one of the most marvellous examples of what the grace of Christ can accomplish in a docile heart and loving soul. And therefore, it seems to us, that the best way of relating the life of one, who was, in the most strictly literal sense, the servant of God and of the poor, is to set down simply, soberly, sometimes even dryly, the facts of which it is made up.

Most people have only a general and vague knowledge of these facts, which would lose their full significance if they were not chronicled with perfect simplicity.

When the reader is familiarly acquainted with them in their entirety, he will be compelled to admit that, in Bossuet's memorable words, things speak for themselves, and that their voice is more powerful than any set speeches, even the most eloquent, that can be made concerning them. Having premised this much by way of excuse for the dryness of our story, which runs a great chance of surprising, nay even of scandalising, some people, let us embark upon our subject, and endeavour to depict the apostle of charity by means of his actions, allowing him to speak for himself as often as possible.

Vincent de Paul was born on the 24th of April 1576, at Ranguines, a hamlet of the parish of Pouy, near Dax, in the Landes. His parents, Jean de Paul and Bertrande Moras, were simple peasants, gaining a slender livelihood by the produce of a small piece of land, which they cultivated themselves. In spite of the prefix in their name, which in those days, be it observed, frequently only denoted the place whence the family came, they had no pretensions to noble birth, and Vincent, on the rare occasions in later life when he signed himself by his patronymic, wrote "Depaul" in one word.

We shall abide by the usual spelling, which, though said by the learned to be inaccurate, has the advantage of being well known. Vincent was the youngest but one of a family of six, two girls and four boys, all dearly loved and prized by their poor parents. In his early childhood he seemed destined to lead the life of an ordinary peasant

and was set to domestic work, as soon as he was old enough, just as his elders had been.

His duty was to mind the flocks, an experience that he was very fond of recalling years afterwards, when anyone took upon himself to praise him or to exalt his family. But the little shepherd-boy's precocious quickness and intelligence soon attracted attention, and his father, possibly in the hope that the child might in time rise to a position which would enable him to support his whole family, resolved to give him a good education. Accordingly Vincent, at the age of twelve, was entrusted to the care of the Franciscans at Dax, who undertook to teach him for the sum of sixty francs a year, a sum which, moderate as it may seem to us, was a heavy tax on the poor family. Little is known of his school-days. His industry evidently equalled his ability, for, four years after his entering the college, he had made such progress and gained so much by the lessons of his masters, that M. de Commet, a lawyer well known in the district, and judge of the Pouy division, committed to him the task of beginning the education of his children.

In spite of his youth Vincent devoted himself heart and soul to this occupation, which enabled him to carry on his own studies without being any expense to his parents.

For five years the young tutor discharged his duties with remarkable skill and unwearying perseverance, continuing meantime to attend lectures at the Franciscan college, and to work unremittingly at his own self-improvement. M. de Commet, him-

self both a wise and a religious man, was deeply impressed by the talent, and still more by the mature virtue of his children's teacher, and spared no pains to induce Vincent to enter Holy Orders.

He doubtless thought that the young man would do the Church good service, and was perhaps influenced by the fact that the priestly state afforded the easiest opportunities of bringing his talents into notice, and opening to him a successful career; since, unlike every other profession, it was free to those who had neither rank nor wealth. He did not realise what a good work he was doing in urging Vincent towards the priesthood, but if it be true that his arguments got the better of the youth's humility, and consequent reluctance to take upon himself the sacred ministry, France, and indeed all Europe, owes him a debt of gratitude.

Encouraged by the opinion of M. Commet, and by the advice of wise ecclesiastical superiors who had observed the seeds of eminent virtue in his soul, Vincent at length took the decisive step, and on December 20th, 1596, received the tonsure and the minor orders in the Church of Bidache from the hands of the Bishop of Tarbes. But having once become a "clerk"—the name then given to those in orders—Vincent was firmly resolved not to stand still at that point. He had no intention of entering the Church simply to obtain a rich benefice, and his great desire was to complete his theological studies. In order to attain this end it was necessary for him to attend some university possessing the right of conferring degrees. The two nearest were

Saragossa and Toulouse; Vincent began with the first, which enjoyed the higher reputation, but his stay there was exceedingly brief, though the exact cause of his departure is unknown. It is said that he was driven away by the violent discussions concerning grace and predestination which at that time split up the University of Saragossa into two camps, and which certainly could not have been much to his taste. However this may be, it is certain that he soon left Saragossa for Toulouse, where he remained for the space of seven years. But meantime he had to live, and Vincent was a poor student without any private means. At first his father, who approved his course of action, helped him to the best of his power by sharing with him the small sum that was realised by the produce of his little property; he even sold a yoke of oxen and sent what they fetched to his son, who fully appreciated the sacrifice entailed by this action. It is possible that M. de Commet, who had incited him to adopt the state of life which he had chosen, came to his assistance.

The first year at Toulouse went by with ups and downs of fortune, and, it cannot be doubted, with a great many hardships; but when the summer of 1598 came round, Vincent's funds were quite exhausted and some means of subsistence had to be found. The young theological student resorted to the expedient still in favour among poor seminarists: he looked out for a tutorship during the long vacation, in order that he might be able to finish his course of study and yet be independent of any out-

side help. Accordingly he took the post of tutor to the two sons of the baron de Flammarens, Hébrard de Grosolles, lord of Bazet, who lived in the castle adjoining the little town of that name. He was so successful in his teaching that when the time came for him to leave Bazet and return to Toulouse, M. de Flammarens and his wife could not make up their minds to let their children forego the advantages they had enjoyed, and begged him to take the boys back with him to Toulouse. This was done, and the lads went to the college whilst their tutor was at the university, and in the time which the lectures left free he undertook to look after them and help them with their work. His care and his instruction produced such excellent results that other boys joined M. de Flammarens' two sons, and the young seminarist soon found himself at the head of a small school of young noblemen, amongst whom were the two nephews of John della Valetta, Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, who had become famous throughout the whole of Christendom in consequence of his heroic defence of the island against Soliman. Through these boys Vincent was brought into contact with another of their uncles, the duc d'Épernon, who was struck with so much admiration for the young man's virtue that he strove fruitlessly for some time to get him made a bishop. Vincent de Paul's devotion to his pupils did not militate against his theological studies, which he carried on for the space of seven years with the greatest ardour and with the same scrupulous conscientiousness which we shall see him display

throughout life in everything which he undertook.

Having taken his bachelor's degree in 1604, he was commissioned to comment on Master Peter Lombard's "Sentences," an extremely famous book in the Middle Ages. This was a kind of public acknowledgment of his theological learning. The "Gallia Christiana" gives him the title of *doctor*, and as nothing beyond his bachelor's certificate has come down to us, it has been surmised that at a later date he destroyed, out of humility, his doctor's diploma. At any rate it is certain that he completed his full course of theology, and that when the Jansenists reproached him with ignorance, and took literally his description of himself as a "poor fourth-rate scholar," they were using one of those polemical arguments which serve no end save that of dispensing those who use them from answering reasonable objections by dint of distracting the attention of the audience.

Having received the subdiaconate and diaconate in 1598, Vincent was ordained priest the following year, his humility leading him to defer that solemn day a little. About the same time he lost his father, who would seem to have divined what an important part this favoured son was to play, and what services he was to render to the Church. In a will bearing the date of 1598 he made several bequests to Vincent, and charged his other children to further by every means in their power their brother's design of consecrating himself to God. But Vincent, who was firmly determined that no

member of his family should ever profit by his entering the priesthood, and who kept his resolution faithfully for more than sixty years, absolutely refused to take advantage of any of the provisions of his father's will, and left the whole of the modest inheritance to be divided amongst his mother, brother, and two sisters, without appropriating the smallest item for his personal wants.

On the 23rd of September, 1600, François de Bourdeilles, bishop of Perigueux, ordained Vincent de Paul priest in the chapel of his palace at St Julien, now Château-l'Evêque. A few days later he said his first Mass, alone, according to his own express wish, save for the presence, prescribed by the rubrics, of a brother acolyte, and of one choir-boy. It was in a little chapel, situated in the midst of the woods, not far from the castle of Bazet. Vincent, who had spent many long hours of prayer in this humble sanctuary, chose the place on account of its solitude.

It is useless to try and describe the faith and devotion with which he, for the first time, offered up the Holy Sacrifice, and vowed to consecrate to God his whole life without any reservation. Never was promise more faithfully kept. We see that he, who was, in the words of St Francis of Sales, the most holy priest in the century, showed, at the very outset of his career, what is called nowadays his distinguishing "*trait*" by avoiding with jealous care all show and ceremony, even of the most modest kind. This first Mass said in a country chapel, without witnesses and without his kinsfolk, bore testimony to the

humility and distaste for honour, which even then existed in the son of the peasant of Pouy. Perhaps at that period he took more pains to conceal himself than he would have done later on, when it would have no longer been necessary, when the course of time and his own advance in virtue had finally destroyed in him the last remains of that self-love and self-complacency, which survive even in the purest souls, and are always ready to spring into fresh life. Vincent de Paul soon gave another and a stronger proof of disinterestedness. When his first patron, M. de Commet, heard that his old protégé had been ordained priest, he wished to have him settled near Dax, and succeeded in getting him presented to the rectorship of Thil, a large parish of sixteen hundred souls, quite close to the above-mentioned town. It was a good living for so young a priest. But the appointment was contested by another ecclesiastic, who had asked for and obtained it at Rome, and the only way of settling the question would have been to go to law about it. Vincent preferred giving up the benefice to engaging in a lawsuit, and accordingly returned to Toulouse and his theological studies, which he carried on till 1605. Shortly after their completion the duc d'Épernon, who had not forgotten the tutor of his della Valetta nephews, sent for him to Bordeaux, doubtless in order to bestow upon him a living, or to bring him forward as a candidate for the episcopacy. But the business, whatever it may have been—for Vincent would never reveal its nature—came to nothing. It was then that an occurrence took place, apparently of no great

importance, which was to decide his future, and to enable him by a chain of unforeseen consequences to increase a hundredfold the talent which God had entrusted to him,—to increase it in a degree which must always remain a mystery to those who persist in regarding it simply as the result of human skill.

On his way back to Toulouse from Bordeaux, Vincent de Paul was informed that a devout lady of rank, who had just died, had made him her heir; this was an unexpected boon, which made it possible for him to pay his debts. But he soon learned to his cost that, if Fortune favoured him, it was merely, to use his own words, in order to exemplify in him her instability and inconstancy. The inheritance was not large—a few pieces of furniture and some small pieces of landed property; the most satisfactory item of the estate consisted of a debt of four or five hundred crowns, advanced upon the life security of a scamp, who did not pay, and against whom there was a warrant of arrest out. Directly he heard that Vincent had accepted the inheritance, he took the precaution of decamping to Marseilles in order to elude legal proceedings. Vincent, to whom the bequest, small though it might be, was almost a fortune, and who was through it ensured at any rate against want, up to the time of the completion of his theological studies, determined to pursue his debtor. This is his account of the adventure, which was fraught with such fateful consequences for him. The letter is written in a lively strain, and with a naïveté and "*verve*" which impart a peculiar charm to it. It reveals to us a

young and eager St Vincent de Paul, rather keen in defending his rights, who is not yet the "bon M. Vincent" of later days, but who gives promise of what he was to become.

"You may have heard, Monsieur," he writes to M. de Commet, "that I found on my return from Bordeaux, a will made in my favour by a good old woman of Toulouse. The substance of it consisted in some furniture and a few pieces of land which the Chamber of Castres had by a majority assigned to her for three or four hundred crowns that were owing to her from a certain disreputable person. I at once started for Toulouse in order to sell the property, which my best friends considered would be the most profitable arrangement for me, as I was in sore straits for money in order to pay the debts which I had contracted, and to defray the expenses entailed by the prosecution of the business, concerning which I do not venture to speak. On my arrival, I discovered that this knowing gentleman had taken himself off on account of a warrant that the good woman had out against him for the above-mentioned debts, and I learnt that he was making himself very comfortable at Marseilles, and seemed to have plenty of money. Whereupon my lawyer came to the conclusion that the state of affairs made it imperative for me to go to Marseilles, since once I had him prisoner, I might get at any rate three or four hundred crowns out of him. Having no cash in hand for the journey, I sold the horse which I had hired at Toulouse, counting upon paying for it on my return, which was, for

my misfortune, much delayed. I am much put to shame at having left my affairs in such a muddle; I should not have done so had it pleased God to give me the success in my undertaking which appearances seemed to promise. Acting upon this advice I started, caught my man at Marseilles, got him put in prison, and compounded with him for three hundred crowns, which he paid down."

Having settled this piece of business, Vincent was preparing to return to Toulouse in the usual way, that is to say, by the coach, the humble precursor of diligences and railways, when a gentleman, whom he had met on the journey from Toulouse, proposed going by sea from Marseilles to Narbonne, which shortened the route considerably, and was moreover far less expensive. Vincent was easily persuaded, the weather was fine, the sea open, and they started with a fair wind, in bright sunshine, hoping to arrive safely in harbour that same evening, which would have been the case, as Vincent himself tells us:

"If three Turkish brigantines, which were coasting along the gulf of Lyons (in order to catch the vessels coming from Beaucaire, where there was a fair going on, said to be one of the finest in Christendom), had not given us chase and attacked us so vigorously, that two or three of our men were killed and the rest wounded. I got a hurt with an arrow which will mark the date of the occurrence for me all my life; so there was nothing for it but to yield to the rascals, who are really worse than wild beasts."

CHAPTER II

TUNIS, ROME, PARIS

SO our young bachelor of theology has suddenly become a slave to the Turks. This fact, which strikes us as improbable, was not very unusual at that period. The Mediterranean and the Adriatic were infested by Turkish and Moorish corsairs; Venice and Genoa were "fallen from their high estate," and these queens of the sea, who had for so long been rivals, were no longer capable of keeping clear the coasts of Italy and France.

The terrible shocks which Europe had sustained in consequence of the religious wars, from which she was only just beginning to recover, also contributed to the spread of this plague of piracy, and the prisons of Tunis and Algiers were full of captives of every nation who underwent the most cruel hardships.

Vincent gave a good many details of his life as a slave in a letter to his old protector, M. de Commet, from which we have already made quotations. It was written immediately after his escape, and was doubtless intended to reassure his family, who for eighteen months had had no news of him.

Later on he endeavoured to regain possession of this document, intending, in his excessive humility,

to destroy it. But its owners, knowing with whom they had to deal, contented themselves with sending him a copy; thus the original, of whose authenticity there is no doubt, has been preserved.

Vincent gives an account of his painful serfdom with a grace and naïveté that could not be attained by another pen. This extract is curious, not only because it relates with striking simplicity this terrible episode in the career of Vincent de Paul, but because it allows us to gather from life the peculiar charm which lay in his words and won the hearts of his audience so quickly.

No one can read this letter without being struck by the wit, the vivacity, the shrewdness, the happy turns of phrase displayed by the writer, who, despite his youth, already has a clear and vigorous style of his own. It becomes easier to understand the captivating power which this peasant's son was so soon to exercise upon those around him, and to realise how impossible it was to resist his flow of words, full of natural originality as they were, which had the effect of animating and almost transfiguring his rugged and unattractive features, lit up, it must be added, by a pair of eyes sparkling with eagerness and mischievous good humour.

"The first effect of the fury of the Turks," he says, "was the cutting into a hundred thousand pieces of our pilot, by way of making up for the death of one of their principal men and of four or five galley-slaves who were killed by our people.

"Having accomplished this, and dressed our wounds in a rough kind of fashion, they put us in chains,

and held on their course, committing many piracies by the way, but setting at liberty, after having robbed them, all who yielded without resistance. At last, at the end of about seven or eight days, by which time they were loaded with goods, they steered for the coast of Barbary, which is a perfect lair or den of non-commissioned spoilers in the service of the Great Turk. Once there they exposed us for sale with a document concerning our capture, which, they asserted, was made from a Spanish ship, because, but for that falsehood, we should have been delivered by the consul whom the king maintains out there in order to keep trade open for the French. This was how they set about disposing of us. After having stripped us naked, they bestowed on each of us a pair of breeches, a linen doublet and a cap, and marched us through the streets of Tunis, whither they had come in order to sell us. After having perambulated the town five or six times with chains round our necks, we were taken back to the boat for the dealers to come and see who could eat and who could not, by way of proving that our wounds were not mortal. When this was over they led us into the market-place, where the dealers came and inspected us precisely as one does when one is buying a horse or an ox, opening our mouths to examine our teeth, feeling our sides, probing our wounds, making us walk, trot and run, carrying burdens the while, then setting us to wrestle in order to judge of our respective strength, and indulging in hundreds of other brutal proceedings.

"I was sold to a fisherman who was, however, compelled to get rid of me because I and the sea never can agree together; he disposed of me to an old alchemist, an accomplished distiller of quintessences, and a very kind and humane man. He told me that he had been working for fifty years at the discovery of the philosopher's stone; his researches had been quite fruitless in that respect, but most successful with regard to the transmutation of other metals.

"For instance, to show that I am not speaking without knowledge, I have often seen him melt gold and silver together in equal parts, arrange them in little sheets, then put a layer of some powder in a goldsmith's crucible or melting-pot, keep it on the fire twenty-four hours, then open it and find the silver turned into gold; still more frequently did he congeal or solidify quicksilver into pure fine silver, which he sold and gave to the poor.

"My occupation was keeping up the fire in ten or fifteen furnaces, which, thanks be to God, gave me quite as much pleasure as trouble. The old fellow was very fond of me, and took great delight in haranguing me about alchemy, and into the bargain about his religion, to which he strove his best to bring me over, promising me great riches and much knowledge. God always kept alive in my heart the expectation of freedom, through the earnest prayers which I offered up to Him and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, through whose intercession alone I believe that I was delivered from captivity.

"I remained then with this old man from the month of September 1605, to the following August,

1606, when he was seized and taken to the supreme Sultan, in order to work for him. However, it was no good, for he died of sorrow on the way. He left me to his nephew, a regular heathen, who sold me again very soon after the death of his uncle, because he heard that M. de Brèves, ambassador for the king in Turkey, was coming with authorised and explicit letters from the Grand Turk, for the recovery of the Christian prisoners. A renegade from Nice in Savoy, my natural enemy, bought me and carried me off to his '*témat*' (that is the name for property held as farms from the Grand Turk, for the people possess nothing, everything belongs to the Sultan). This man's '*têmat*' was in the mountains, where the country is very hot and arid. One of his three wives, a Greek and a Christian, though a schismatic, had a good disposition, and was very kindly inclined towards me, and moreover, in due time another, who was by birth a Turk, served as an instrument to the boundless mercy of God for drawing her husband out of his apostasy, bringing him back to the pale of the Church, and delivering me from my slavery. Being very curious to learn all about our manner of life, she paid me a visit every day in the fields where I was digging, and after some conversation would order me to sing the praises of my God. The recollection of the children of Israel, '*Quomodo cantabimus in terra aliena*' ('How shall we sing the praises of the Lord in a strange land?') made me begin with tears in my eyes, the psalm '*Super flumina Babylonis*' ('By the waters of Babylon'), and then I sang the '*Salve Regina*' and several

other things, in which she took such delight, that it was a marvel to see. She did not fail to tell her husband that same evening that he had done wrong in abandoning his religion, which was in her opinion extremely good, according to the account of our God which I had given her and some hymns to His praise which I had sung in her presence. She said that she had felt such a divine gladness meantime that she did not believe that the paradise of her fathers, where she hoped one day to dwell, could be so glorious or so full of joy as her soul was of delight whilst I was praising my God, whence she concluded that there was something wonderful about it.

"This woman, like a second Caiaphas, or another Balaam's ass, was the cause, through her talk, of her husband's telling me the next day that he was only waiting a convenient opportunity for us to escape to France, but that he would manage it in a short time, to the glory and praise of God.

"This 'short time' turned out to be ten months, during which I was buoyed up with vain hopes. However, at the end of that time they really were realised, for we made good our escape in a little skiff, and on the 28th of June we arrived at Aigues-Mortes, and soon afterwards reached Avignon, where the renegade, weeping and sobbing, was reconciled to the Faith by his lordship the vice-legate, in the church of St Peter, to the honour of God and the edification of the spectators.

"The aforesaid Monseigneur has kept us with him in order to take us to Rome, whither he is going

immediately on the arrival of his successor in his three years' office, which expired on St John's day. He has promised to procure the penitent's entrance into the austere monastery of the Frati ben Fratelli, which he has made a vow to join, and to provide me with a good living.

"He does me the honour of showing me great affection, making much of me, for the sake of some secrets of alchemy which I have taught him, a favour which in his own words he esteems more highly than if I had given him a mountain of gold (*'se io gli avessi dato un monte d'oro'*) because he has worked at it all his life, and made it his only relaxation. Knowing that I belong to the Church, he has ordered me to send for my ordination papers, assuring me that he will stand my friend and get me a benefice. . . . It cannot surely be the case, monsieur, that you and my relations have been scandalised in me on account of my debtors; I should have paid them in part with the hundred or hundred and twenty crowns that our penitent gave me, if I had not been advised by my best friends to keep the money till after my return from Rome, in order to avoid any inconvenience which I might meet with, if I were without money, now that I am in Monseigneur's house and enjoy his favour. But I am of opinion that all this scandal will come right in the end."

Once out of slavery and safe at Avignon, Vincent de Paul soon came under the notice of the Cardinal Montorio, the Pope's vice-legate, who proposed that Vincent should accompany him to Rome on his

approaching return thither. Vincent, who if the Lazarist tradition is trustworthy, had already made some stay in Rome, in 1600, before going to Toulouse, agreed and followed the prelate to Italy. Being still strongly possessed by the desire of settling the debts which the expenses of his priestly education had compelled him to contract, he had not perhaps abandoned the hope, which assuredly was perfectly legitimate, of getting a living that would secure his future against anxiety. This is the gist of another letter, likewise addressed to M. de Commet, but this time from Rome. After begging that his ordination papers may be sent on to him, he adds: "I am in this city of Rome, carrying on my studies, at the expense of his lordship the vice-legate, who was at Avignon, who does me the honour to hold me in great affection, and to desire my advancement, in consequence of my having shown him a great many curious things which I learnt during my time of serfdom from that old Turk, to whom I wrote you word that I was sold. Amongst these extraordinary bits of science is the beginning, not the complete perfection, of the mirror of Archimedes, an artificial spring to make the skull of a dead man speak, which that wretched old fellow made use of to delude the people, telling them that thus his god Mahomet made known his will to his servant.

"Many other things in geometry, which I learnt at the same time, I have explained to Monseigneur, who is so jealous of them that he will scarcely let me speak to anyone else, for fear I should teach him,

whereas Monseigneur wishes to enjoy alone the reputation for this knowledge. Sometimes he displays his skill to his Holiness and the cardinals. Therefore his kindness and goodwill, coupled with his promise to the same effect, inspire me with the hope of being able to get out of all my difficulties honourably, by means of a good living that he will obtain for me."

This anxiety on the part of Vincent to pay his small debts is noteworthy, bearing witness as it does to the fact that he was early in life, as he showed himself throughout, not merely honourable, but extremely scrupulous in everything concerning money. His carefulness about his temporal future sets him before us as he was, simple and natural, free from the least affectation of any kind. At this period of his life a benefice would have helped him to get out of his difficulties, and he would have accepted it without hesitation, even though he might have parted with it when he no longer needed it. A few years later, we shall see that by the help of divine grace, he has put away all anxiety for his personal interests, even the most lawful, and that he will never even think of such a means of extricating himself from a dilemma.

Once settled at Rome, Vincent resumed his studies, and profited by his stay in the centre of the Catholic world to bring his theological knowledge to perfection. He acquired at the same time an attachment and a docility to the Holy See which never left him, and which enabled him to take his way through the first beginnings of Jansenism with-

out disturbance of mind or uncertainty. The legate Montorio, whose Italian quickness of judgment had shown him that the prisoner of the Turks, brought to him at Avignon, would one day become one of the most remarkable ecclesiastics in France, presented him to the ambassadors just sent to the Pope by Henry IV., and warmly recommended him to them. Henry, who had already intervened as arbiter between the Holy See and Venice, and had succeeded in settling their differences, was then busy with what is known as his "great scheme," namely the coalition of all the European states against the two branches of the house of Austria.

M. de Brèves, who had just negotiated the celebrated treaty of Constantinople (1604), represented the king at Rome, together with Denys de Marquemont, auditor of the Rota; moreover Charles of Gonzaga, husband of the princess Nicolle, daughter of the last duke of Lorraine, secretly defended the interests of France, whilst officially representing Lorraine, still "a country under obedience," that is to say, one whose benefices depended directly on Rome during a certain fixed part of the year. These three great personages had no sooner learned to know this humble priest, so lately a slave of the Turks, than they conceived a high esteem for him, and entrusted to him without any hesitation a secret mission to the king.

To what this mission exactly referred has never been clearly discovered, nor what was the precise message which Vincent was charged to deliver at Paris, for, true to his usual discretion and to his con-

stant anxiety to conceal whatever might reflect credit on himself, he never spoke of it to anyone, nor made the slightest allusion to this incident, which nevertheless decided his future, by bringing him on a new stage, where he was destined to play a most important part. It has been surmised that his mission was connected with the great scheme above mentioned, and that matters, too delicate to be committed to writing, were confided to him. However that may be, it is certain that at the beginning of 1609 Vincent de Paul returned to France as the bearer of a secret mission to the king; he, a poor priest, unknown to the world, was received at the Louvre, and several times admitted to an audience with Henry IV.

An interview with the king was a unique opportunity for anyone possessing the smallest spark of ambition, especially when the king in question was Henry IV., one of the greatest adepts the world has seen at judging character and at discerning the merits as well as the capacity of his interlocutors. If Vincent had taken the slightest pains to attract the notice of his sovereign, who was at the same time the shrewdest man in the kingdom, nothing would have been easier than to get into his good graces, and so to profit by them as to make the present, no less than the future, secure against any temporal anxiety. The monarch, who on three distinct occasions had tried to draw St Francis of Sales into the Church of France, by offering him the richest bishoprics, would not have been long in reading Vincent de Paul, had not the latter used as

much care in concealing himself, as anyone else would have done, possibly quite innocently, in bringing himself forward. But—and here the saint begins to show himself—as soon as his mission was accomplished, Vincent's great object was to leave the Louvre without asking for anything, without even showing any desire to return; and it may be safely stated that at court, just as everywhere else, nothing is easier than to efface oneself from memory, if only one sets about it in earnest.

And so it came to pass that the poor priest, whom a turn of events had transformed into the bearer of an embassy, found no difficulty, when he had complied with the instructions given him by delivering his message to the king in person, in leaving the court, where no one knew him, and where he did not know a single creature.

He went to lodge in a small room in a house situated in the faubourg Saint-Germain, near the Hospital of La Charité, which had just been built by Mary de Medici in the street of the "Saints-Pères," that is to say almost outside Paris, far from the "Marais," at that date the fashionable quarter where within a few years Louis XIII. was to erect the "marvel of the Place Royale." In this obscure corner the poor little country priest was quickly forgotten by the great people at court, who had only caught a passing glimpse of him, and he began to devote himself zealously to works of Christian charity, going to the hospital of La Charité to nurse the sick, to encourage them and to help them to die.

The future must have looked very dark just then to Vincent, alone without means or patron in the midst of a great city like Paris. What would become of him? How was he going to live? He did not know; he trusted in Providence, to whom he committed the care of finding the post which he was to fill. He was not disappointed, for it was at this period that he was presented to M. de Bérulle, whom he had met, it is said, at a sick person's bedside. De Bérulle was already famous for his virtue and his good works; he had just brought the Carmelites into France, and was founding the Oratory; shortly afterwards he was made Cardinal. This meeting of two men, so peculiarly well fitted to understand one another, was to have a great influence over Vincent's whole life, for in a very short time intimate relations became established between himself and the great director of souls in the seventeenth century. But before relating any of the results which ensued, we must speak of an incident that happened in the early part of his Paris life, which was to him one of those peculiarly painful trials, so often sent by God to those who are strong enough to bear them without shrinking, and to know how to make a good use of them.

In order to husband what remained of his slender means, Vincent shared his modest lodging with a companion, who paid half the rent of his little room. He came from the same part of the country as Vincent, being judge of Sore, a commune in the Landes, and was up in Paris for the prosecution of a lawsuit. This man had put his money in a cup-

board, which he one day forgot to secure on going out. That same day Vincent de Paul, being unwell, was obliged to remain in bed until some medicine, which he had ordered, arrived. The messenger who brought it opened the cupboard to get a glass, saw the money, took it, put it in his pocket and went off, no doubt delighted at this unexpected windfall.

When the judge came in he hurried to his hoard, and not finding it turned furiously upon Vincent, who had observed nothing and had no reply to make. In his anger the wretched man overwhelmed his companion with abuse, and accused him roundly of having robbed him. Unmoved and unruffled by his insulting language, Vincent contented himself with answering that he had seen nothing, had no idea what had become of the money, and that God knew the truth.

Then he held his peace and let his accuser say what he would; goaded by rage, the man went so far as to have issued against Vincent what was then called a "monitory," which naturally resulted in nothing. Nevertheless he continued to spread the calumny everywhere, and even went so far as to bear it in person to M. de Bérulle, to whom he got an introduction simply for the purpose of denouncing Vincent de Paul as a thief. Vincent kept silence and let him talk without making any attempt at self-justification. Six months afterwards the thief, being ill and in danger of death in an hospital, confessed his crime and sent word to the judge of Sore that it was he who had stolen his four hundred crowns, and that he had allowed another to be

suspected rather than incriminate himself. The judge, now as full of grief and repentance for his false charge, as he had been of rage and resentment at his loss, wrote a letter to the man whom he had so grievously offended, imploring him to grant him forgiveness, and saying, that if necessary he would come and beg for it on his knees—an offer which Vincent de Paul took good care not to accept. Long afterwards, in his conferences to the priests of the mission, he related his story about a third person, using it as an example to encourage his hearers in leaving to God the task of justifying them when they found themselves in a difficult position.

CHAPTER III

VINCENT DE PAUL AT PARIS

IN the beginning of the year 1610, Vincent de Paul received the offer of a post which, although it seemed strangely out of keeping with the life of the future saint, provided him with the necessaries of life. For a person who was almost reduced to destitution this was very important. Where is not exactly known, but probably in the house of M. de Bérulle, the rendezvous of all men distinguished for ability or piety, he had made the acquaintance of Jacques du Fresne, private secretary to the Queen Marguerite de Valois, the first wife of Henry IV.

Since the formal annulling of the marriage, into which she had been forced, the volatile and witty princess led a life of retirement in her palace in the rue de Seine, which stood in the midst of large gardens, sloping down to the river-bank. Surrounded by artists and men of letters, the last of the Valois was drawing to the close of her days in the midst of pleasures which she strove each day to make more refined and delicate.

At the same time her mind turned gradually towards, at least, outward devotion, which induced her to give extensive alms, and also to build religious houses.

Her secretary Du Fresne was a shrewd, and at

the same time an excellent man; it is evident that he was impressed both by the mature virtue which Vincent's humility was powerless to conceal, and also by the piquancy and vivacity of his mind, for he spoke to the princess about this young priest, who was a stranger in Paris and at present almost unknown. She wished to see him; it is a matter of much regret that no record has been preserved of this interview between two people, absolutely unlike in every respect. Whatever other virtues Queen Marguerite lacked, everyone must admit that she was possessed of a singularly quick and discriminating mind, as is abundantly proved by her charming memoirs. She soon perceived that she had fallen in with a very remarkable man, and needed little persuasion on the part of Du Fresne to take Vincent as her chaplain. She procured for him by a letter patent, dated June 10th, 1610, a small benefice, which brought him in a few hundred pounds, the Abbey of Bernard de Chaume, of the Cistercian order in the diocese of Saintes.

Vincent now possessed an income without any restriction on his freedom, for he did not live in the house of Queen Marguerite, and enjoyed perfect liberty in his daily life. In his new and delicate position Vincent, who was not yet known as he was later on to everyone as "M. Vincent," had the opportunity of making close acquaintance with the highest society of the day, and learnt in a good school the difficult art of holding intercourse with the great and powerful of this world, and of walking over ground covered with snares without tripping. The

son of the peasant of the Landes had too much native shrewdness, too much natural tact, and his soul was likewise too full of the Christian simplicity, which goes steadily through the greatest difficulties, to be perplexed or led astray by the brilliant *entourage* with which he was so closely connected. He passed through the midst of the frivolous and witty society which surrounded Queen Marguerite, without being in the least charmed by its eloquence, but doubtless not without being struck by the secret evils which were concealed under dazzling externals. Perhaps it was there that he learnt pity for the moral wretchedness, often hidden by a glittering exterior, which is one of the distinguishing features in the character of the man usually regarded solely as the great friend of the poor.

It is to this period that his biographers assign an incident, which shows to what heights of spirituality he had already risen.

Sceptics or unbelievers may smile and look upon the fact that we are about to relate as a piece of mystical exaltation. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that more than one amongst them would be glad to find at his side a second Vincent de Paul to deliver him from his interior troubles as he delivered the doctor of the Sorbonne. All the contemporary narratives relate what they näively call the "doctor's temptation."

Whilst he was almoner to Queen Marguerite of Valois, Vincent de Paul met in the princess's house a doctor of the Sorbonne, a person of repute in his day, whose name has been prudently concealed.

This learned man, whose head was perhaps slightly turned by his erudition, was suddenly assailed by doubts against faith, which, growing more and more violent every day, at last shook his convictions to such an extent that he felt himself on the point of losing all belief; his distress of mind was so acute that his reason became imperilled. He confided to Vincent de Paul his disturbance of mind and his despair. Deeply moved, Vincent strove, though without success, to restore peace to this troubled spirit. Then, seeing that arguments were powerless, he conceived one of those inspired ideas, which the saints alone know, because they alone are capable of putting them into execution. He prayed, and in his prayer offered himself to God as the victim of the trial from which he wished to deliver the person for whom his supplications were offered. His petition was heard, the object of his solicitude was instantly delivered from anguish, but, as the light dawned, never again to depart, upon the doctor's soul, doubt, with all its horror, took possession of Vincent's.

The trial was terrible and of long duration; some say that it lasted four years, and for all those weary months this most humble and submissive of believers was unsparingly tormented by the temptation of unbelief.

Copying his "Credo" on a sheet of parchment, he placed it on his heart, contenting himself with laying his hand on it as a sign of faith, when temptation seemed to be about to gain the mastery. Then, in spite of the exhaustion and weakness, which were

the result of his state of interior trouble, he devoted himself more than ever to works of external charity, ceaselessly multiplying his visits to the hospitals, and carrying consolation to sufferers whilst he himself stood in more need than they of a consoler. One day, when he was in more than ordinary torture, he made a vow to consecrate himself to Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. At once his trouble disappeared, and light, light unclouded, as he afterwards confessed, took the place of the thick darkness which had so long surrounded him. Vincent rose up from the ordeal calm and strong; henceforth he is ready for the work that God is about to entrust to him. He has endured calumny and interior anguish: he has been publicly accused of being a thief, he has thought himself on the brink of becoming an unbeliever, his patience and faith have gained the victory. He is seasoned, and is prepared for the accomplishment of his task. Moreover he is now in a good school, for, a short time after being chosen chaplain by Queen Marguerite, he had left his little student's room, and betaken himself to the house in which M. de Bérulle, in 1611, founded the celebrated congregation of the Oratory. This house, known as "Le Petit Bourbon," was situated in the Rue du Faubourg Saint Jacques, where the Val-de-Grâce now stands.

Under its roof there lived M. de Bérulle and his first companions, Sénault, Bence and Condren, all of whom were later on justly famed for their virtue, and who formed the nucleus of the Oratory.

Vincent de Paul could not have done better than draw from this prolific source of Christian perfection, and it was a divine inspiration which led him thus to put himself for a time under the direction of M. de Bérulle. He never thought of joining the Oratorians; he considered himself far too much their inferior both in virtue and learning to conceive such a notion, and he was of opinion that the utmost he was fitted for was to become a lowly country curé. But de Bérulle, who was extremely perspicacious, was not deceived, and predicted to some of his brethren, who bore witness to the fact at the process of canonisation, that this humble priest "would render remarkable services to the Church, and would found a Congregation which would greatly advance the glory of God and the extension of His kingdom." During the few months which he spent in retirement at the Oratory, wholly absorbed in devotional exercises and in attending the instructions of M. de Bérulle, Vincent was able to form close acquaintances with the principal people of the religious society of the day, then so full of life and ardour, just entering upon the "renaissance" movement, which followed the religious wars. It was doubtless then that he saw and learned to know St Francis of Sales. The bishop of Geneva, like M. de Bérulle, was not long in passing upon his humble "confrère" a prophetical judgment verified likewise by facts; he said one day, gazing at Vincent, that he would be the "holiest priest of his time."

Vincent de Paul was from the very first peculiarly attracted to the bishop of Geneva, whose

gentle serenity charmed him so much, that he constantly endeavoured to imitate it, and later he was fond of saying, when on the subject of his own "rusticity," that it was owing to his having seen M. de Genève that he had not remained all his life "a bundle of thorns." No doubt during his stay at the Oratory, Vincent was taken to the Carmelite monastery in the rue St Jacques, lately founded by Mme. Acarie in conjunction with M. de Bérulle. Few were better fitted than he to understand that eager soul, to whom the most learned listened admiringly, and whose burning words of exhortation melted even the hardest hearts. Vincent spent nearly two whole years in constant intercourse with all the men most famed for learning and virtue, and thus, whilst completing his training in the practice of the highest perfection, acquired that knowledge of the world and of men, which is indispensable for the accomplishment of really useful work.

Francis Bourgoing, one of the first disciples of M. de Bérulle, who was destined to attain distinction both as a preacher and a writer, had been desiring for some time to enter the Oratory, but up to this time obedience had constrained him to keep a country curéship in the neighbourhood of Paris. Now at last de Bérulle gave him leave to resign his benefice, and to retire to the Petit-Bourbon, begging him at the same time to choose for his successor Vincent de Paul. Bourgoing joyfully agreed.

On the 13th of October, 1611, he resigned his living at Clichy to Vincent de Paul, who contemplated with sorrow the prospect of being compelled

to leave a retreat which suited his tastes and necessities so perfectly and to take upon himself, in the ordinary phrase, the care of souls. His reluctance was increased by his natural humility and self-distrust, but as de Bérulle, who clearly desired him to begin to get some experience of active ministry, steadily insisted, Vincent, after six months' waiting, had to obey.

On the 2nd of May, 1612, the new curé of Clichy was instituted, with the picturesque ceremonies, many of which survive to this day. He kissed the altar and the tabernacle, rang the bells, and was then conducted to the presbytery. Clichy, two centuries and a half ago, was only a small town lost amidst the suburbs of Paris, inhabited by peasants, for the most part poor, who had preserved simplicity of life and a very religious spirit. Scarcely had the new curé arrived than, forgetting all his apprehensions in his delight at finding himself for the first time in a position to do good on a larger scale, he set to work with a joy which he could not conceal. He went himself to visit the poor and sick, carrying money, food and clothing, tending them with his own hands and cleaning their dwellings. For although his manner of life was simple and frugal, and though even when he lived in the great world and went to the Louvre, he wore patched cassocks and worn-out hats, he observed now and through his whole life the most scrupulous personal cleanliness, and liked to see round him, as he used to say, that "spotlessness" which seemed to him a symbol of interior purity. Without making a stir, without putting himself for-

ward, by dint of that silent activity and persistent perseverance which overcomes all obstacles, Vincent de Paul devoted himself entirely to his new work, and in a short time obtained very great results. His little parish, which had never seen such unremitting zeal, was, so to say, transformed by the fervent exhortations of its new curé. Never thinking of himself, nor of his own interests, he discharged to their fullest extent the duties of his pastoral office, being always ready to listen to everybody, consoling here, advising there. Thus he was not long in winning the hearts of his parishioners, the poor as well as the rich Paris bourgeois, whose country houses were situated on the outskirts of Clichy.

The village church was falling into ruin; Vincent was exceedingly anxious to rebuild it, and this was the first occasion on which he himself collected, and got others to collect. Though he had no means of his own, and his parish consisted almost entirely of peasants, he had no hesitation in undertaking the task. He caused collections to be made in Paris, interested in the work his protectors in the capital, and possibly appealed to Queen Marguerite, whose liberality was well known; at any rate he met with such success that in less than a year the church was rebuilt, its interior fittings were restored, and the worship of God could be properly carried out in it. This church exists at the present day; everything round it has changed, the village has become one of the most populous quarters of Paris, but the humble building which was raised, thanks to the zeal of

Vincent, is still standing. The pulpit in which he preached serves for the preaching of the Gospel to the present inhabitants of Clichy, who, if they have for the most part remained poor, have not, alas! managed to keep the faith which consoled and helped their forefathers! Opposite this venerable pulpit is seen, hanging on the wall, the crucifix which Vincent de Paul "used," according to the current phrase of the day, during his sermons. In the garden of the presbytery at Clichy is still shown a Judas-tree, which blooms every year, and which, according to tradition, was planted by Vincent's own hand. The few months which he spent at Clichy were certainly the happiest time of his life. He never spoke of them without emotion: the recollection of his dear Clichy and its good inhabitants often recurred to his mind. More than twenty years afterwards, he still congratulated himself on having been curé of Clichy. "Ah!" he exclaimed, in one of his familiar instructions, "I used to say to myself that the Pope was less happy than I. One day the first Cardinal de Retz asked me: 'Well, Monsieur, how are you getting on?'—'Monseigneur,' I replied, 'I am so happy that I cannot express it.'—'How is that?'—'My people are so good, so obedient to all my admonitions, that I say to myself that neither the Pope, nor you, Monseigneur, are as happy as I am.'"

It was likewise during his stay at Clichy that he started, as we should say nowadays, his first "*œuvre*" in the full sense of the word. He took into his house twelve poor boys, who seemed to

him to display an aptitude for the ecclesiastical state, and undertook their education as well as their maintenance. We have seen with what zeal Vincent de Paul from the very beginning of his career discharged his parochial duties; doubtless he had many other dreams for the future, and thought himself destined to spend his life in the obscure though useful vocation of curé of Clichy, when a piece of advice, or rather an order from M. de Bérulle, caused him to make a change of scene and assume a new part.

One of the greatest noblemen of the court, Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, count of Joigny, general of the galleys, son to the marshal duke of Retz, was seeking for a tutor for his children. M. de Bérulle, to whom M. de Gondi applied as being likely to find the man he needed, instantly thought of Vincent de Paul, whom he had known thoroughly for the two years that he had been his director, and whose worth he was therefore better able to appreciate than anyone else. He was convinced that for Vincent to have full scope and to do all the good that he was capable of doing, it was necessary that he should be brought a little more forward, and particularly necessary that he should possess means of action, which he had not got, and practically never would have, if he remained hidden and unknown in his little parish at Clichy. With his usual perspicacity, which on this occasion one is inclined to look upon as truly prophetical, de Bérulle clearly perceived that here was an opportunity offered by Providence for allowing Vincent to attain little by little his full

development. It would furnish him with means for the execution of projects of which he was himself not yet aware, and would give him the lasting and intelligent help of protectors high in position and influence. De Bérulle did not hesitate; he summoned the curé of Clichy, told him that he wanted him for a task which was certainly one of delicacy, but which might bear great fruit; in short, he commanded him to accept M. de Gondi's offer, thus, though possibly unwittingly, settling Vincent de Paul's future vocation, which, as we shall see, is closely bound up with his stay in the house of Gondi. Although filled with amazement and consternation, Vincent had no idea of resisting. He yielded at once, put his affairs in order, packed his few household goods on a handcart, left Clichy never to return, and went to put himself at M. de Bérulle's disposal. But this was not done without grief on his part and keen regret on the side of those whom he left behind; in spite of his short tenure of office, he was as much beloved in his parish as though he had passed years there, and he himself, in a few touching words, has described the anguish which rent his own heart and the hearts of those whom from the first day he loved to call his "children," at his departure.

"I left my little church at Clichy with great sadness," he wrote to one of his friends; "my eyes were wet with tears as I blessed the men and women who drew near me, whom I had loved so dearly. My poor people were there too, and it went to my heart to leave them. I arrived in Paris with my small stock of furniture, and went to M. de Bérulle's house."

CHAPTER IV

VINCENT DE PAUL IN THE HOUSE OF GONDI

1613

IT was certainly a very abrupt transition to leave the modest presbytery at Clichy for the Hotel de Gondi. Nevertheless it does not appear that our country curé experienced an hour's perplexity, or showed the slightest embarrassment on finding himself suddenly transplanted into one of the most brilliant houses in Paris. Though they had hardly been a century in France, the Gondis had very soon attained the first rank at court, in the town, in the Church, in the army, in fact wherever it was possible to bring oneself into notice and to reap honours.

A native of Florence, and the descendant of one of those powerful families of Tuscan bankers which disputed precedence with the highest nobility of Europe, and which had given two queens to France, Antoine de Gondi had begun by carrying on a banking business at Lyons. But he soon became naturalised, and was brought to court by Catherine de Medicis, who was fond of being surrounded by her countrymen. He became house-steward in the palace of Henry II., whilst his wife was entrusted with the care of the royal children. Their son, Albert de Gondi, raised the fortunes of the house

still higher. He was made a peer, and, later, marshal of France, and was the first duke of Retz, an estate brought him by his wife, the widow of the baron of Retz. Albert de Gondi was among the most important personages of his time; a man of tried courage, but entirely devoid of scruple, he had been one of the principal instigators of the massacre of St Bartholomew, which, in his opinion, only possessed the defect of not being sufficiently complete; then he turned round without the slightest hesitation, openly advised Henry III. to make an alliance with the king of Navarre, steadily espoused the latter's cause, and became one of his chief advisers. During this time, his brother Peter became the ducal bishop of Langres, then bishop of Paris, confessor to Charles IX., and cardinal. His two nephews succeeded him one after another in the metropolitan see, one becoming a cardinal like his uncle, and the other the first *arch*bishop of Paris. It would take us too long to enter into the genealogical details of the house of Gondi, although they are interesting as giving a picture of society at this period of transition, moreover they have already been related by an able pen; the little that we have said is sufficient to show that the Hotel de Gondi, rue Pavée in the Marais, was, on account of its magnificence, as well as of the great world which filled it, one of the most brilliant centres in Paris.

Vincent de Paul was summoned into these surroundings, so different from those in which he had hitherto lived, in order to preside over the education of the sons of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi,

count of Joigny, second son of the marshal de Retz, who, as has been said above, held the important post of general of the king's galleys. Handsome, brave, well-made, as ardent a lover of literature and art as of glory, he distinguished himself later on at a battle against the Turks, and at the siege of La Rochelle; this last shortly before amazing every one by leaving the world and entering the Oratory. At present he was simply a fashionable nobleman, enjoying high favour at court, and bent on making his way in life, but remarkable even then, in the midst of extremely licentious society, for the purity of his morals and his strong affection for his wife.

Marguerite de Silly was worthy, by her intellect, her powers of mind and her angelic virtue, of the devotion with which her husband surrounded her. She deserves a place in that series of illustrious women who succeed each other throughout the seventeenth century, and who have found biographers. Her pure and sweet personality, attractive and charming to an unusual degree, caused the most austere Christian virtues to be admired in the highest society, without losing anything of her grace and exquisite distinctions. Entirely absorbed as she was in the duties of a Christian lady of high standing, M^me^. de Gondi during her few years of life was always ready to help, propagate and increase the innumerable works of charity which sprang up in such unparalleled abundance during the first fifty years of the century, and gave to the Church in France fresh vigour. Probably this was the secret reason which guided M. de Bérulle in his

authoritative sending of Vincent de Paul to the Gondis; he saw that Vincent, left to himself, would not be able to do very much, but that when helped and supported he was capable of performing miracles. He was destined to find this help and support in Mme. de Gondi.

De Bérulle was far more concerned about this than about giving the sons of the general of the galleys a tutor, a person who could probably have been found without much difficulty. His intentions are plainly shown by the care with which it was agreed that Vincent should have under him a professor, to undertake the details of the education, which he was to manage and direct. By this arrangement he was sure of some hours of independent leisure.

What the parents especially desired was that Vincent de Paul should watch over the moral and religious education of the children entrusted to his charge. "I much prefer," Mme. de Gondi used to say, "my children to be made saints than great noblemen." Vincent de Paul brought the utmost care and all the skill which he possessed to bear upon his task; if he was unsuccessful in the care of the most famous of his charges, who was to bear the title of Cardinal de Retz, he can scarcely be blamed, when the disposition of the child and the outward circumstances which influenced his education are duly considered. Moreover, the future Cardinal was not born when Vincent took up his abode in the house of Gondi, and was still very young when he left it, never to return.

At the time of the arrival of the poor little curé

of Clichy in the splendid château of Montmirail, the favourite residence of the general of the galleys when not at court, he only found two boys there: the eldest, Peter, born in 1602, who was in the future to be duke of Retz, and to spend his whole life as a soldier of dazzling prowess; the second, Henry, destined for the Church, who was to meet with a tragic death ten years later from an accident when out riding. Both children had a hasty, indeed a violent temper, which must have sorely tried their tutor's patience. He put it to a good use by making it the instrument for softening "that crabbed and cross-grained disposition" from which he was constantly begging God to deliver him, and for repressing "those risings of nature and those black moods" which, if his own account is to be believed, lasted so long in him. He finally effected so complete a disappearance of them, that one is inclined to accuse his humility of exaggeration when one hears his self-accusations.

With that simplicity and decision which were a salient feature in his character, Vincent de Paul at once, and without any difficulty, took his proper position in the noble house where he was to dwell for a time. He devoted himself entirely to his duties, and did not mix himself up with anything that lay outside his own department.

It could not have been always easy work in that large establishment, open to all the most brilliant, but possibly also the most worldly society, in spite of the sincere and the fervent piety even then of the masters of the house.

The priest, with whom we have become acquainted, soon managed to isolate himself in the midst of the turmoil of matters concerning court and town; when his presence was no longer required he retired without affectation, but without regret, and never was seen with a surly or ill-tempered expression. As he says himself very simply in a letter written later, in which he gives advice to one of his friends, who was about to occupy a similar post, he made it a maxim "to see the general in God and God in him, and to obey him and Madame his late wife, as if she had been the Blessed Virgin, and not to present myself before them unless they summon me, or some pressing business calls me. In the name of God, monsieur, act in the same manner. As to the servants, you must show them due consideration and always treat them gently, cordially and very politely, and above all, sometimes speak to them of God." With such rules of conduct, and a great deal of mother-wit, Vincent had no difficulty in taking his place and before long in exercising a very real influence over every one in the Hotel de Gondi, masters as well as servants, which last class, as we have just heard from his own lips, he treated with regard which was a shade above kindness.

If, when he was talking to them, he took pleasure in recalling, instead of striving to have it forgotten, that he was the son of peasant parents, and had looked after the pigs, with M. and M^me^. de Gondi on the contrary, though he did not forget that he was one of their household, he likewise always recollected

that he was a priest, and that respect was due to his sacerdotal office.

On one occasion he gave a remarkable proof of this adaptability and this skill in uniting two sentiments which even in a Christian do not always agree very well, namely, respect and independence. At this period the passion for duels, which only Richelieu's very drastic measures prevented from decimating the nobility, was at its height. Vincent, informed, possibly by Mme. de Gondi, that the general, having been offended by a gentleman at court, was about to have an encounter with him, saw him, on the day fixed for the duel, hear mass devoutly and commend himself to the protection of God, at the very moment when with human inconsistency he was about openly to defy His laws. Vincent, who was saying mass, waited at its conclusion till the chapel was empty save for himself and M. de Gondi, and then, going up to the general, addressed him in words which have come down to us. "Monseigneur, allow me to say a few words with all respect. I know on good authority that you intend to go and fight a duel. But I declare to you on behalf of my Saviour Whom I have just made manifest to you and Whom you have just adored, that if you do not abandon this evil purpose He will take vengeance on you and on all your descendants." Moved by the holy boldness of the priest, whom he had hitherto only admired for his humility, M. de Gondi, whose piety was sincere, and who had an upright soul, remained silent for a moment, then, remembering the place he was in, entered into himself, thought of his children, and

promised Vincent to give up his project. He kept his word.

This incident is characteristic, and shows how great, even in the very beginning of his career, were Vincent de Paul's powers of persuasion; for it was impossible, especially at that time, to ask or obtain a greater sacrifice than the one above mentioned, and he obtained it without apparent effort by the simple force of his own inward conviction and of the divine grace dwelling in him. This anecdote enables us to form an estimate of the authority which the humble priest had, as it were, naturally assumed in the house of Gondi, where he might have been expected to feel quite lost. It is easy to imagine the good effect which he silently produced on everyone, masters and servants, parents and children, visitors and friends. But it was M^me^ de Gondi who profited most by the presence under her roof of a man, already so remarkable for the singular combination of apparently contradictory virtues and characteristics, which it was beginning to be impossible for his humility to conceal, who united to a daily increasing compassion for all kinds of suffering the most astonishing acuteness in the discernment of spirits, two qualities which do not always go together.

M^me^ de Gondi was an ardent soul, aiming at perfection and spurred the further forward by her high position, the nothingness of which she realised more each day. Of an anxious nature, inclined to scruples, she required a guide to point out the way to her. It was probably at the entreaty of M. de

Bérulle that Vincent, who was beginning to be called simply "M. Vincent," consented to undertake the direction of Mme. de Gondi.

He soon got rid of the scruples, which were wearing out her strength in useless self-tormenting, and turned her mind towards works of charity to the poor. Mme. de Gondi, always eager, gave herself up with such zeal to good works of every kind, in spite of her exceedingly delicate health, that she fell ill and nearly died. Her director, who, like herself, scarcely understood the meaning of the word moderation where the poor were concerned, tried in vain to restrain her, but instead of setting her an example he took so little care of himself that he succumbed to overwork and had a serious illness.

Mme. de Gondi thus became indirectly one of those who inspired Vincent de Paul with the idea of his great works. He always took delight in attributing them to her. In the course of a stay which the Gondis made at the château of Folleville, in Picardy, where they possessed a large estate, M. Vincent was sent for one evening to come to a dying peasant, a man of good reputation and considered pious. Vincent de Paul, seeing him so near the time of appearing before God, the Judge who cannot be deceived, suddenly conceived the idea of advising the sick man to make a general confession.

He was exhorting him with that simple eloquence more persuasive than any set speech, when Mme. de Gondi, who was anxious to hear how the sick man was, and to say a kind word to him, arrived upon the scene. Touched by her visit, the dying man could

not refrain from owning to the great lady, who thus came to visit him upon his death-bed, that his conscience was oppressed by the weight of several mortal sins, which he had always concealed out of shame.

"Whereupon," continues Abelly, in his account, "this virtuous lady, filled with amazement, exclaimed, speaking to M. Vincent: 'Oh! Monsieur, what is this? What words have we just heard? Doubtless the greater number of these poor people are in the same case. Ah! if this man, who was looked upon as good, was in a state of damnation, how must it be with others who are leading a worse life? Oh, Monsieur Vincent, how many souls are being lost! What can we do to mend matters?'"

In her grief as a Christian at this discovery, Mme. de Gondi induced Vincent to preach the following Sunday in the parish church on the necessity for general confessions. And as the saint says himself: "God had much regard to the confidence and good faith of this lady, for the great number and the heinousness of my sins would have hindered the results of this action but for His blessing on my sermon. All these good folk were so touched by God that they all came to make their general confession, and the crowd was so great that I could not get through, even with the assistance of another priest, and Mme. Gondi sent to beg the Jesuit Fathers at Amiens to come to our help. We then went to the other villages, which belonged to Madame in those parts, and we did as we had done in the first; there was a great throng, and God gave His blessing

everywhere. And the first sermon of the mission, with the great success that God gave it, was on the feast of the Conversion of St Paul. It was surely by the design of God that it began on such a day."

This 25th of January, 1617, remained engraved upon Vincent's mind as a memorable date; he never forgot it, and every year kept its anniversary as that of the first and remote beginning of his great work of the Mission. But the moment fixed by Providence had not yet come, and it does not appear that at present Vincent had any conception of the task which he would have to fulfil. Indeed it was shortly after this first mission at Folleville, when his steadily increasing influence over M. and M^me^ de Gondi seemed to allow him each day to do good greater in extent and duration, that he suddenly formed the resolution of leaving the house of Gondi and going and burying himself in a little country living hidden away in the depths of a poor district. Suddenly, without giving notice of his intentions to anyone, he leaves the château of Montmirail, where the Gondi family then was, goes direct to Paris, pays a visit to M. de Bérulle, to whom he communicates his resolution, receives his approbation, quietly makes his preparations, and on the 1st of August, 1617, is settled as curé of Chatillon-les-Dombes, a small town situated in the depths of La Bresse.

Vincent de Paul himself never spoke of the motives which induced him to decide upon quitting the post which he filled with such perfect disinterestedness, and in which he did so much good.

It is very likely, as his biographers say, that the increasing esteem, consideration and authority which he enjoyed in the Hotel de Gondi, constituted the cause of his leaving it.

His humility took alarm at seeing himself treated like a person of importance. M^me^. de Gondi could not do without her director, and though he had compelled her to go occasionally to another confessor, she always came back to him. M. de Gondi publicly professed his admiration for his children's tutor. That was more than enough to make a man who always spoke of himself as a wretched creature take flight.

Then the Hotel de Gondi represented the world, the court, politics, with their countless intrigues, just at this period more active than ever, for the stormy regency of Mary de Medicis was ending in civil war and in party assassinations. Lastly, Vincent, who viewed his tutorship in a very serious light, was perhaps alarmed and discouraged by the violence of temper of the boys whom he had to bring up, and who united with the hereditary courage of their race, a violence and impetuosity that nothing could subdue. At any rate, whatever were the reasons which impelled him to the course he took, they seemed to him sufficient to brave the reproach of ingratitude or want of consideration, and M. de Bérulle took the same view. Indeed it was he who helped Vincent to put his project into execution by obtaining for him from the chapter of Lyons, in whose gift it was, the little out-of-the-way living where he was going to seek to be forgotten, never

guessing that Providence, who destined him for such great things, wished to finish his preparation in some degree by putting him into direct contact, without the aid of any intermediate agent, with one of the poorest and most uncivilised populations of old France.

Nevertheless it was there that God was to make him the recipient of those new and prolific inspirations, such as He sends from time to time to the faithful servant whom He has chosen to support His Church.

CHAPTER V

VINCENT DE PAUL, CURÉ OF CHATILLON-LES-DOMBES

1617

IF Vincent de Paul was seeking a field where he could exercise with greater ease the Apostolic zeal and activity with which he was filled, he could not have lighted upon a better place. The little town of Chatillon-les-Dombes, where he arrived in the early months of 1617, was poor, and situated in a remote province which had been ruined by the religious wars.

The Protestants in it were numerous, and being near Geneva, found support and encouragement close at hand. The clergy, poorly recruited and ill-trained, took little pains to instruct or edify their flocks. The nobility in the neighbourhood, turbulent, and in many cases addicted to the most ignoble pleasures, did not set a better example to their tenants. Thus everything had to be done, but there was scope for doing a good deal, for underneath this unpromising exterior lay a lively faith, which desired nothing better than to bear fruit. The new curé set to work without losing a day, and from the very beginning his work gave token of that combination of breadth of view and of a

practical mind in execution which, when existing in a high degree, makes great men. He obtained from Lyons another priest, on whose zeal and devotion he could depend, and began by a thorough cleaning of the church, the dirt and disorder of which was a positive scandal, and kept people away.

After having done all he could for the external worship of God, he turned his attention to the ministers of religion, and tried to persuade them to give up their easy-going and more than dissipated life, by living together in a sort of community.

Touched by the exhortations of the holy priest, and perhaps still more by the sight of his penitential life and his virtues, these priests, who had hitherto been absolutely worldly, after making a little resistance, followed his advice. This decision transformed their existence, which henceforth became worthy of the priesthood. The power of persuasion, the traces of which are met at every step in the life of Vincent de Paul, was still more strongly shown in the conversion brought about by him of one of the principal people of the town, in whose house he lodged, in default of a presbytery. It was a young man named Beynier, a Protestant by birth, rich and entirely given up to pleasure. He was so much moved by the remonstrances of his unexpected guest, that he not only abjured heresy, and returned to the bosom of the Church, but even gave away the greater part of his goods to the poor, and became one of the models of the town. Several members of his family, in spite of the resistance and the threats of those who wished to keep them back, followed his example.

It may easily be supposed that parochial works, sermons, catechisings, visits to the poor and sick were not neglected by the new curé, whose zeal and ardour so profoundly impressed the inhabitants of Chatillon, unaccustomed to anything of the sort, that the whole town was in a stir, and scarcely anything else was talked about. They admired his love for the poor, and also the self-forgetfulness which caused him to devote himself entirely to his ministry without having the least idea that he was doing anything remarkable. But what struck them more than anything else was the simple, natural, unstudied eloquence, which flowed, in the literal sense of the words, out of the abundance of the heart. That voice, which a few years later was to exercise so much influence over the court and Parisian society, had an irresistible charm for these simple peasants, who, without being conscious of it, were under the ascendency of that highest kind of eloquence, which comes from the depth of conviction, and from the ardour of Christian charity.

Conversions multiplied rapidly in the little town of Chatillon and the surrounding neighbourhood, for people came from a great distance to hear the preacher who was so much talked of. One of these was so remarkable and caused such a sensation in the country, that the memory of it still survives. There lived near Chatillon a count de Rougemont, a man of loose morals and of such a pugnacious disposition that his violence was legendary in the neighbourhood. The number of his duels, in which his skill usually enabled him to kill his adversary

outright, was, by this time, past reckoning. Being curious to hear the man whose virtues and eloquence were extolled everywhere, he one day entered the church during a sermon by Vincent de Paul.

Now, on that particular day, Vincent succeeded so well in touching the hearts of his audience, or rather the grace of God which spoke by his lips was so efficacious, that the count of Rougemont went out of church overwhelmed, and stirred to the very depths of his soul. He displayed even in his religious emotion something of his natural impetuosity, for, betaking himself to the preacher, he flung himself in tears at his feet, describing himself as a wretch worthy of any punishment and ready for any expiation. Sudden as this change was, it proved lasting, and before long, the man who had been pursuing a headlong course in the path of evil, needed a little restraint in the eagerness with which he hurried along the right way. He sold his château of Rougemont and divided the money it realised between alms to the poor and the founding of religious houses; if Vincent had not positively forbidden it, he would have sold all his property for the same purposes in order, as he said, to resemble his Saviour, and to have nowhere to lay his head.

"I cut, I break, I shatter everything," he used to say, "and I am going to take the most direct road to Heaven." In his ardour he went so far as to immolate his sword, that beloved sword, which had been his lifelong companion, and had so often served him in his duels. This was so painful a sacrifice that he was a long time putting it into execution,

but at last he one day got down from his horse, broke the blade of his sword upon a rock, and then remounting, exclaimed aloud: "Now I am free."

The reader will forgive our dwelling on these details; they are characteristic of the age, and give a marvellous picture of the influence exercised from the very beginning of his priestly career, by this peasant's son, this poor "fourth-rate" scholar, as he used to call himself, who was beginning to acquire celebrity under the name of "M. Vincent."

Two other conversions, which also at this time made so much noise in that distant province that its echo reached Paris, are equally worthy of mention, because they were possibly the indirect origin of the "Daughters of Charity." They were those of two noble ladies of the district, rich, beautiful, and very frivolous, named Mesdames de la Chassaigne and de Brie.

Moved by what they had heard said about Vincent de Paul, they wished to see him. He received them kindly, doubtless guessing the designs of God with regard to those worldly women who seemed so far removed from anything the least resembling the active practice of Christian virtue, and earnestly exhorted them to return to God and to change their way of life.

So deep an impression was made upon the two ladies by this visit, which had been at first undertaken simply from motives of curiosity, that they straightway took the resolve to devote themselves to good works, and they kept their word. Abandoning dress and amusements, they began to journey

about the country, giving large alms everywhere, going to see the poor in the most filthy hovels, and nursing the sick. Their heroism was proof against that terrible scourge of the plague, which was again ravaging all France, spreading terror far and wide, its very name being enough to make the boldest tremble. During an epidemic of this awful disease, which laid waste Chatillon, the two ladies, whom one is tempted to call "uncertificated Sisters of Charity," if the phrase were not a little too playful, spent themselves in the service of the sick, caring for the plague-stricken by night and day, without showing the slightest fear of infection. They thus deserved the honour of suggesting to Vincent de Paul the first notion of the confraternities of charity, whence was to spring the institution of the "Daughters of Charity."

In fact one day, just as M. Vincent was going to say Mass, M^me^. de la Chassaigne begged him to recommend to the charity of the public a poor family of which all the members were ill and in the most frightful distress. He acceded to her request, and was so successful in moving his audience, which, be it observed, was almost entirely composed of peasants —a class not as a rule easily touched,—that when he went himself to visit the poor family in question, he found the cottage filled with provisions of every kind,—nay, stocked to overflowing.

All the way along, he had met, without knowing whence it came, a crowd of people, who saluted him with an air of emotion, but without speaking to him. Though filled with joy at this charity, which

went straight to his heart, Vincent could not help saying to himself: "There is a great deal of charity, but it is ill-regulated. Those poor sick people, being provided with too many provisions at once, will let some get spoilt and wasted, and then they will relapse into their first state of destitution." And passing at once from the perception of the evil to the means of remedying it, he sent for Mme. de Chassaigne and Mme. de Brie, explained to them with his usual clearness the drawbacks of these ill-apportioned alms, and begged them to get together a few good people who would be inclined to help him to improve matters.

"I suggested to them," he said himself, later on, in one of his conferences, "to club together in order that each lady in turn should provide a day's food, not only for the sick above mentioned, but also for those who might be ill in future." "That is," he added, "how '*la Charité*' was established." Vincent's two helpers had soon discovered fellow-workers, and for three months the ladies of the parish, the first "*Dames de Charité*," laboured under the eyes of their curé for the relief of the poor. When he saw that he could reckon on their devotion, he wished to try their perseverance and drew up the first set of rules for the confraternities of "*La Charité*," which were afterwards reproduced and modified according as necessity required. Even thus early in Vincent's life, we find that it contains all his ideas concerning the manner of relieving and caring for the unfortunate,—ideas which were so novel and destined to bring forth such marvellous

results that they involuntarily recall to our minds the mysterious seed which fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold.

This document, as worthy of observation for the freshness of its views as for the piquancy and originality and grace of its style, is unfortunately much too long to be quoted here.

Moreover, it has been printed many times, especially since the discovery of the original manuscript on the 20th of February, 1839, in the archives of the mayoralty at Chatillon. The reader who is curious to make acquaintance with it as a whole will find it without difficulty in one of the large full lives of St Vincent de Paul, in Abelly's work, as well as in the modern biographies. There, for the first time, is expressed the idea of making the constant and regular practice of charity no longer the peculiar function of religious but of the laity in every class.

There is also to be noted that other deep question, to which we shall find Vincent returning again and again, the distinction to be drawn between the poor person and the professional beggar: the one deserving of all help and pity; the other, on the contrary, to be withstood to the utmost, as harmful, through his voluntary idleness, to the Church as well as to society. These two truly modern notions, one of which will lead him on insensibly to the founding of the Sisters of Charity, who are to be the first unenclosed religious, and the other to the increasing by every means in his power of the opportunities of providing the necessitous with free and remunera-

tive work,—no easy matter at a time when industrial labour was so little developed—are really, as it were, the foundation of all Vincent de Paul's charitable undertakings. One would say that he had an intuition of the ever-increasing importance of the part to be played by what has since received the name of pauperism, and the necessity of struggling against that constantly growing evil of modern society by the united action of people of good-will and the spread of work. In this first set of rules produced by the pen of M. Vincent, we see already manifested in their full light, the good sense, the moderation, the perfect balance which, linked with the most ardent charity, are the distinguishing marks of all his works.

He does not forget for an instant that the association which he wishes to found is in no sense a religious order, and is to be entirely composed of lay persons living in the world. "The aforesaid confraternity," says he, "will be called the 'confraternity of charity,' and the persons of whom it is composed will bear the name of 'servants of the poor' or 'ladies of charity.' Their patron will be our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved the poor so much."

Every pious and virtuous Christian woman, widow, wife or spinster may belong to the confraternity "provided that married women and girls obtain the leave of their husbands and parents, and not otherwise." Then we have minute regulations for the organisation of the confraternity, the different offices, the posts, the "*officières*." A pious layman of the town or a priest is to act as man-of-business to the

confraternity, because "women cannot manage money unaided."

The curé of the parish is to have the "management," so as to guard against any disputes, and to ensure the society being a support and not a source of trouble to the parish.

Next follows a series of instructions concerning the manner of visiting the poor and nursing the sick, expressed with such simplicity and grace as to recall St Francis of Sales. "The '*dame de Charité*' is to greet the sick cheerfully and kindly, to get the dinner ready, to arrange a little table on the bed, cover it with a napkin, put upon it a glass, a spoon and some bread, make the sick wash their hands before eating . . . in short she must do everything as lovingly as if it were for her own child."

All this advice and a great deal more, which want of space compels us to omit, breathes a truly admirable perfume of Christian charity,—of that Christian charity which is the daughter of Christ, to which we always return if we would meet with real equality, which caused Vincent de Paul, in an exhortation addressed to his first "*Dames de Charité*," to bid them themselves arrange the burial of any of their sick people who should chance to die, and attend their funeral "if they can do so conveniently, thus fulfilling the office of mothers, who accompany their children to the grave." Is not this injunction concerning the time to be devoted to visiting the sick dictated by marvellous delicacy? "The servant of the poor must always begin with a person who is not alone, and end with those who are alone, so as

to have more time to give to them." The whole passage is written with the same mixture of practical accuracy and gentle Christian compassion.

After having satisfied himself, by seeing them working under his own eyes, that the rules drawn up for the "*Dames de Charité*" satisfactorily answered the expectations formed of them, Vincent de Paul had them approved by the archbishop of Lyons, then promulgated them himself at Chatillon in a solemn meeting on the 8th of December, 1617, a memorable date in the history of charity. An official report, still in existence, was drawn up of the proceedings, and at the bottom of the sheet are to be read the names of the first "*Dames de Charité.*"

Such was Vincent de Paul's first work, marked already by originality of view and the ardent charity which triumphs over all obstacles.

The tiny seed thus sown was to prosper and cover the world; at the present day the confraternities of "*Dames de Charité*" are countless, and are to be found everywhere. Even in the lifetime of M. Vincent the work developed rapidly; a short time after the establishment of the first society the branches numbered thirty, and they continued to augment. Vincent de Paul himself opened one at the other end of France, in Picardy and in Champagne, finally, after his return to the Gondi family, at Paris. For if, in order to avoid breaking the thread of our narrative, we have as yet said nothing about M. and M^me^. de Gondi, it must not be supposed that they had resigned themselves to the final loss of

such an adviser, such a helper, and to their honour it may also be added, such a friend. When he had received the letter in which Vincent de Paul made known to him his retirement and the reasons which had actuated it, M. de Gondi had not been able to control his distress, and had written to his wife the following lines which are truly remarkable both on account of their nobility of expression, and still more for the lofty sentiments contained in them.

"I am in despair about a letter which M. Vincent has written to me, which I send on for you to see whether there is not still some remedy to be found for the misfortune we should incur in losing him. I am extremely surprised that he said nothing to us about his resolution, and that you have had no news of him. I entreat you to do your utmost, and to use every means in your power that we may not be deprived of him. For even granted that the reason he alleges (his pretended incapacity) is the real one, it would not be worth considering, seeing that what I principally regard is my own salvation and that of my children, which I know that he will be able to further enormously some day." Mme. Gondi was not less grieved than her husband at what she called their abandonment by M. Vincent.

"I should never have thought it," she said to one of her friends. "M. Vincent had always shown himself so charitable to my soul, that I could not suspect that he would leave me in such a manner. But God be praised, I accuse him of nothing, far from it; I believe he has done nothing save by the special Providence of God, and moved by His holy

love; but in truth his departure is very strange, and I confess that it is beyond me. He knows the need I have of his direction, and the business about which I have to talk to him; the suffering of mind and body that I have endured for want of help, the good that I desire to do in my villages, which it is impossible for me to undertake without his advice. In short I see my soul in a pitiable state. You perceive in what a resentful strain M. le Géneral writes to me about it. I can see for myself that my children are daily deteriorating, that the good work which he was doing in my household, and to seven or eight thousand souls on my estates, will come to an end. What! have not those souls been redeemed by the Precious Blood of Our Lord just as much as those at Bresse? Are they not equally dear to Him? In good truth I do not know how M. Vincent views the matter, but I know very well that it seems to me that I ought to neglect no method of getting him back." Mme. de Gondi went immediately to see M. de Bérulle, in order to ask his help and counsel. In the delicacy of her conscience she was afraid of giving herself up too much to her grief, and of not being sufficiently resigned to the Will of God. M. de Bérulle reassured her, and advised her to write herself to Vincent de Paul. Mme. de Gondi followed his advice, and wrote the following letter, which has been preserved, as it well deserves to be:

"My state of anguish is unendurable, without an extraordinary grace from God of which I am unworthy. If it were only for a time I should not be so much grieved, but when I reflect upon all the occasions

when I shall stand in need of being helped by direction and advice, both in life and death, my sorrow breaks out afresh.

"You may judge whether my mind and body will be able to bear this trouble long. I am in the condition of neither seeking nor receiving help elsewhere, because, as you know very well, I am not able to speak freely about the needs of my soul to many people.

"M. de Bérulle has promised me to write to you, and I am invoking God and the Blessed Virgin to give you back to our house for the salvation of all our family and of many others, towards whom you will be able to show your charity.

"Once more I entreat you, practise it towards us for the love that you bear Our Lord, to Whose Will I commit myself in this business, though I sorely fear that I shall not be able to persevere in these dispositions.

"If after that you refuse me, I shall charge you before God with everything that may happen to me, and with all the good that I shall fail to do for lack of support."

Vincent received these touching lines shortly after his arrival at Chatillon. Though moved and disturbed by them, he did not think that he ought to yield to the appeal, nor break off the work, as yet scarcely begun, that he was carrying out at Chatillon. He wrote to M^me^ de Gondi, to console her, but did not stir. She on her side, far from being discouraged, only resorted to more active measures; she got her husband, her brother-in-law,

the bishop of Paris, and Père de Bérulle all to write to Vincent, and entrusted the documents to one of his friends, M. du Fresne, the same who had formerly introduced him into Queen Marguerite's household.

Du Fresne was a sensible and shrewd man; when he saw Vincent he said very little to him about the de Gondis and their children, but represented to him that the good which he might do at Chatillon would be necessarily circumscribed, and that another good priest might very well continue the work set on foot and even increase it.

On the other hand, what might he not do if he consented to return to the de Gondis? Helped by their name and fortune, what might he not accomplish, not merely on their property, where nevertheless their tenants and "people" numbered seven or eight thousand, but at Paris, at court, and all through France? These were arguments calculated to weigh with Vincent, to which his practical mind found no reply. The idea of doing good on a larger scale made an impression on him, but not being able to resign himself all at once to give up his dream of a hidden life, nor to leave the little flock whom he already loved from the depths of his tender heart, he replied to du Fresne that he would go to Lyons and consult Père Bence, one of the first disciples of M. de Bérulle, and his rival in sanctity.

Père Bence advised him to return to Paris, where, if necessary, the enlightened counsel of M. de Bérulle would help him to a final decision. Vincent was

obliged to bow to this clearly expressed opinion, which, at the back of his mind, he could not help endorsing. He gave his friend two letters for M. and Mme. de Gondi, in which he announced his approaching return to Paris, whilst committing the final arrangement of things to M. de Bérulle.

When the news of the speedy departure of their curé was spread among the inhabitants of Chatillon, there was universal despair. "We are losing everything, we are losing our father," was heard in the houses of burgesses and peasantry alike.

Before leaving, Vincent gave away with his own hands his modest household goods both provisions and furniture, to the poor, who were always his first and dearest friends. The richer sort did not fail to buy from them some of the smallest things which had belonged to him. The possession of an old hat was violently disputed. When he left on the 10th of December, 1617, the whole parish fell on its knees to ask his blessing, which he gave weeping. Fifty years later the survivors declared on oath "that it would be impossible to specify everything that had been accomplished in such a short time by M. Vincent, and that they would even have difficulty in believing it, if they had not seen and heard him. . . . They believe, continue the depositions, that what he has done at Chatillon would be sufficient for his canonisation, which they have no doubt will take place some day."

In fact Vincent de Paul only remained five months at Chatillon, but as it was there that for the first time his zeal was allowed full play, he had begun

that series of miracles of charity, of which God's grace taught him the secret, which henceforth will accompany him on his path through life.

Having reached Paris on the 23rd of December, 1617, Vincent de Paul immediately went to see M. de Bérulle. We have no exact details of this interview, which decided Vincent's career. But the next day, Christmas Eve, he re-entered the Hotel de Gondi, not to leave it until eight years later, when, with the help of his powerful friends, he had laid the foundations of nearly all his great works, and when he had himself attained a sufficiently important position to be able to support and develop them singlehanded, protected only by the lustre of his virtue, and sustained only by the authority of his sanctity.

CHAPTER VI

SECOND STAY IN THE HOTEL DE GONDI—MISSIONS AND CONFRATERNITIES OF CHARITY—BEGINNING OF THE WORK FOR THE GALLEY-SLAVES

1618

IF Vincent de Paul had finally consented to return to the house of M. de Gondi, it was certainly not in order to enjoy rest, even though he had well earned it by his labours at Chatillon. On the contrary, what he sought in the Hotel de Gondi, was a wider field of activity and more means of doing good. To do M. and M^me^ de Gondi justice, they quite understood the terms on which Vincent had come back, and, far from thinking that he was at their disposal, they, to a certain extent, put themselves at his service, so as to help him and lend him the support of their fortune as well as of their name. M^me^ de Gondi, who, delighted at getting her director back, had made him promise not to leave her before her death, was more eager than ever in the desire of doing good around her.

Far from hampering her, the general of the galleys aided his wife with all his power, and sought to rival her in zeal and goodwill. Lastly M. Vincent was to find a most active fellow-worker in M. de Gondi's

sister, Mme. de Maignelais, whose name is celebrated among those great Christian ladies who contributed so effectually, by their good works and by their example, to the marvellous renascence of the Church in the seventeenth century.

Marguerite de Gondi had been married very young to the Marquis de Maignelais, whom she adored. Endued with heroic courage, this young and brilliant nobleman had espoused the royal cause after the League came to an end. Mayenne had him assassinated, and Mme. de Maignelais was, at the age of twenty, left a widow with an only son whom she lost a short time afterwards. Thus wounded in her closest affections, freed from every tie and possessed of an enormous fortune, Mme. de Maignelais devoted herself entirely and for ever to piety and good works. We meet with her name at the head of all the great religious enterprises of the period. Bound by links of intimate friendship to Mother Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, that daughter of Mme. Acarie whose virtues were rewarded by spiritual favours so extraordinary as to be the talk of Paris, she wished, like her friend, to seek the enclosure of a Carmelite convent. She was forcibly kept in the world, where her place was clearly defined, and where she was able to do more good, but nothing less than an authoritative brief from the Pope was able to make her resign herself to such a course.

Having exchanged her rich attire for a dark-coloured woollen dress, sold her silver plate and adopted earthenware dishes and platters, only keep-

ing one very plain carriage for the purpose of getting about Paris, Mme. de Maignelais spent her life amongst the poor, visiting them, and nursing them with her own hands, and devoting all her fortune, which amounted to more than a million of money of the present currency, to alms and good works.

Vincent de Paul could not have found a more zealous helper. It is easy now to understand the designs of Providence in bringing him back to the house of the Gondis. He immediately set to work, and though he retained the supervision of M. de Gondi's children in their education, he gave himself up entirely to this ministry of "almoner" in the strict sense of the word, in which nothing could ever weary him. On the different estates belonging to the Gondis, confraternities of charity, in imitation of that of Chatillon-les-Dombes, were founded one after another.

Vincent de Paul began by preaching a mission. His simple but burning language awakened slumbering faith and zeal, and new foundations were made without difficulty. Already several excellent priests, urged by his example, imitated M. Vincent by giving missions in the country districts.

Thus in 1618, only a few months after his return to Paris, a mission was preached at Villepreux, property of the de Gondis, after which a confraternity of "*Dames de la Charité*" was established there, and approved by the first cardinal de Retz, M. de Gondi's uncle. At the end of the same year another confraternity was set on foot at Joigny, and the account of the opening, which was con-

ducted with the greatest solemnity, has been discovered in our own day. Two months later a fresh charitable association was established at Montmirail. Thus thirty confraternities were founded within a short space of time. Everywhere Mme. de Gondi was at Vincent's side, giving freely of her time, her trouble, and her money. Nothing discouraged her, neither the daily increasing weakness of failing health, nor rebuffs, nor the repulsive dirt of the poor. She sat by the bedside of the sick, nursing them and giving them their food, and then went back to preside at M. de Gondi's table, which she adorned by her grace and beauty, and by the lively and piquant wit, of which the memoirs of her son, the famous cardinal de Retz, give us some idea.

Next year, being with the de Gondis at Folleville, in the diocese of Amiens, Vincent instituted his first confraternity of charity for men. M. de Gondi gave in his name, and by his example induced everyone to join.

On the 23rd of October, 1620, the regulations for this first confraternity of charity for men were approved by the Bishop of Amiens. The very next year, another men's confraternity was founded at Joigny. The rules for these charitable associations are nearly identical with those for the confraternities of "*Dames de la Charité*," the care of the sick being, however, reserved for women "as better fitted for it than men." We see here, expressed even more clearly than before, Vincent's openly proclaimed intention of struggling by all possible means against beggary. "The company of charity," he says, "is

instituted in order to assist corporally and spiritually the poor of the town and the villages thereto belonging. Spiritually, by having them taught Christian doctrine and piety, and corporally, by enabling those who can work to gain their livelihood, and supplying the others with the means of subsistence, thus fulfilling the command given to us by God in the 15th Chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, to act in such a manner that there may be no poor begging among us." When the poor, who are worthy of help, are recognised and supported, a prohibition was to be "issued against beggary under pain of withdrawal of alms, and the inhabitants were to be forbidden to give to those who ask; an asylum was also to be opened for wayfarers, where they were to have supper and bed, and the next morning two sous, with an injunction to go on their journey." Here we have the beginning of night shelters. In order to support these different works of charity and to ensure their continuing, the country confraternities must strive to have a flock of sheep, cows and calves, which would be taken to the common pasture with the flocks of the neighbourhood, as was then the custom.

"The sheep are to be marked with the brand of the association, which is to be renewed every five years." In towns, where such resources are not to be found, their place is to be supplied by the erection of workshops, where children, convalescents, and even able-bodied men may find work and gain their living. Here we see that procuring food and lodging by work was invented two centuries before

our day by this humble M. Vincent, whose name and whose shadow, so to speak, are to be found in the origin of all the charitable works of modern times. If space would allow, we should quote every passage in the rules of the confraternity which has reference to the workshops; so plainly do they exhibit that mixture of ardent charity and practical sense, which are, as it were, the hall-mark of all St Vincent de Paul's works. The apprentices are to receive instruction on condition of their binding themselves to give it on the same terms to the poor children who take their place. Everything is organised with minute care, with regard to the material instruction, which is to be given by a master workman, equally with the moral and religious teaching, which is to be imparted by a priest, whose duty it will also be to take the poor children to the services of the Church. "By this means the poor are instructed in the fear of God, taught to gain their living, helped in their necessities, and the towns are delivered from a crowd of absolutely good-for-nothing idlers." These associations of men were a still more original conception than those of the women; they spread to a certain extent in the central provinces where the report of M. Vincent's "new plans" had penetrated, but they were far less numerous than the women's confraternities.

Nevertheless in Burgundy, where, since the religious wars, the paupers had increased in number to a fearful degree, traces have been found of several institutions of this kind, particularly at Bourg, Trévoux, Châlons and other towns of the same district.

In 1846, amongst the archives of the prefecture at Mâcon, was discovered an authentic document entitled: "Extracts from the secretary's book for the year 1623," which contained the report of a meeting held on the occasion of the visit of a "holy priest from M. the general of the galleys, who, filled with devotion and piety, has communicated to us new projects by means of which we have provided for the relief of the poor in Trévoux and in the surrounding towns, and that for the good of the town we ought to profit by the opportunity."

The meeting, at which the principal townsfolk and the officers of the crown (what we call nowadays public functionaries) were all present, settled upon the establishment of a "*Charité*" in the town, and in order that proper care should be taken about the means of carrying it out, "it was decided that each of the grades of society shall name delegates, and that thus shall be formed a commission to seek the ways and means of putting into execution what has been decided on. Which was done on the morrow." Commissions then were already named to study questions;—certainly the nineteenth century has not invented anything. What was doubtless more efficacious than the commission was the presence of M. Vincent at Mâcon, though with his usual humility he does not appear in the report of the meetings, at which he does not even seem to have been present. He nevertheless set to work immediately afterwards, in spite of the threats of the begging tramps, who were not desirous either of working or abandoning their usual mendicancy, and in spite of the incredulity

of the townspeople. "Everyone," he wrote later, "pointed at me in the streets, thinking that I should never succeed." But Vincent was not likely to be stopped by anything of that sort. In less than three weeks, he had started two "*Charités*,"—one of men, the other of women, following the rules of which we have spoken above, and carefully separating the able-bodied poor who could work, from the infirm who were incapable of doing so. His ardent charity was so infectious that all the richest and most distinguished people in the town regarded it as an honour to enter the confraternities, which soon relieved more than three hundred poor families. The work once done, and the foundation, which was to last long after his visit, finished, the humble "priest from M. the general of the galleys" escaped from public gratitude by a hasty departure. "Everyone," he says himself in one of his letters, "burst into tears of joy, and the aldermen of the town paid me so much honour, that, being unable to endure it, I was compelled to depart secretly, in order to avoid all this applause." Such were the beginnings of these voluntary charitable associations, composed of pious layfolk, living in the world, which are perhaps one of the most original and most new of St Vincent de Paul's works.

The women's confraternities increased enormously, the men's associations were less numerous, but nevertheless lasted up to the Revolution. Moreover they were the origin and the model of those confraternities of charity which under the name of Society of St Vincent de Paul and under the admirable

direction of those great Christians of the beginning of our century, the Lacordaires and the Ozanams, have developed so marvellously and will always be considered one of the great glories of our century.

Nevertheless all this was only a beginning, and the field of work which God opened before his faithful servant widened every day without ever having the effect of diminishing in the smallest degree his faith and zeal.

M. de Gondi was general of the galleys, or, as we should say now, admiral of the fleet in the Mediterranean, where the galleys nearly always lay. It was neither an empty title nor a profitable sinecure, very much the reverse, for it involved constantly leaving the ports to give chase to the barbarian pirates who infested the sea, and whose boldness knew no bounds. M. de Gondi displayed on several occasions unusual skill and such brilliant courage as to bring himself into great notice. He distinguished himself especially in 1620 and 1621 by successful expeditions against the pirates, and in 1623, at the siege of La Rochelle, where, showing as much generalship as courage in the management of his light galleys, he rendered the heavy ships of the townspeople useless, and was instrumental in bringing about the surrender of the place, thus putting an end to the war which the duc de Rohan, at the head of the rebellious Huguenots, was still keeping up against the king.

But if he was a brave sailor M. de Gondi was also a sincere Christian, and the sight of the wretchedness of the galley-slaves in their chains, of the fearful torments (the word is not at all too strong) which

they endured, touched his heart with pity. "He often spoke of it with emotion and sought for means of relieving them." Did Vincent de Paul hear him speak of these miserable beings who were kept in order by strokes of the lash on their bare shoulders, who died on their bench of torture without assistance of any kind, and whose bodies were unceremoniously cast into the sea? Or in the course of his visits to the hospitals, did he get the opportunity of entering the place in which the convicts condemned to the galleys were shut up? We do not know; but it is certain that one day he presented himself, in a state of violent emotion which reached the point of tears, before M. de Gondi, who was at Paris with his wife in the interval between two campaigns. Vincent had just been visiting the dungeons where the wretched men condemned to the galleys were imprisoned before being sent to row on the vessels of the fleet, and what he had seen filled him with horror and dread. Huddled together in horrible damp prisons, having no food but black bread and water, covered with vermin, with ulcers, and sometimes with putrefying wounds, fearful to behold, these unhappy creatures remained there weeks, sometimes months, without anybody troubling about them, and their moral condition was still more appalling than their physical wretchedness. Blasphemies, quarrels, abusive language, obscene words made these dungeons a living picture of hell.

The sight of all this misery had so overset Vincent's compassionate soul, that, according to

Abelly, he closed his vivid description of it to the general with these words: "Monseigneur, these poor people belong to you, and you will have to answer for them before God. It is incumbent on your charity not to leave them without help or consolation, whilst they are waiting to be taken to their place of punishment." Moved and disturbed by this vigorous remonstrance, M. de Gondi gladly yielded to Vincent's exhortations, and by virtue of his office of head of the royal galleys, authorised him to take all measures which might appear to him efficacious for the relief of these miserable men. M. Vincent, knowing with whom he had to deal, had already thought out a plan, which he hastened to put into execution. Reinforced by M. Portail, who was to be his first disciple in the work of the missions, and by the de Gondi's chaplain on their Villepreux estate, he began by visiting the convicts in the Conciergerie and the different prisons, where they were confined. With a devotedness which was scared by nothing, he removed the vermin which covered them, brought them food, and, the way thus once opened, bestowed on them in abundance, as did also his two helpers, comfort and counsel, speaking to them in the Name of Him Who for us humbled Himself unto death even the death of the cross, with so much pitying warmth and tender charity, that he unclosed in these hardened hearts unknown springs of repentance and love. Never had these poor prisoners seen or heard anything like it, and never had Vincent de Paul been more filled with that spirit of persuasiveness

which God gives, when He pleases, to His chosen servants.

The effect of this mission in the prisons of the galley-slaves was marvellous, and the change worked in the convicts recalled that brought about by the voice of the apostles in the first ages of the Church. These men, who had committed every sort of crime, shed tears at the words of their visitor, and more than one was sincerely converted to the God of his childhood. The fame of these miraculous conversions was so great that they formed a subject of conversation throughout Paris and even at court. Nay, for a short time it was the fashion to go and visit the prisons, so as to verify the wonderful effects of M. Vincent's charity. He himself, though far from pleased at all this ado, profited by it to collect the funds necessary for the purchase of a house in the rue St Honoré, close to St Roch, where he founded an hospital; thither the convicts were transferred to be nursed and cured before going to work out their sentence. M. de Gondi and M^me^ de Maignelais helped the undertaking to the utmost of their power, and the bishop of Paris, Henri de Gondi, brother to the general of the galleys, who had just succeeded his uncle the first cardinal de Retz, issued a charge recommending the new work to the charity of the Parisians. Finally the king, Louis XIII., infected by the universal admiration excited by so novel a work, wished to consecrate and extend it, and therefore conferred by letters patent, given with his own hand on the 8th of February, 1619, "the office of royal almoner on M.

Vincent de Paul, who was to exercise it at a stipend of six hundred pounds a year, and was to enjoy the same honours and rights as the other naval officers in the Levant, His Majesty desiring that the said de Paul, in the said quality of royal almoner, should henceforth have honour and superiority over all the other chaplains of the said galleys."

This was making the humble priest almost an official personage and confiding to him, to a certain extent, the mission of visiting the other convict prisons in France, which were in no better condition than the Paris dungeons. Vincent, delighted, not at being thus honoured and placed above others by the king, but at being enabled to carry on and increase his enterprise, understood this perfectly, and at once resolved to visit all the convict prisons in the country. In those days a voyage to the different parts of France was no slight undertaking, and we do not know whether he accomplished it in its entirety. But it is certain that he accompanied M. de Gondi to Marseilles, probably in 1622, but historians disagree about the date. There the evil was the same as at Paris, perhaps worse, and Vincent displayed the same intrepid zeal. Nothing checked it, neither the horrible wounds with which the criminals were covered nor their blasphemies and profanity. M. Vincent's charity worked the same miracles here as in Paris, and he conceived the project of establishing at Marseilles, where the presence of the royal galleys, then entirely manned as to rowers by these convicts, made it more necessary than anywhere else, an enormous hospital where these

poor wretches might receive moral and material succour before or after their term of hard service. It was not possible to carry out the scheme until ten years later, when it was accomplished with the help of Cardinal Richelieu and the duchesse d'Aiguillon, as we shall see in due time, but it dates in Vincent's mind from his first stay at Marseilles.

It is to the date of this same voyage that most of the biographers of St Vincent de Paul assign an occurrence which has been rejected as an invention, or as impossible, even by pious authors who are ardent admirers of their hero. It is related that one day, in the course of his visits to the convicts, Vincent, touched by the tears and despair of a young man who was being torn from the arms of his wife, had one of those sudden inspirations of which only the saints are capable or worthy. Heeding nothing but the pleadings of his own charity, he resolutely took the place of the galley-slave, seated himself on the bench where he was to take the oar, suffered his legs to be put in irons, and, while the young fellow disappeared invoking blessings on the head of his unknown saviour, Vincent began to row, silently filled with a divine joy at having been found worthy to suffer such a torment for the love of Him who was nailed to the Cross for the redemption of man.

But the exchange was soon discovered, and Vincent de Paul had to quit the town with all haste, in order to avoid the triumph that such an action would have procured for him amongst the fiery and excitable children of the South.

Such is the account of that living instance of the holy folly of the Cross, so frequently exemplified in the life of its true disciples. The narrow limits of this sketch will not allow us to go thoroughly into the question of its authenticity, which moreover has been treated with equal moderation and ability in the last and recent works on St Vincent de Paul. We only crave permission to state briefly that the material impossibility urged by the greater number of the dissentients seems to us baseless. In order to be undeceived on that head, it is quite sufficient to read in Colbert's correspondence, so well analysed by M. Pierre Clément, the despatches referring to the king's galleys, and the slaves who manned them. It will be seen that thirty years after the period with which we are concerned, after Richelieu and Mazarin, under the vigilant and reforming ministry of Colbert, when Louis XIV. was young and powerful, at the zenith of his glory and greatness, no scruple was made, as is proved by official documents, about keeping on the bench of galley-slaves, convicts who had worked out their sentence, a year, two years, and even more, sometimes as much as twenty years beyond their term, according to the requirements of the royal service. After that, and we repeat that the official reports bear witness with truly amazing frankness to the correctness of our statements, it must be owned that in the time of confusion which followed the regency of Mary de Medicis, between the Thirty Years War on the one hand, and the last remains of civil war on the other, there is nothing surprising in

the possibility of the fact that we have mentioned, more particularly as the exchange was a sudden action, done on the spur of the moment, followed by an instantaneous but short-lived result. At that moment the galleys were being hastily manned, ready for the inspection of M. Gondi, before going to the siege of La Rochelle; provided that the number of rowers was complete, and that the vessels were able to pass in line before the admiral, is it likely that anyone would go to inspect the rows of galley-slavers whom their officers chastised with whips six feet long without so much as casting a glance upon them?

Many years later, one of the members of the Mission, wishing to ascertain the truth concerning Vincent's heroic self-abnegation, asked him whether the wounds on his legs, from which he had been suffering for forty years, were not caused by the irons with which he must have been shackled in order to take the place of a convict. The good M. Vincent contented himself with smiling, and changed the conversation instead of replying, which was equivalent to a silent admission on his part.

The mission preached by Vincent de Paul in the Marseilles prisons had been so successful, and had so effectually roused Christian charity on behalf of the poor convicts, that he left the town with the firm determination of continuing his work, and the course of this history will show that amongst all his countless works he never forgot his dear galley-slaves.

Accordingly when two years later the fleet com-

manded by M. de Gondi was to spend the winter in the ports on the Atlantic, after the siege of La Rochelle, Vincent started for Bordeaux on a charitable and spiritual visit to the galleys stationed there. He got from the cardinal de Sourdis, Archbishop of Bordeaux, twenty monks to help him in his undertakings, and divided them, sending two to each ship, whilst he himself went from one to another, preaching on all in turn, with that natural eloquence, the secret of which lay in his ardent charity, keeping everyone up to the mark, and multiplying himself, so to speak. Amongst these miserable men who, guilty as they were, were most severely punished for their crimes, he made himself truly all to all, so as to win them all to God. The results of this misson on the sea were so great that the report of it spread everywhere, and M. Vincent's reputation, already considerable, was sensibly increased. Little by little God gave him the means of carrying out unaided the designs for which he was destined. A Turkish sailor, till then a fanatic Mussulman, was so touched by the words and actions of that "good M. Vincent," that he abjured Mahometanism, and took a vow to devote himself henceforth to the service of the man who had converted him. This mission at Bordeaux, or rather, on the royal galleys lying at intervals all along the coast, was among the most successful of those directed by Vincent de Paul himself. It plainly showed him the usefulness of the work, but at the same time the necessity, for its successful carrying-out, of fellow-workers who were both zealous

and accustomed to dealing with the poor. His humility, which up to that time had prevented his believing that he could be called upon to train disciples, had to own itself conquered; he returned to Mme. de Gondi more inclined to listen to her, and to follow her advice.

Mme. de Gondi had indeed been exhorting him for some time to put into definite shape this mission work, which she had, so to say, seen born, and whose continuance she was to secure. This excellent woman felt that she had not much longer to live, and wished before her death to satisfy the urgent desire which was consuming her, namely, that of beholding the foundation of an institution established solely for the work of instructing and saving the souls of the poor in the country districts by means of missions given regularly by priests trained in that kind of work.

It was now ten years since the poor and humble priest had entered the powerful family of de Gondi, and the time of his departure from it was drawing near, but to the end of his days he remained faithful to those whom he delighted to call his benefactors, and always did them every service in his power, for the moment was not far distant when the positions were to be reversed, and it was to be the lowly chaplain of a great family who would be in a position to protect and defend it. Previous to the political misfortunes which were impending, domestic sorrows were already casting their shadows over the hitherto brilliant and prosperous house.

In 1722 Mme. de Gondi received a shock from

which she never recovered. Her second son, Henri de Gondi, a youth of winning appearance, lively, intelligent, full of ambitious ardour, was killed, when still almost a boy, by a kick from a horse. He was hunting in the woods round Folleville, and being thrown from the saddle by the horse stumbling, fell to the ground, and whilst trying to get his foot out of the stirrup received a kick which broke his skull and killed him on the spot. He was brought home dead to his mother, over whose sorrow we draw a veil.

Vincent de Paul was there to support her in her hour of trial, but the heart of M^me^. de Gondi, already more than detached from this world, was broken past healing. Two months later her eldest son, who had followed the general of the galleys to the siege of La Rochelle, where he showed the courage of a veteran, was struck by a musket-ball, and had his shoulder broken. But this time the poor mother had nothing worse than anxiety of mind, for M. de Gondi brought back her son cured. It was at this date that the family of de Gondi determined upon the entrance into Holy Orders of the youngest of M. de Gondi's sons, François Paul, who was destined to become so famous under the name of the cardinal de Retz. He was born in 1613, the year following Vincent's entrance into the house of Gondi. A knight of Malta from his birth, because that had taken place during a chapter of the Order, François Paul de Gondi had at first been destined for the army. When his elder brother, who was to be a "churchman," was accidentally killed in

1622, family plans with regard to the younger underwent a sudden change, and it was decided that he should become a priest, in order to inherit the succession (the phrase is perhaps a little harsh, but we cannot find a better) of his great uncle, and then of his two uncles who had been in turn bishops and archbishops of Paris.

It was in this fashion that the vocation of children was formerly decided, without their being so much as consulted. "I do not believe," wrote cardinal de Retz, nearly fifty years later in his celebrated memoirs, "that there was in the world a better heart than my father's, and I may say that he was of a virtuous disposition; nevertheless, neither my duels nor my intrigues deterred him from doing his utmost to join to the Church perhaps the least ecclesiastical soul which the world contained; the love for his first-born and the sight of the archbishopric of Paris, which was in his family, brought this about. He did not believe this himself, nay, was not conscious of it; I would venture to swear that he would have sworn in the secret depths of his heart, that he had no motive for his action but that inspired by the apprehension of the dangers to which a different profession would expose my soul."

This decision on the part of Christian parents seems to us very strange, and the force of habit and the power of received opinion are its only extenuation. Nevertheless, the responsibility for it cannot possibly be put upon Vincent, who, though loved and respected by the de Gondis, always occupied in their house the position of a subordinate. His

advice was not asked, and if he had given it, it would have been in vain.

The influence of the custom of the day was so strong that parents as pious as M. and Mme. de Gondi, did not hesitate, in order to keep the see of Paris in their own family, to put one of their sons into sacred orders, without taking into consideration his tastes or his inclinations, in order to fill the place of another. The second cardinal de Gondi, bishop of Paris, first minister of Louis XIII., had just died at Béziers, whither he had accompanied the king; his brother, who was to be the first archbishop of Paris, succeeded him. The family was determined to retain this exalted dignity in the house of Gondi at any price, and the resolution of making the youngest son of the general of the galleys enter the ecclesiastical state was arrived at, without the smallest doubt as to the lawfulness of the proceeding crossing the minds of the parents, who thus settled their son's future in the hope of seeing him obtain a great benefice.

Before severely condemning M. de Gondi, who in a short time from this date gave up everything—name, fortune, office—in order to become a priest and to die unknown, or his wife, who consumed the little strength left to her in visiting the poor and nursing the sick with her own hands, would it not be as well to enter into ourselves and ask ourselves whether more than one of our modern notions on many subjects will not appear to future generations quite as strange and inexplicable as those which prevailed

nearly three centuries ago, and are so incomprehensible to us?

If Vincent de Paul was powerless to dissuade his illustrious patrons from their resolve, which was too much in harmony with the customs of the day to surprise him much, we shall see by succeeding events that he did his utmost to prevent its bearing fruit. If he did not succeed in training and reforming by his admonitions the unmanageable disposition of the future cardinal de Retz, he did not spare him, even after leaving the Hotel de Gondi, either good advice or bold reproof.

This departure from the roof which had given shelter to his beginnings, was at hand. He was indeed ripe for his great works—he was close upon fifty—and had acquired a knowledge of all classes of society. He had been poor, as were the peasants of those days, had been a slave to the Turks, had then made acquaintance with the court, and with the strong and weak side of the great nobility. Through long years of silence, humility, prayer and good works, he had advanced a considerable way along that path of virtue, in which he was hereafter to make such great and inimitable progress. After long trial he was ready; henceforth his activity will soar so high and produce such far-reaching results that we shall find difficulty in following him. This long preparation, this slow, gradual training, so different from the abrupt changes of which the lives of the saints are full, is one of the peculiar features of Vincent de Paul's life. Everything about it is simple and follows the course of nature; it would seem as

though God had designed to show by the example of this His servant, how gently and uninterruptedly He can lead to perfection the goodwill of a heart which has given itself up to Him entirely and unreservedly.

CHAPTER VII

BEGINNINGS OF THE MISSION—THE BONS-ENFANTS—SAINT LAZARE

1624

IN one of his missions in Picardy, Vincent de Paul had made fruitless efforts to bring about the conversion of a Protestant, who was always casting in his teeth the desolation, from a religious point of view, in which the country folk were left, compared with the inhabitants of the towns, where priests and religious abounded. His stubborn resistance was finally overcome by the sight of the zeal and the manifold labours of Vincent and several other priests during a second mission, preached in the same place, with the secret intention of giving the lie to the reproaches of the obstinate heretic; he yielded to the spectacle of such self-devotion. From that day forth Vincent realised that these courses of sermons, which he had at first begun wherever he happened to be, simply with the intention of doing good, needed regular organisation. In order to accomplish their object it would be necessary to have a congregation of priests, free from every other duty, who would therefore be able to devote all their time and all their life to the evangelisation

of the peasantry, by giving missions in every part of the country. They would moreover be extremely useful to the country clergy, who were at that period most ill-instructed and not always very edifying in their lives; they would, in short, give themselves up entirely, without any thought of self-interest, to the apparently thankless task of rekindling the faith which was slowly dying out in consequence of the religious wars and the ravages of heresy. So he said within himself, but true to his practice of Christian deliberation, and not believing himself to be chosen as the instrument of Providence for a work of which he thought himself incapable, he waited for the time chosen by God, and did not seek to anticipate it.

Mme. de Gondi, on her part, had been inspired with the same idea, perhaps at an even earlier date than her holy friend. With the eagerness which she displayed about everything likely to further the glory of God and the salvation of souls, she had, immediately after the first mission preached by Vincent de Paul, put aside a sum of fifteen thousand pounds, that is to say, about fifty thousand francs, in the money of the present day, "to be offered to a congregation which would promise to give a mission every five years or so, to the villages belonging to her."

Neither the Jesuits nor the Oratorians, who were successively applied to, were able to enter into such an engagement. Mme. de Gondi was not discouraged, and kept the sum above mentioned intact, feeling sure that she would in time find a way of using it

according to her first intentions. For seven years she waited, letting her project ripen, and her resolution strengthen. She won her husband over to her plans, and he promised to add thirty thousand pounds to the fifteen thousand already collected by her. That was enough to make a beginning.

About this time an old building, which had been used as a college, and had borne the name of the "Bons-Enfants," became tenantless. Mme. de Gondi, who had taken into her confidence her brother-in-law the archbishop of Paris, from whom she received a great deal of encouragement, asked him for this house as a nursery for the congregation of her dreams. The archbishop willingly agreed, and promised to help the foundation to the extent of his power. All that remained to do was to discover a founder, or rather to induce Vincent de Paul, whom they had had in their minds from the very first, but whose humility had prevented his taking a step forward in the direction, to undertake the business. The general of the galleys, his wife and the archbishop de Gondi, sent for him to make him come to a decision. But if he was humble and self-distrustful, Vincent de Paul was neither irresolute nor timid. The will of God was plain; his love for the poor did not allow him to draw back. He accepted without hesitation, and became so eager in the carrying-out of the scheme that he had scruples on the subject, fearing that he was getting too much attached to it and taking too human a pleasure in it.

In a retreat made by way of preparation for his

new work, he formed the resolution of undertaking nothing "as long as he was in a state of ardent hope and within near view of being able to do great good, for then he was carried out of himself."

On the 6th of March, 1624, the Archbishop of Paris named Vincent head of the college of the Bons-Enfants; and the next year, on the 17th of April, 1625, in the Hotel de Gondi, rue Pavée, in the parish of Saint Sauveur, was signed the contract for the foundation of what was to be called the "*Mission.*" M. and M^me^. de Gondi occupy the most prominent position in it, but one guesses without difficulty who is holding the pen and drawing up the first regulations for the work, to which he is to devote his whole life. This document, celebrated in the religious history of the seventeenth century, is too long to find a place here; moreover, it has been frequently printed. The object of the association was to "come to the help of the poor country-folk who are left alone and, as it were, abandoned," by gathering together a few good priests "of approved learning, piety, and capacity," who "should devote themselves wholly and entirely to the salvation of the poor people, going from village to village at the expense of the common funds, preaching, instructing, exhorting and catechising the peasantry, inducing them all to make a good general confession of their whole past life, without ever taking the smallest remuneration in any shape or form whatever, so as to distribute freely the gifts which they have received from the bountiful hand of God."

In order to arrive at this result, M. and M^me^. de

Gondi gave a sum of forty-five thousand pounds, the income of which was to be applied to the maintenance of as many ecclesiastics as it would suffice for, "at the choice of the said sieur de Paul, the said priests to give themselves up entirely to the said poor country-folk." For nine months of the year they were to discharge their office of missionaries, and the three summer months were to be spent "in spiritual recollection and retreat, so as to prepare themselves for their coming work." The Archbishop of Paris gave the college of the Bons-Enfants to serve as a home for the infant congregation, but Vincent was to continue to live at the Hotel de Gondi, as he had done in the past, in order to be able to afford its inhabitants "the spiritual aid that for many long years he has given them." For a considerable time these new preachers of the good word had no more than these few rules; the whole document of the foundation amounting only to six articles. Vincent de Paul, partly out of humility and self-distrust, partly in consequence of his wonderfully practical mind, refused for more than thirty years to give detailed constitutions to the order which he had founded, so to say, in spite of himself and unwittingly.

Instead of raising the building according to a preconceived plan, and all at once, he let time do its work and bring to light the different necessities and weak points; in short, he allowed the rules of the Mission to make themselves, and only formally drew them up after their efficaciousness had been proved by the experience of years. We shall see him acting in the same way with regard to the Daughters

of Charity, but the point is worth noticing, for it brings before us the whole man with his singular mixture of practical prudence, combined with what may be called eager tenacity in his plans. Perhaps, too, that is the reason of the astonishing adaptability of the institutions created by him,—the secret of the marvellous results obtained with such slender means. Vincent de Paul never thought himself capable of doing anything great,—never of his own will desired to do anything of the kind. But the works which he founded have all resisted the numberless changes wrought by time and revolution in the state of society. Being established not according to a scheme thought out beforehand, but according to the lessons learnt from long experience, and having been, to a certain extent, helped by time, they have successfully conquered its attacks, and by yielding to new requirements are now, thanks to this elasticity, as young as on the first day of their existence.

It seemed as though Mme. de Gondi, whose delicate health was gradually failing, had waited for the conclusion of this business, which she had so much at heart, to leave this world. Scarcely two months after the signing of the contract, which is, so to speak, the register of birth of the congregation of the Mission, on the 23rd of June, 1625, this noble woman, who had spent herself in doing good, and had literally worn out her strength, died of exhaustion. According to her desire, she had Vincent de Paul by her death-bed, and his consolations helped her to make the terrible journey. By her pure and

exalted virtue, Mme. de Gondi had rendered herself worthy of the inestimable favour of being supported and strengthened at her death by Vincent de Paul. Her name is worthy of being linked with that of the humble priest whose holiness and wide-spreading influence she was one of the first to perceive; no higher praise can be bestowed upon her.

The general of the galleys was away from Paris at the time of his wife's death, having gone to Marseilles on business connected with his post. Vincent de Paul, having discharged his last duties to Mme. de Gondi, thought it incumbent upon him to go himself to acquaint M. de Gondi with the loss which he had sustained. In spite of the distance which then separated Paris from Marseilles, and the difficulties of the route, he took the journey, and accomplished his trying mission with infinite delicacy. But M. de Gondi's grief was inconsolable; two years later he left the world, giving up title, fortune and official employment, in order to bury himself in the congregation of the Oratory just founded by M. de Bérulle. There he became a priest and lived for many years, entirely given up to the practice of the most austere piety without ever wishing to emerge from the obscurity in which he had hidden himself. Vincent de Paul did not wait for this retirement, which made a great sensation both at court and in the town, to leave the Hotel de Gondi. Immediately after the death of Mme. de Gondi, notwithstanding her having made in her will the request that "M. Vincent should stay with her husband and children," Vincent de Paul, feeling that he was wanted else-

where, and that he could not do any more good in a house where he would no longer be in his right place, retired to the college of the Bons-Enfants to join the few disciples who formed the nucleus of the religious family of which he was the founder and the first superior.

The work of the Mission began very modestly; it was as poor in men as it was in money, for at the time of the foundation made by M. and M^me^ de Gondi, Vincent de Paul had only one colleague, who determined to imitate him, and to devote himself to the evangelisation of the rural peasantry,—M. Portail, who was to the end his companion and helper, his right hand in all his undertakings, and, as he used to say, his second self. It was M. Portail who had taken possession of the college of the Bons-Enfants in the name of Vincent, who was detained by M^me^ de Gondi.

Almost immediately on his arrival, although the congregation only numbered two, Vincent de Paul wished to set to work at his missionary tasks and to preach; he and M. Portail were joined by a poor priest, also full of zeal, and they started forthwith, each carrying under his arm a small bundle and having in his purse a few coins, just enough to avoid starvation. As they were not rich enough to pay anyone to look after the house, the key of the college of the "Bons-Enfants" was given to a neighbour, and the building, in which it must be owned that there was nothing to steal, committed to God's keeping.

Our humble pilgrims began by visiting the estates belonging to the house of Gondi. "We went," said Vincent, many years afterwards, "simply and un-

pretendingly . . . to evangelise the poor as our Lord had done. That was what we did, and God, on His side, did what He had foreseen from all eternity. He blessed our labours in a certain measure, and other good ecclesiastics, seeing this, joined us and asked to be with us, not all at once, but at different times." Vincent de Paul acted as he did in the case of all his other works, cast the seed into the ground, and then let time do its work, never hurrying, never trying to propagate the undertaking, never seeking reputation or display. If it were God's will, the small seed would become a great tree; if not, it would remain a shrub. In 1626, two new comrades came to put themselves under Vincent's orders; in 1627 they were joined by four more; ten years after its foundation the congregation only numbered thirty-three regular members. This slowness of development, far from grieving Vincent, was a delight to his humility, and at the same time neither discouraged him nor tempted him to abandon the work; on the contrary, profiting by the teaching of personal experience, he organised it little by little.

He trained his first fellow-labourers with the utmost care, teaching them, as far as was possible, that art of winning souls by simplicity and frankness which he himself possessed in such a remarkable degree. His desire was for simple, modest, popular priests, who would approach the peasantry, not with learning, but with the "rusticity" and the "good fellowship" likely to attract them. Not that he despised learning; his letters constantly recommend

study, and almost all his first disciples were bachelors or doctors of theology, but the making of scholars was not his aim. The preparation of missionaries for the country districts was what he had at heart.

"Oh! Messieurs," he repeated incessantly, "the poor are our inheritance. '*Pauperibus evangelizare misit me.*' What happiness, Messieurs, what happiness! If the question had been put to Our Lord: 'What have you come to do upon earth?'—'Help the poor.' 'Anything else?'—'The poor.' 'What besides?'—'The poor';—and if a missionary were asked the same thing would it not be a great honour for him to be able to say with Our Lord: '*Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*'? It is in order to catechise, instruct, confess and help the poor that I am here."

Therefore, as the missions were destined for the poor, they were to be given gratuitously, nothing to be asked of the poor tillers of the soil, and if the rich gentry wished to make an offering, it was only to be accepted by way of alms; the missionaries taking with them, as far as was practicable, what was necessary for their subsistence. They were never to go alone, but in twos and threes, in order to help each other mutually, and to have more scope for action. Their method of preaching was to be adapted to their audience, by its simplicity, its absence of adornment, and its practical conclusions.

Vincent described this as his "*little method*," and in it is manifested all the originality of his work, and what may be described as its modern novelty.

"This method," he said himself, in the familiar

conferences which have come down to us, "consists in our making our sermons go straight to the point, as simply and familiarly as possible, so that the humblest of our hearers may understand us; using, not language which is too low or common, but clear, unaffected, everyday speech." The three principal points which a missionary should try to draw out earnestly in his sermons are,—the explanation of the motives which ought to lead us to the love of virtue and the hatred of evil; the showing in what virtue consists, and the means of attaining it. It is wonderful to see with what witty vivacity, and sometimes with what biting irony, Vincent de Paul develops his "little method," and derides the pompous preachers, still much in fashion at this date, "who with their fine sermons perhaps scarcely convert one sinner in the whole of an Advent or Lent." For, although in the matter of clearness, Vincent de Paul's speech belongs to the seventeenth century, it has retained all the vivacity, the suppleness, the simplicity of the middle ages, together with the fertility of expression, the inversions, the richness which were soon to be irrecoverably lost by the French language. The study of the instructions and correspondence of Vincent de Paul would be extremely interesting from a literary point of view, and would be worthy the attention of a critic; it would certainly be most instructive as to the history of the language, and would procure for their author a well-deserved place among the writers of the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The narrow limits of this biography do not allow

us to give the quotations necessary for the support of our statement, but we must take leave to insert the following passage in which Vincent, speaking of preaching, makes game with characteristic liveliness of what he calls the "*pompous method.*" "What," he asks, "is all this parade for? Does anyone wish to show that he is a good rhetorician, a good theologian? It is a strange thing that he should go to work in such a bad way; for, in order to gain the esteem of the wise, and to acquire the reputation of an eloquent man, one must know how to win one's audience and lead it aside from what ought to be avoided.

"Now, that does not consist in choosing our words carefully, in rounding our periods, in uttering our discourse in a lofty and declamatory style, which passes high over the heads of our hearers. Does that sort of preacher attain his end? does he imbue the people with the love of piety? Are they touched and do they turn to penance? Far from it, far from it."

Under such a master, who himself set the example, the progress of the first missionaries was very rapid, and the result produced by their preaching soon made them very popular; everyone wanted them, and they could not satisfy the appeals made to them.

But if the missionaries were beginning to get known, their numbers, as we have just said, remained very small, to the perfect satisfaction of their founder, who had no idea of creating a new order, and who refused persistently to make rules,

or to give constitutions. His new congregation was nevertheless approved by royal authority in 1627; a bull of Urban VIII. in 1632 raised it to the rank of a regular congregation, under the name of Priests of the Mission; a few years later in 1643 this bull was registered by Parliament. At that date the infant congregation had left the college of the Bons-Enfants some years. At the end of 1632 it had been transferred, with the approbation of the archbishop and of the parliament, to St Lazare, a rich priory with large buildings and a spacious enclosure, and rents appertaining to it, situated on the route St Denis. To this day the remains of it are to be seen at 107 Rue Saint Denis.[1] It was originally a leper hospital, which, after the lepers had ceased to exist, became a prebendal which supported a few canons who stood in great need of reformation. Their superior, a pious and zealous man, had offered his benefice to Vincent, who, shunning everything closely or remotely connected with splendour or riches, had at first refused the offer, despite all its advantages. He held out for more than a year, and only yielded to the opinion of M. Duval, one of the chief ecclesiastics in Paris, and then on the express condition that no alteration was to be made in the customs or rules of his disciples. What decided him was the obligation incurred by the Mission, agreeably to the contract of foundation, of taking in and caring for any lepers who might happen to present themselves, and also of opening the house

[1] It is here that the prison of St Lazare stands at the present day

once a year for the retreat of the Paris candidates for ordination. On the 8th of January, 1632, Vincent de Paul took possession of the priory of St Lazare, where the congregation of the Missions, destined to so great an expansion, remained until the Revolution. Hence Vincent de Paul's missionaries were commonly called priests of St Lazare or Lazarists, a name which they still retain. There were at the end of the garden a few little huts, where some poor lunatics were shut up. The sight of them had excited Vincent's tender pity, and had gone a long way in inducing him to accept the foundation.[1]

He at once began to look after them himself, and by dint of kind treatment, gentleness and intelligent charity, succeeded in alleviating their hard lot, even in effecting the cure of some amongst them. He became so much attached to the work that in the course of a lawsuit, occasioned by the handing over of St Lazare to the missionaries, he frankly confessed to a trusted friend that when he was praying at the time of judgment being given, he began to examine himself in order to see whether, in the event of the case being lost, he should not regret that house too much. He discovered, he said, that there was only one thing for which he had a great affection, and should leave with difficulty: "the poor lunatics who were in the little garden-huts."

[1] Mementoes of St Vincent de Paul are still shown here, such as the slab of stone on which he knelt to pray, and the site of the cell in which he died, reverently preserved in the Sisters' chapel.

CHAPTER VIII

WORKS FOR THE TRAINING OF THE CLERGY

1628

THE mission once settled at St Lazare, the good M. Vincent made it—to use a term more military than religious — his headquarters in his campaign against misery in every shape. There he returned after those missions in which he recklessly spent his strength, and we may say his whole soul, in preaching to the poor peasantry in the provinces; and after those visits to the hospitals, the prisons, the galley-slaves, and the poor in their most unsavoury dwellings, which soon made the poor priest one of the best-known figures in Paris. It was at St Lazare that he gave the conferences already mentioned to his disciples, before sending them all over France, then through Europe, to Africa, to "*Barbary*," as the phrase ran then, and even to Madagascar. It was there also that those wonderful women, who were his faithful fellow-labourers, Mme. Le Gras, the duchesse d'Aiguillon, and the wife of Président Goussault, came to seek his help and advice in carrying on the works which he had founded with their co-operation. It was there that he succeeded, by a real miracle of charity, in collect-

ing those immense sums which were spent in the service of the provinces that had been ruined by the war. Lastly, he gave there, to the candidates for ordination, those retreats which were so powerfully instrumental in the reform of the clergy, and, simultaneously with M. Olier at St Sulpice, he created the first seminaries. All these works, managed side by side, and almost all at once by the same man, partake of the marvellous, and we experience as much difficulty in the task of setting them forth clearly and briefly, as we feel admiration for that mysterious strength of grace which is able to accomplish so many and such great things with means seemingly small and weak. The reader will forgive us, if, in order to give an accurate account of such different undertakings, each worthy, on account of its nature and the magnitude of its results, of a separate book, we do not keep exactly to chronology and the order of dates. We shall depart from it as little as possible, but in order to explain properly the scope and the results of one of Vincent's foundations it will be necessary to anticipate time occasionally, and to relate its effects beforehand, although we shall have to retrace our steps afterwards.

Thus one of the works to which from the very beginning he devoted himself with most zeal, the retreats to the candidates for ordination, disappears a little in the midst of M. Vincent's other great enterprises, although it is among those of which the results, though less striking than some others, were more fruitful. These retreats were destined

for the immediate preparation of the young men about to receive the priesthood. After the religious wars, the troubles brought about by the struggle, and the consequent decay both of faith and morals, the general state of the clergy in France, particularly the rural clergy, called loudly for reform. Ordination was given suddenly without preparation. And, nevertheless, it was a critical time, and the enemy was everywhere on the watch. The retreats given to the ordination candidates were designed to remedy the evil, so far as it was possible, and as a matter of fact they did remedy it.

The first took place in the month of September 1628, at Beauvais. The idea of it was due to the bishop, by name Potier, who later on considered himself for a brief period of a calibre to dispute the first place with Mazarin, and who himself opened the exercises. Vincent had brought with him two doctors of the Sorbonne who then enjoyed a great reputation, MM. Duchesne and Messier, to preach the sermons, properly so-called, reserving for himself the conferences, that is to say, the familiar exhortations on dogma and theology, which he delighted in giving. He explained the commandments with such success, such clearness and unction, that his hearers were carried out of themselves, and nearly all of them came to make their general confession to him. The report of the effects of this retreat spread to Paris, and the archbishop, who was, as we have seen, a de Gondi, guided by the advice of M. de Bourdoise, the fame of whose piety has come down to our day, gave orders, in a pastoral dated

the 21st of February, 1631, that all aspirants to Holy Orders should be obliged to prepare for them by a ten days' retreat. M. Vincent took the business upon himself; he opened the retreats when he was still with his first companions at the college of the Bons-Enfants. These retreats were given four times a year, in the Ember Weeks, and a multitude soon began to flock to them.

The crowd attending them increased indeed to such an extent before long that it became necessary to give six retreats a year, to which must be attributed a great share in the religious revival which quickened the Church in France at this period. Again it was the pious ladies who helped Vincent with their zeal and their money whose inexhaustible devotion and goodwill stood the test of covering the great expenses entailed by these retreats, when a hundred priests had to be lodged and kept, and this several times in the year. M^me^ de Maignelais, the wife of the Président de Herse, and the *Dames de Charité* vied with one another in charity, fully realising the practical usefulness of exercises which reformed the clergy, so to say, without any reform. The queen, Anne of Austria, came one day to listen to one of these sermons, and went away so charmed with it that she made herself responsible for the food of the ordination candidates for five years, M^me^ de Herse having already done so for another five.

Vincent de Paul poured out his whole self in the retreats, and seemed then to cast aside his ordinary reserve. He showered marks of consideration on "*Messieurs les ordinands*," watching over their com-

fort in every detail, even going so far as to clean their shoes himself when there were not enough brothers or servants for the work. He preached every evening, giving free vent to the sentiments which filled his soul, and speaking in very truth out of the abundance of his heart. How was it possible for his hearers not to feel touched whilst listening to such a priest speaking with such warmth of the dignity of the ecclesiastical state, and the holiness which it demands? Always the first to humiliate himself, to put himself beneath all others as the last and most contemptible of men, everything about him, face as well as words, breathed forth so powerful an odour of the charity of Christ constraining him, that it made a deep and indelible impression, which remained as a warning—as one of those lessons which mark an epoch in life. It may safely be said that all the *élite* of the French clergy, in this great period of history, went thus through the retreats of St Lazare and passed under the hands of Vincent de Paul. It is sufficient to mention, in passing, the names, amongst many others, of M. Olier, the founder of St Śulpice, of Rancé, the reformer of La Trappe, of the cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, and above all, the illustrious name of Bossuet, who at different times made the retreats for the ordination candidates, cherished a lasting remembrance of them, and delighted to attribute to the exhortations of M. Vincent, his example, and the impression caused by the mere sight of him, the abiding results of that short and passing retreat. "In our early youth," wrote Bossuet later on to the Pope

Clement XI. in a letter soliciting the canonisation of his old master, "we made the acquaintance of the venerable priest Vincent de Paul, and from his holy discourses we drew the true principles of Christian piety and ecclesiastical discipline, a recollection which even at our present age possesses a wonderful charm for us." What struck Bossuet and made the greatest impression upon him, was, as he loved to repeat to the end of his days, "the simplicity, the wonderful simplicity of M. Vincent." He often in conversation dwelt upon this pre-eminent virtue which Vincent de Paul, though he had suddenly grown famous in Paris, at court and in the town, preached in his person as well as in his sermons. No doubt it was the ardent exhortations of Vincent in favour of simple Christian discourses which gave to Bossuet's young genius that confidence in the power of God's word in itself, which was to enable him to reform the pulpit in France and to reach the highest point of eloquence.

But, however great was the effect of the retreats on those to be ordained, an effect which grew wider and deeper as they were carried on, it was and could of necessity only be transient. Vincent was intimately convinced of this, but he never hurried. This was equally in keeping with his natural bent and with his fixed resolve always to wait for a formal indication of the Divine Will. He asserted that he had never formed the design of any of the works which he carried out, but had always obeyed instigation from outside.

A young man,—some say it was M. Olier, the future

founder of St Sulpice, but the statement has been denied,—came one day to ask him whether he did not think it would be a good plan to collect together, once a week at St Lazare, those who after having received ordination wished to preserve their first fervour. "Those words," said M. Vincent, "come straight from God, nevertheless we must still pray and think." But the idea once mooted, he did not let it sleep. He wrote instantly to the Archbishop of Paris, who approved of the scheme, and on the 25th of June 1633 was held at St Lazare the first of the ecclesiastical conferences, which from that time succeeded each other regularly, and became famous under the name of "Tuesday Conferences." They were not only gatherings, to which anyone went at will, in order to talk about edifying subjects, for, with the clearness of mind which speedily and accurately saw how to satisfactorily organise projects for good, Vincent de Paul had drawn up for these conferences a whole scheme of rules, which ensured their lasting success. No one was received except after careful enquiry, on the recommendation of three members, who had the right of introduction. All the members were bound to help, support, and in case of necessity admonish, one another, and to nurse each other in their respective illnesses; they were equally obliged to come regularly to the meetings which took place every Tuesday; the subject for discussion was to be proposed at the preceding meeting, so that all might prepare for it. The director, who was to conduct the debates, so as to prevent their wandering from the point, was

to sum up the discussions in a few "simple and effective words."

These Tuesday conferences were no sooner founded than they were attended by all the zealous priests in Paris. Everybody wished to join them, and the only difficulty was to choose amongst the crowd of candidates. It is true that M. Vincent gave himself up to this new work, which was, strictly speaking, only the continuation of the other, with inconceivable ardour. We will again quote Bossuet, who was one of the first and the most earnest members of the Tuesday conferences: "We were associated," he says, "with that company of pious ecclesiastics who met every week to speak together of the things of God. Vincent was its author and soul, and when we were eagerly listening to his words there was not one of us who did not realise the fulfilment of the words of the Apostle: 'If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God.'"

M. Tronson, who was to become so well-known in the religious world of the seventeenth century as the second superior of St Sulpice, boasted to the last day of his life of having been one of the first members of the "Tuesdays" and of having heard that man who was "full of God."

The exercises of the ordination candidates and the Tuesday conferences made such a sensation that the Cardinal de Richelieu, who did not like anything being done without his participation, and who, it must be owned, took a sincere interest in everything that concerned religion, sent for Vincent de Paul. He held a long conversation with him, and required

a detailed account of the work. Delighted with his interlocutor, whom his rapid penetration enabled him to appreciate at his full worth, the great cardinal was lavish of praise and encouragement to the humble missionary, urging him to persevere in his various undertakings, for which he promised his help. He closed the interview by asking Vincent to mention the members of his conference whom he considered most worthy of the episcopate. He himself wrote down the names at Vincent's dictation in order to give them to the king. When he had dismissed him, Richelieu said to the duchesse d'Aiguillon: "I had already a high idea of M. Vincent, but, since this last talk with him, I look upon him as quite a different man." He did, in fact, follow Vincent's advice by raising to the episcopate many of those picked out by him. It is beyond doubt that he recommended Louis XIII. to have recourse to the counsel of Vincent de Paul, for on several occasions after the death of the cardinal the king secretly asked for a list of those worthy of becoming bishops. M. Vincent only consented on the express condition that inviolable secrecy should be observed, "otherwise the Tuesday conferences, instead of training saints, would become full of hypocrites and ambitious people."

To the exercises for the ordination candidates and to the Tuesday conferences were added spiritual retreats. They brought within reach of all the faithful, priests or laymen, aspirants to Holy Orders and to the religious life, sinners who were converted, or who were anxious to be converted, the benefit of

a few minutes' solitude with God. The custom had always been common in the Church, and dated from the first days of Christianity. Whenever great danger had threatened the faith or the spirit of Christianity, their champions had sought in retreat fresh strength to defend them; they renewed their youth at the fountains of the Lord. The famous exercises of St Ignatius, whose influence has been in no way weakened by the complete alteration of the social system, since they were first given four centuries ago, were perhaps one of the strongest weapons possessed by Catholicism in her struggle against the Protestant Reformation and the corruption of the Renaissance.

As early as 1629 and 1630, whilst he was still at the Bons-Enfants, Vincent de Paul had frequently directed in person retreats for important people belonging to the Sorbonne, who had come to ask him to help their good desires.

But it was not until the infant Mission had been removed to St Lazare that he was able to give free vent to his zeal by multiplying spiritual retreats, by extending them, by training his priests for this new kind of work, finally, by giving himself up to it with his usual self-devotion. He drew up, in order to explain the way of managing the retreatants, a "directory" in which are displayed all the wit and "bonhomie" which in him were united to a profound knowledge of the human heart and of the way to touch it. The retreatant was to be received with "*dove-like*" simplicity, as Vincent, the true contemporary and disciple of the bishop of Geneva,

used to say; no special method and no views of one's own were to be imposed on him, and only one object was to be kept in view, that of bringing him wholly back to God, by following the guidance of his character, his position and his past. Cards containing a kind of detailed programme of the retreat were prepared and given to the retreatant on his arrival, so as to put him into the way of things quickly, and without trouble. "Care must be taken that the room where he is installed is furnished with everything necessary, books, paper, candles, sheets, and even a night-cap laid ready on the bed," which last Vincent enjoins the hosts not to forget. Nothing was to be demanded in the way of an indemnity, but what was freely given might be accepted, "if the retreatant offered to give anything."

We should like also to quote the addresses delivered by Vincent to encourage his brethren of the Mission, when the work of the spiritual retreats, after 1635, developed all at once in an unexpected manner, which alarmed them, both on account of the fresh task that it imposed upon them, and of the enormous increase in expenditure, which was its inevitable consequence. These lively and witty exhortations, sometimes full of humour, deserve to be better known. The following short extract, chosen at haphazard, will give some idea of them:—

"This house, Messieurs, formerly served as a retreat for lepers. They were received here, and not one was cured; now it serves to receive sinners, who are covered with the disease of spiritual leprosy, but who by the grace of God get

well; nay more, we may say that the dead rise again. What happiness for the house of St Lazare to be a place of resurrection! What a subject of shame will it be, if we render ourselves unworthy of such a grace. What grief and confusion, Messieurs, will be ours one day if, through our own fault, we are deprived of it, and are humiliated before God and men! What cause to grieve will a poor brother of the Company have, who now sees so many people come from the world to seek a little retirement amongst us, and who then will see that great benefit neglected.

"He will see that no one will be received for the future, in short he will no longer see what he used to see. . . . And the priests of the Mission, who formerly gave life to the dead, will bear only the name and appearance of what they once were; they will be corpses, not real missionaries, carcases of St Lazarus, not Lazarus raised to life, still less men who raise the dead.

"It is true that all those who make their retreat here do not profit equally by it, but then is not the kingdom of God filled with the good and the bad? Is it not a net which holds all kinds of fish? . . .

"O sweet and merciful Saviour, Thou knewest well that the greater number of men would take no heed of Thee, and nevertheless Thou didst not hesitate to endure death for their salvation, although Thou didst foresee the enormous multitude of infidels who would mock at it, and the great number of Christians who would abuse the graces which Thou didst merit for them."

The spiritual retreats, both public and private, started by Vincent, first very modestly at the college of the Bons-Enfants, then on a much more extensive footing at St Lazare, gradually increased in a wonderful way, far beyond what their founder had foreseen or sought. All classes of society, at a period when classes were sharply divided, mingled there in the most Christian and democratic equality. "In the same refectory there sat side by side old and young, clerics and laymen, noblemen and beggars, doctors of the Sorbonne and people who were absolutely illiterate, magistrates and workmen, worldly men and recluses, knights and pages, masters and servants." The throng was so great in course of time that it was reckoned that during the twenty-five last years of M. Vincent's life more than eight hundred people came yearly to St Lazare to make a retreat, that is to say, more than twenty thousand in the whole time. It is not difficult to realise the good accomplished by these retreats, through which nearly two generations of Christians passed, and which contributed quietly, but perhaps more efficaciously than many other more noticeable practices, to the imprinting on the Christian character of that day a solidity and serious strength, which excite our admiration and, to a certain extent, our envy.

It seems as if by awakening and reviving the custom of retreats, Vincent de Paul had, as it were, a prevision of the restlessness of the present day, and of the need of movement which is aroused and increasingly developed by facility of communication; as if he desired to put in juxtaposition with the danger

the means of avoiding it, and to bring back the practice of making retreats into the life of everyday Christians, at the time when it would be in the power of everyone to hurry breathlessly from one end of the world to the other.

If the retreats given at St Lazare did a great deal of good, they were very expensive, and as they increased seemed likely to become too heavy a burden for the young congregation. But nothing could check Vincent's zeal when the good of souls was concerned; he trusted to Providence with that sublime confidence of the saints which is never deceived. When a missionary once complained of the number of retreatants who were received gratuitously, Vincent simply answered: "My brother, they want to save their souls." On another occasion the procurator of the house came to him with the words: "Monsieur, there is not a halfpenny left for to-morrow." "Oh! Monsieur! what good news! God be praised for this happy moment. Now we must show whether we trust in God or not. Let us have no fear. The congregation is far more likely to be ruined by riches than by poverty." Another day, in answer to the exhortations of a priest who was urging him to retrench his charity, he added smiling: "Monsieur, when we have spent everything for Our Lord and have nothing else left, we will put the key under the door and go."

Nevertheless, one day, having been more besieged than usual by the remonstrances of his brethren, and having been forced to admit that it would be as well to put, at any rate, some limit to his readiness "to receive retreatants," he promised to be more

particular: "To-day," he said, "I will act as porter; I undertake to receive those gentlemen myself and to discriminate among them." Towards evening, it was discovered that more people had been admitted than ever before: Vincent had not been able to make up his mind to refuse anyone. "Monsieur," one of the brothers announced to him, "there is not another available room."—"Well, use mine."

Whilst, almost despite himself, Vincent de Paul's field of action was widening, the work of the mission, which had served as a foundation to all the others, was growing and spreading enormously. The missions, both in the country districts and in the towns, went on with increasing success; everywhere M. Vincent's priests (they were not yet called Lazarists) were in request. It was becoming imperative to get recruits, to train them, in short, to form them, little by little, into a regular congregation. Up to this time, Vincent de Paul had contented himself with being joined by priests of goodwill, who wished to help him in his charitable undertakings, and more had come forward than his invincible humility could have foreseen, but this means no longer sufficed, and it was necessary to make provision for works which grew daily in importance, and which would of necessity produce others. Docile to the guidance of Providence, Vincent de Paul in 1635 founded the seminary of St Lazare, and this institution, at first merely destined for an individual object, that of training the priests of the mission, led him insensibly, almost imperceptibly, to attempting one of his greatest

works, one of those whose results were destined to be as fruitful and durable as those of the *Filles de Charité*, namely, the foundation of the seminaries.

In spite of the express declarations of the Council of Trent, which had published a special decree on the subject, the establishment of houses destined for the education and training of priests had not yet succeeded in France. As early as 1635, Vincent de Paul had quietly and without professing or wishing to make a seminary, gathered together in the college of the Bons-Enfants a few youths destined for the priesthood, and had begun to train them, but the undertaking had but little success, and did not then develop at all. Two years later, seeing, as we have said, the necessity of getting recruits for the mission, and training them, he resolved to organise what was called the seminary of the mission, that is to say, the noviceship, where those who felt themselves called to join it came to try their vocation, to prepare themselves for Holy Orders, to learn the religious life, and to steep themselves in the spirit which ought to animate them. He entrusted the management of it to Jean de la Salle, one of his first three companions, but did not consider himself therefore relieved from the obligation of looking after it personally. The addresses and counsels which he addressed to his seminarists, for it was only later on that he resigned himself to looking upon them as novices, deserve to be better known, so redolent are they of ardour and apostolic love of souls, and of the desire of leading them to perfection. The way in which he insists that no one

is, under any pretext, to be urged to join "the mission," or, as he always called it, his "little company," and that those who desire to enter another religious order are not to be hindered, is particularly noteworthy. It is a proof of disinterestedness even more rare in spiritual than in temporal things, and of a purity of view which is not always a consequence of even the most burning zeal.

"Let us allow God to do his own work, Messieurs," he used to say, "and let us remain in humble expectation waiting for the commands of Providence. By His mercy, that is how the Company has acted so far, and we may truly say that everything belonging to it has been a Divine gift, and that neither men, property nor foundations have been of our seeking. In God's name let us continue this course, and let us suffer Him to do as He will. Let us, I beg of you, follow His orders, not forestall them. Believe me, if such are the dealings of the Company, God will bless it." Everything in the rules given to his seminary, which afterwards obtained in all the seminaries managed by the Lazarists, tended to make good priests to the full extent of such a great phrase. Religious training was, in his eyes, more important than study and science, which, in his opinion, ought always in a seminary to rank below piety; and when one considers the state of the clergy in many country districts, revealed to us by the memoirs of the day, and even by Vincent's instructions, it cannot be denied that he had laid his finger on the most pressing need; it was absolutely necessary to raise the level of the lower clergy,

and give back to the flocks, who were still docile, pastors worthy of the name. Jansenism, of which we shall have to speak later on, was just about to make its appearance, and the best way of making head against its deceptive rigorism was to confront it with the full reality of Christian holiness and austerity. Danger is of different kinds at different periods, and requires various remedies.

Perhaps Vincent de Paul would not in our day regard learning with the same mistrust as in his own, when the Sorbonne was still at the height of its fame, whereas the country curés were almost wholly uninstructed, and did not set an example of priestly virtue to those around them. The seminary of the mission, which was in fact the first great seminary of France, once organised and in full working order, served Vincent de Paul as a model for the development and spreading of this useful institution, which was then carried out for the first time; but as usual he did not hurry, and he was guided by circumstances instead of seeking to direct their course.

In 1641, the bishop of Annecy summoned Vincent in order to establish a house of the same kind in his diocese. But, although founded and endowed, the work which was begun did not grow, and languished till 1643, when it took an impetus that it never lost till the Revolution. It was at Annecy that Vincent discovered the cause of the slight success of the seminaries in France. He observed that the mixing of a number of young boys scarcely beginning their education, having as yet no settled

vocation, with youths of a more advanced age, ready to enter Orders, produced the most unsatisfactory results, and that it was impossible at one and the same time, by identical methods, to train the latter specially for the priesthood, and to educate the former in view of a future as yet undecided. It was necessary to separate them, and he did so immediately on his return to St Lazare. He kept at the Bons-Enfants the youths who were preparing for the priesthood, and moved the boys, in the early stages of their education, to a house which he bought at the further end of the St Lazare precincts, and to which he gave the name of St Charles' Seminary. It was, as has often been remarked, a masterly stroke to found simultaneously the great and the little seminaries. The latter, a truly admirable institution, have ever since, even to our own day, supplied the Church in France with fertile and inexhaustible resources.

Once more we see the name of Vincent de Paul at the originating of one of the institutions on which modern religious society rests.

It was in 1642 that M. Vincent initiated this bold enterprise which was to have such happy results. In that same year, at the same period, almost on the same day, M. Olier founded, by the advice, we may say by the dying orders, of M. de Bérulle, the congregation of priests who were to manage the seminary of St Sulpice and to become renowned throughout the whole world by the services which they have rendered and daily render to religion: a marvellous coincidence, in which it is difficult not

to recognise the Will of Providence. Thence was to proceed the great reform of the clergy, which has enabled the Church in France to pass through trials of every kind without succumbing, to resist both unbelief and persecution, and which gives her at the present day the strength necessary for struggling victoriously against the new species of secret and hypocritical attacks of which she is the victim.

Discussions have been held to settle which of the two, Vincent de Paul or M. Olier, had founded the great seminaries first, and therefore, to whom the chief honour was due. This kind of discussion, never very profitable, would be in our opinion singularly out of place here, and would almost argue a lack of respect for the memory of the man whom we were intending to honour. Certainly neither M. Olier, who delighted to say to his brethren, "M. Vincent is our father"; nor Vincent de Paul, who called M. Olier a "man of God" and asked his blessing when he went to see him on his death-bed, would allow us to enter into such, if we may be allowed to say so, an idle contention. Both worked for God alone, both arrived simultaneously at the same end, guided and led by the same Divine grace, whose unworthy instruments they acknowledged themselves to be; far be it from us to diminish by a posthumous discussion a glory so pure and a brotherhood so Christian in the love of good!

To give an idea of the way in which the seminaries founded by Vincent de Paul developed, it is sufficient

to say that in 1789 the missionaries of St Lazare managed fifty-three large seminaries and nine small, that is, more than a third of the establishments of the kind existing throughout the whole of France.

Meantime the work of the missions was spreading in a corresponding degree. At Montauban (1629), at Bordeaux, at Saintes (1634), in the Cevennes (1635), in Auvergne (1636), in Champagne (1638), to mention only the most important, missions were preached by the priests trained by Vincent, with a success which would have amazed him, had it ever crossed his mind to attribute it in the smallest measure to his own care and zeal. The good done by the mission was so remarkable that Richelieu, then at the height of his power, had the congregation established at Richelieu and at Lucon in 1638.

The most famous of the missions given by Vincent de Paul at this period was that preached in 1642 in the faubourg St Germain, a neighbourhood then enjoying as bad a reputation as any part of Paris. It was a quarter as yet almost outside the town, enclosing the famous "Pré aux Clercs," so well known for its population of vagabonds, people without any fixed home, and criminals of every kind, that when a pious lady, probably the duchesse d'Aiguillon, came to beg M. Vincent to have a mission there, he hesitated some time. Yielding to her entreaties, he at length made up his mind to it and broached the subject to his brethren, who in their turn manifested such evident repugnance to the idea, that for the first time Vincent thought he must have acted through a feeling of pride and of

exaggerated trust in his own strength. Throwing himself on his knees, in spite of his white hair and his advanced age (he was then sixty-five), he asked pardon of his priests with such touching simplicity that entering into themselves and ashamed of their hesitation, they declared themselves ready for anything that their master and father might command. The mission was preached with such prodigious success that all Paris rang with the fame of it.

The conversions were so numerous that, as Abelly says, it would take a whole volume to relate them all. The next year M. Olier, having become curé of St Sulpice, continued the work that had been begun, and it was owing to the care of these two good workmen that the most abominable quarter of Paris (the word is not too strong, as may be ascertained by the perusal of the memoirs of the time, and of the police reports of that day, incomplete though they are) was transformed into one of the religious centres of the capital.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the great movement of Catholic revival, there arose those new opinions which received the name of Jansenism, which for two centuries struggled against the authority of the Church, set minds at variance and led them away from the faith. This is not the place for a history of it, and we should not even mention it if Vincent de Paul had not been indirectly connected with it at the outset by his relations with M. de Saint-Cyran, the great apostle of Jansenistic teaching in France, as well as by the efforts he made to hinder the spread of the dangerous new ideas, the result

of which was that he was exposed to violent and persistent attacks. Nay, even his memory was not spared.

Vincent de Paul had become acquainted with Duvergier de Hauranne, more famous under the name of the Abbé de St Cyran, when the latter, then quite young, had come to Paris about the year 1621, and had attracted a good deal of notice by his learning and the austerity of his life. Like the Cardinal de Bérulle, the good M. Vincent was at first deceived by the severe piety and rigour of this new Father of the Church who had read all the works of St Augustine. But when Vincent became more clearly aware with whom he had to deal, and especially when St Cyran ventured to impart to him his ideas about grace, the present state of the Church, the authority of the Pope and of the councils, especially the Council of Trent, whose decisions with regard to the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist he absolutely rejected, his eyes were opened and he realised on what a dangerous journey, both for himself and for those who might follow him, St Cyran was starting. He tried to stop him whilst there was yet time, and even went so far, despite his horror of disputes, as to hold with him some very eager discussions, in which he displayed not only all his warmth of heart but also his invincible firmness in defence of orthodox Catholicism. St Cyran, who was exceedingly anxious not to break with a man held in so much consideration, sought to justify himself in a very involved letter which he wrote to Vincent, the original of which was long preserved.

Nothing could shake Vincent, whose perfect directness of soul understood nothing of the artifices of language, thanks to which the founders of Jansenism eluded the decisions of the Church.

All the efforts of St Cyran and his allies were powerless to affect the wholeheartedness of Vincent's submission to the Church, and, if he was always gentle and discreet in his dealings with individuals, he was always—whatever the Jansenists may have said—equally immoveable in questions of principle. "I tell you, Monsieur," he said many years later to a priest of the mission, whom he wished to forewarn against the new doctrine, "I tell you that this new error of Jansenism is one of the most dangerous which have ever troubled the Church, and *I* am particularly bound to bless and thank God for not having suffered the first and most important professors of that doctrine, whom I knew intimately and who were my friends, to infect me with their sentiments. I cannot express to you the trouble they took and the reasons they set forth to attain that end, but I always confronted them amongst other things with the authority of the Council of Trent, which is plainly against them, and, when I saw that they continued their arguments, instead of answering I repeated my '*Credo*' to myself. That was how I remained firm in the Catholic belief."

But, as old Abelly has marvellously expressed it in his charming and simple language: "M. Vincent knew very well how to distinguish persons from their error, he detested the error, and yet always kept in his heart a real and sincere charity for the persons,

of whom he never spoke but with great reserve, and rather in a spirit of compassion than with any burst of indignation. He even, when the opportunity presented itself, used and made several charitable efforts in order to induce them to be reconciled to the Church. Until after the publication of the Constitution of Pope Innocent X., he went to seek them out, and to visit some of them at Port-Royal, in order to invite them honourably and compel them gently to be reunited; this nevertheless did not produce all the effect which he desired."

When in 1638 Richelieu, who was not fond of disturbances of any kind and who always liked to have everything subjected to his own will, caused St Cyran to be suddenly arrested and imprisoned at Vincennes, Vincent de Paul, with his usual keenness, and that kind of latter-day instinct which in him was united to the old simplicity of soul, perceived that such rigour, instead of crushing the rising sect, would on the contrary confer upon it the lustre and reputation which are always the portion of the victims of violence.

He kept in the background without either joining the accusers or echoing the cries of the admirers. Being summoned to give witness at the trial as an intimate acquaintance of St Cyran, he refused to answer a lay judge and appeared before the terrible cardinal himself. According to the anecdotes of the day—of Jansenistic origin it is true—Richelieu was not pleased with M. Vincent's moderation, and, scratching his head (his well-known sign of displeasure), dismissed him.

On the 4th of December, 1642, Richelieu, who had long been hopelessly ill, breathed his last.

The Abbé de St Cyran was instantly set at liberty, but did not long enjoy this species of triumph, for a few months later he was himself suddenly carried off by a terrible attack of apoplexy. It was then commonly reported that Vincent de Paul, who had ceased all direct communication with him since their last discussions on the authority of the Church, was present at his funeral. This fact, which has never been proved, would be in perfect harmony with the generous charity of Vincent, who was always gentle to individuals, especially when he himself was in any way exposed to risk or inconvenience.

Nevertheless the Jansenists have tried to turn this Christian moderation against him by accusing him of pusillanimity, cowardice, and insincerity, when they saw him resisting with all his might the spreading of their narrow and fatal teaching, as repugnant to his turn of mind as it was contrary to the truth. It was particularly after the publication of the famous book on "Frequent Communion," when the Jansenists, with the great Arnauld at their head, began to pose as the party of reform, that Vincent, driven to extremities by his zeal for defending the Faith, became openly, as they themselves called him, their most dangerous enemy. He made strenuous efforts to enkindle the zeal of the bishops, and he, who always gave himself out as ignorant simply saying that the Jansenists spoke the truth when they reproached him with his want

of knowledge, wrote two letters against the new doctrines and the necessity of resisting them, which are perhaps as clear and plain as anything that has been penned on the subject. Thanks to his measures, ninety-five bishops sent up to Rome the famous passages extracted from the "Augustinus" of Jansenius, known as the five propositions. Vincent de Paul went to entreat Anne of Austria (over whom he had a great influence, as we shall see later, for we are purposely anticipating the course of events in order to bring this part of Vincent's life to an end); he went so far, we repeat, as to beg the queen to write to the Pope, with a petition for a speedy decision; in short, he spared no pains, braving, as he himself says in a letter, or rather, not troubling about, the question: "What will people say?" "For three months," he said, "I have been writing my sermon on the doctrine of grace, and every day God grants me fresh light which confirms me in the belief that Our Lord died for all and that He wishes to save the whole world." Such was Vincent's rôle in this celebrated theological strife, which had such long and disastrous results—a rôle which drew down upon him violent attacks in his life-time, and still more after his death; and M. Vincent's "great betrayal," as the Jansenists called his behaviour in these delicate circumstances, gave rise to more than one pamphlet in which his memory was not treated with much respect.

After the condemnation of the five propositions by Innocent X., his zeal did not slacken, and he exercised extreme and vigilant care in preserving

the mission from being compromised in any way; he was as severe with regard to the equivocations by which the Jansenists sought to elude the decisions of the Church as against their doctrine itself, and the distinction between *fact and right*, which furnished the matter for so many controversies, did not find more indulgence in his eyes than Jansenius' "Augustinus" or the book on "Frequent Communion." He remained up to the last the submissive son of that Church of Christ whom he loved better than aught else in the world and who had taught him to love his brethren more than himself, even when guilty or erring.

It is easy to understand how these sad struggles made M. Vincent's position more important, and also how they aided the interior progress of this soul already so far advanced in the road of high perfection. They made him acquainted with one of the trials most painful to an upright and charitable nature, that of seeing his intentions misconstrued and charged with self-interested calculations, and of hearing himself accused of treason and cowardice, when thinking only of defending the sovereign rights of truth.

As always happens when one gets on in life, death began to deal blows around him and remove from him the first companions of his work. One of the losses with grieved him the most, and took away one of his strongest supports, was the death of M^me^. de Chantal, which took place in 1641. Their relations dated from 1619. At that date St Francis of Sales, who had just founded the order of the Visitation at Paris, was seeking a director for the infant

community. Vincent de Paul, still unknown, had been presented to him, and the bishop of Geneva speedily divined what would be the future destiny of the humble priest, as yet unrecognised by anybody, and to what a height of virtue he had already attained. He chose him to direct the Visitation, and Vincent de Paul retained that charge till his death, that is to say, for more than forty years. It was at the Paris convent that he made the acquaintance of Mme. de Chantal, who came from time to time to Paris, in order to visit her community; and after the death of St Francis de Sales an active correspondence was established between Ste Chantal and Vincent.

We may remark in passing that it is a wonderful period, and a unique moment in the history of religion, when the names of Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Jeanne de Chantal, not to mention any others, are met with in one narrative!

From that date until her death, Mme. de Chantal's communications with Vincent were as constant as they were intimate; she opened her soul to him, and showed him unreservedly all the faith and love concealed in it. Vincent used to call her his only mother, and listened to her advice with filial deference, thus imitating the great bishop of Geneva. During the twenty years that he had the direction of her soul, he said that he never noticed the smallest imperfection in her.

Their last interview in 1641 was the greatest possible consolation to Vincent de Paul, and we could have wished that another Augustine had pre-

served for us the final conversation of those two great souls, so different in their gifts of mind and their earthly calling, so alike in the ardour of their heavenly love and in their burning desire for the everlasting country.

Mme. de Chantal, after a short visit to the house of the Visitation at Paris, went back to her convent at Moulins. On the 13th of the next December she died in the arms of Mme. de Montmorency, the widow of the victim of Richelieu's stern justice, who had gone to bury her inconsolable sorrow in the cloister.

This death, which grieved Vincent de Paul deeply, gave rise to the "vision of the globes," much talked about at the time, which was the only vision in his whole life of which he ever spoke or ever would speak. This is how Vincent de Paul vouches for the truth of the occurrence in a document written by his own hand, the original of which is still preserved. His narrative is so characteristic in the perfect—we might almost say the minute—accuracy manifested in it that we must needs quote a few passages. In his humility he is careful not to speak in the first person, and mentions himself as a person worthy of credit.

"I have no manner of doubt that God will reveal one day the sanctity of Mère la Chantal, as indeed I hear that He has already done in several parts of the kingdom and in various ways, of which I will mention one, which happened to a person worthy of credit, who would, I may venture to affirm, rather die than utter a falsehood.

"This person, having received news of the hopeless

illness of our lately-deceased, kneeled down to pray to God for her, and the first thought which came into his mind was to make an act of contrition for the sins which she had committed and usually commits. Immediately afterwards there appeared to him a little globe, as it were of fire, which rose from the earth and went to unite itself in the region of the upper air to another globe, larger and more luminous; the two, being transformed into one, rose still higher in the air, and were fused into a globe infinitely larger and more luminous than the others; and it was told him interiorly that this first globe was the soul of our worthy Mother, the second of our blessed Father, and the other of the Divine Essence: that the soul of our worthy Mother had been reunited to that of our blessed Father, and both of them to God as their sovereign principle.

"What might cause doubt as to this vision is that this person has so great a veneration for the sanctity of the venerable Mère de Chantal that he never reads her letters without weeping, from the conviction he has that it is God Who inspired her with what they contain, and that consequently this vision is an effect of his imagination: but what made him think it a real vision is that he is not accustomed to have any and has never had but this one. As a testimony to which I have signed this document with my own hand and sealed it with our seal."

CHAPTER IX

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

1633

WHEN the name of Vincent de Paul is uttered, the white cornette of the Sisters of Charity rises before the mind's eye.

The reader may perhaps be surprised that having already spoken of part of M. Vincent's life, we should as yet have said nothing of the most fruitful and popular of the works with which his name is linked. It is because this institution had the same history as all the others founded by him; it was formed little by little, gradually, by a sort of internal evolution, as one would say nowadays. This slowness in putting his ideas into execution, this constant care never to let them get beforehand with events, but, on the contrary, always to allow them to be guided by these last, this desire to do good to the utmost of his power, without ever striving to accomplish reforms according to an ideal standard of his own, this making use of existing elements, in short, this taking men as they are, and bringing them to God without asking of them anything more than what God asks, are met with everywhere in the works of Vincent de Paul. Perhaps that is the source of

their peculiar elasticity, and of that pliancy which renders them fit for all times and all states of society, and permits of their adapting themselves to our modern democracies as easily as to the monarchical and aristocratic condition of Europe in the seventeenth century. This original trait, almost exceptional in the life of great men, who have all, to a certain degree, and in different ways, acted mainly by means of the power and the imperious force of their personality, is nowhere more strongly marked than in the progressive foundation of the Daughters of Charity.

This new work originated in the confraternities created by Vincent de Paul, when he was still in the Hotel de Gondi. Established in Paris at an early date, in 1629, the confraternities of Charity did not develop there with the same facility and rapidity as in the provinces; the obtaining of ladies was difficult. It was easy enough to get them to belong to the association, to give alms, and to go and visit the poor, but when there arose the question of nursing them themselves, things did not go so smoothly; some were hindered from doing so by the obligations of their position, or did not know how to set about it. They sent their servants to do the work in their place and stead. There was a gap to be filled up, and, unless that were done, the work would either come to a "standstill" or "go limping." Vincent clearly perceived what was wrong and set to work to remedy it.

Helped by her who was destined to be his right hand, by M^lle^ Le Gras, of whom we shall presently

have to speak in greater detail, he collected together a few good country-girls of lowly birth, but full of vigour and accustomed to work, and gave them to the ladies of the confraternity of Charity as helpers, to replace them in the material work of which they were incapable, or which went too much against the grain. They were divided amongst the parishes in Paris which contained a "Charité"; one at St Nicolas du Chardonnet, two at St Sulpice, one at St Laurent, one at St Sauveur, where the first confraternity had been founded.

They lodged wherever room could be found for them, sometimes in convents, sometimes in the house of some hospitable lady. All the week was spent in visiting the poor, nursing the sick, accompanying the *Dames de la Charité* in their visits to the poor, and taking them to the right places. On Sunday they met at St Lazare, where Vincent de Paul, if he had time, preached them a little sermon on their duties and special vocation.

The whole thing began so modestly that these poor girls were at first only called by their Christian names, followed by the name of the parish where they discharged their humble ministry: Marguerite de St Paul, Nicole de St Laurent; sometimes Vincent even says unceremoniously in his letters: "the one at St Merry."

Marguerite de St Paul, whose full name was Marguerite Nazeau, deserves special notice even in this short history. She was a poor peasant girl, who kept sheep and who taught herself to read and write (with considerable difficulty as we may guess),

whilst letting her flock graze. As soon as she had mastered this information, she began to impart it to others, and became a kind of travelling voluntary school-mistress, whom no mockery nor contempt could dishearten; her increasing work did not quite provide her with enough to eat, but by dint of saving and privations she even earned sufficient to help young clerics in their education for the priesthood. Vincent de Paul met her accidentally one day in the course of one of his innumerable apostolic journeys; he at once realised the worth of such a soul, and enrolled her amongst the first helpers of the "*Dames de la Charité*." Wherever she went the good Marguerite made herself beloved by her gentleness, her cheerfulness, her kind disposition, her unquenchable enthusiasm in the most absolute devotion to the poor. Having taken into her humble little lodging a woman ill of the plague, she caught the illness nursing her, and died as simply and as piously as she had lived, a perfect model of the Sisters of Charity whom we still see in our day passing along the streets. She was worthy of the name given to her: "*the first servant of the poor*."

Meantime the scattering in different places of these poor girls, bound to the performing of the manifold good works required of them, began to present difficulties; they were not all as excellent as Marguerite, and they required training, supervision, and a rule of life. Vincent de Paul was not slow to perceive this, and although he always dreaded anything that nearly or remotely resembled the foundation of an order, he did not hesitate to go

forward when he saw his path plainly marked out. A small house was soon found, and the choice of the person who was to rule the collected members did not take long. God had placed at Vincent's side her who was to be his unwearying helper in this new task. He took good care not to go and search elsewhere, and on the 29th of November, 1633, M^lle^ Le Gras entered the humble dwelling which was to be the nursery of such great things. The house, which is still in existence, and is now called 43 rue Cardinal-Lemoine (formerly rue des Fossés St Victor), was very poor, small and shabby-looking; the entrance was by a low door and a dark passage.

It was there that the four or five girls were installed whom M^lle^ Le Gras was to train in the practice of religious virtue, in the service of the poor, and to direct in their good works. It was all that Vincent wished, and neither he nor his fellow-worker thought of anything else.

It is impossible to give here a complete biography of Louise de Marillac, niece to the maréchal de Marillac, and to the keeper of the seals, Michel de Marillac, who had both died, the one on the scaffold, the other in prison (1632), victims of their adherence to Marie de Medicis. Left a widow at the age of twenty-four by Antoine Le Gras, one of Marie de Medicis' private secretaries, M^lle^ Le Gras (for it is thus that, according to a custom of the time for which it is difficult to lay down rules, she was called till the day of her death) devoted herself wholly to the education of her son, to the practice of the most

ardent devotion, and to good works. After having been at first directed by Camus, bishop of Bellay, the friend of St Francis of Sales, she came into the hands of Vincent de Paul, who soon obtained a thorough knowledge of her. The letters that he writes to her are full of his usual practical good sense, and of counsels of patience and moderation to the ardent soul, in whom her maternal love was the only rival to the love of God. "I have never seen a mother so motherly as you," he used to say to her; "you are scarcely a woman in any other point."

It is worth seeing how M. Vincent takes Mlle. Le Gras to task when later she wished to make a priest of this beloved son, in spite of his openly-avowed dislike of the idea. "Leave him to God's guidance," he said, at the close of his exhortation; "He is more his Father than you are his mother, let Him lead him. If it is His Will, He can call him at another time, or give him the vocation most fitted to bring about his salvation. . . . Bonjour, Mademoiselle, give yourself entirely to Our Lord, and resign yourself to His good pleasure. I advise you to make your prayer, like the mother of the sons of Zebedee, to whom Our Lord said, when she was eagerly anxious about the future of her children: 'You know not what you ask.'"

As early as the year 1629, when the first confraternity of Charity was established in Paris, in the parish of St Sauveur, Vincent employed Mlle. Le Gras to look after it, as well as those which were successively established in the other quarters of the town; then he sent her to visit those in the provinces.

In all these journeys, as through the whole of the remainder of her life, she was pursued by the solicitude of M. Vincent, who knew her zeal, but was always afraid of seeing her not take sufficient care of her weak health and exhausted strength. "To see her," he wrote, "one would suppose that she has come out of the grave, but God knows what strength of mind is hers." "Take care, if you please, of your health," he used to say to her, "and honour Our Lord's cheerfulness. Oh! how much my heart desires that it may come to pass, and that speedily. Come, rouse yourself, and do what is necessary on your part. Be very cheerful meantime, and do cheerfully what you have to do. In God's Name, use your best efforts to keep well, and treat yourself better."

Then follows advice designed to tranquillise the holy intemperance of zeal, which was only inflamed by work and activity, which was absolutely insatiable, and prone to self-accusation. "In God's Name, Mademoiselle, love your poverty, and be tranquil. It is the chief honour which you can offer just now to Our Lord, Who is tranquillity itself. I cannot help telling you that I intend to blame you severely to-morrow for letting yourself be possessed by these idle and frivolous apprehensions. So prepare to be well scolded."

In the midst of what may really be described as an infinite amount of occupations, Vincent de Paul busied himself for many years with the spiritual direction and with the whole life of M^lle^ Le Gras, with a solicitude and Christian affection which render their intercourse a worthy companion-picture

of that between St Francis de Sales with Mme. de Chantal, but which at first sight one would hardly expect to find in a man apparently absorbed by works of charity. It may be his outward activity has too effectually concealed from the superficial glance of posterity the intensity of that interior life, of that ardent and disinterested search after absolute good, which are the only real foundations of any Christian life, the only pure sources whence the saints draw their marvellous and inexhaustible fertility.

When, on the 29th of November, 1633, Mlle. Le Gras entered the little house in the Rue St Victor, she had no more idea than had M. Vincent of doing anything new, but simply of devoting herself still more entirely than in the past to the service of the poor, and of seeking, in the complete forgetfulness of the world, consolation for the misfortunes then overwhelming her nearest relations.

But the tiny seed which was to become a large tree was not slow of growth, and indeed the pains which Vincent de Paul took in training the first Sisters of Charity seems to show that he had a kind of foreknowledge of the future. Every week he went to the little house of Mlle. Le Gras, accompanied by M. Portail, or some other missionary, and there gave familiar conferences "to those good girls, who are the servants of the poor." These conferences, taken down secretly by Mlle. Le Gras or some of her companions, have been preserved to our own day in all their unaltered naïveté, and are full of that simplicity, grace and restrained ardour,

which we have already observed in the instructions of the mission.

His words flow easily and naturally, fluent, picturesque, full of life and movement, without any literary effort, or any straining after effect. Now and again Vincent breaks off to question first one Sister, then another, their answers are noted down, and are even then stamped by that frankness, straightforwardness, sometimes with that irony or fun, which are still so noticeable in the Sisters of Charity at the present day.

They are just the same good Sisters, so alert, so simple, so free from self-consciousness, with that open, good-humoured manner, which is perfectly irresistible.

These exhortations are quite practical, and are all directed to one end, that of training his hearers to the kind of life, then new and contrary to all customs, to which God called them. As they were for the most part the daughters of poor peasants, without much primary education, Vincent was constantly urging on them simplicity and humility, and he did this with equal vigour and delicacy, frequently recalling the fact that he, too, was a countryman's son. "You see, my Sisters, the greater number of you are rough girls, brought up in rusticity, like myself, who in my youth used to keep flocks."

How could they complain of being badly treated when the person exhorting them to littleness puts himself on their level,—when he reminds them that they are labourers' children, he immediately adds "like myself." Let us also give the portrait of those

whom he calls "the good girls, the real village girls," who were a class perhaps less rare then than now. "I tell you, then, that there are no people better than those who have the real spirit of villagers. You do not find any more full of faith, more ready to turn to God in their needs, more penetrated with gratitude in their prosperity. Now, to begin with, the real village girls are extremely simple; they use no arts, nor words of double meaning; they are not obstinate, nor wedded only to the evidence of their senses, but believe readily what is told them. In this respect you should imitate them. The real village girls are remarkable for their great humility; they do not boast of what they have, they do not talk about their relations, they do not think themselves clever, but just go straight on their way." And the good M. Vincent, with a smile, goes on sketching the real village girl, endowing her with all the virtues which ought to be the portion of the true Daughters of Charity.

For more than twelve years Vincent left the Daughters of Charity not merely without written rules, but even without constitutions, and made no efforts to get them approved. He let the work develop, so to say, of itself, and take shape according to the needs and necessities to which it corresponded. On this occasion, also, he allowed himself to be guided by experience, and waited for the Daughters of Charity to get through their probation; it was soon over, for the number of M^lle^ Le Gras' disciples quickly increased. One after another the Paris confraternities of Charity summoned them

to their help. It became necessary to move to a more roomy house, situated at La Chapelle, and finally to one bigger still in the faubourg St Denis, close to St Lazare. There the little grey Sisters began to nurse the sick in the hospitals at the Hotel-Dieu, at the Foundling Home, of which we shall speak presently.

In 1641 the good Daughters of Charity began a fresh work, in which they are still inimitable, that of the "little schools," that is to say, schools for little children, which was speedily followed by that of infant-schools. With their brightness and intelligence they soon revived and reopened the little schools, as old as the Church herself, and there, with a skill which has not yet been surpassed, they gave that solid elementary Christian education that nothing can replace.

The work of the "little schools" was always peculiarly dear to Vincent, who fully realised their scope and efficacy. "There is nothing," he said to his daughters, "more worthy of you. . . . Oh! my daughters, you yourselves ought to learn in order to become capable of teaching little girls. You must devote great pains to it, for it is one of the two aims which should be in your minds when you give yourselves to God."

The care of the poor and sick, the teaching of the children of the people in the town and in the country, that is, in truth, the work of a Sister of Charity, and everyone knows how nobly she accomplished it, and accomplishes it at the present day.

In 1642, seeing that the number of Sisters con-

tinued to increase, Vincent at last yielded to their entreaties, and allowed four of them to take simple vows for one year only. This was done by Barbe Engiboux, Jeanne Dallemagne, Marguerite Laurence, and a fourth, whose name is unknown, before him, on the 25th of March, 1642, the day on which, nine years before, Mlle. Le Gras had consecrated herself to God. This date has remained sacred among the Sisters of Charity; it is the day on which every year, being then perfectly free, they renew their annual vows.

Vincent de Paul would never act hastily or anticipate events, but for all that he did not stand still when an undertaking was begun, and therefore consented likewise to the choosing of a council to direct the work; but, that done, M. Vincent, who always made a great point of his daughters being considered "secular" and not "religious," the second word always implying in those days a correlative and necessary idea of enclosure, stopped at that point and waited years before going any further.

Like everything which comes at its proper time and answers a long-felt want, the company of the Daughters of Charity developed rapidly, and the "grey Sisters," as they were soon called by the common people, occupied a definite place in all works of charity; hospitals and schools alike.

This brings us to the history of another foundation of Vincent de Paul's at Paris, which took place about this time, and which was equally useful to the poor and to religion. It is one of the most striking marks of the wonderful religious movement, which was

so keen in the first seventy years of the seventeenth century, whose countless works, carried on quietly during the next century, brought the faith unharmed through the troubles of the regency and the subsequent philosophic unbelief. We are about to speak of the meetings of the *Dames de Charité*, which must not be confused with the confraternities of Charity, introduced into Paris by M^lle^ Le Gras in 1629. Presided over by M. Vincent, these meetings then enjoyed a great reputation in Paris, and accomplished, with the help of the Sisters of Charity, great works, some of which survive to the present day.

As has been justly observed, one of the traits of genius in Vincent de Paul's character was revealed by his foreseeing the important rôle that individual effort was to play in modern society, and his understanding that Christians, as such, could not remain isolated either in their beliefs or habits.

Just as he had made nuns come forth from the cloister, as he had grouped Christian women in charitable confraternities devoted to the service of the poor, he perceived the necessity of making worldly people leave their houses and the Louvre, in order to bestow upon the poor, whose numbers were now unusually large, not merely the alms of a passing moment, but a little time and trouble. According to his invariable custom, he waited and let himself be guided, so to say, by circumstances.

On a certain day in 1634, a friend and rival of M^lle^ Le Gras, the rich, young and beautiful widow of Président Goussault, whose life was wholly and absolutely

devoted to the practice of heroic virtue, came to lay before him a plan for having the patients in the Hotel-Dieu visited by a band of ladies, whom she undertook to get together. She told him that there was a great deal to be done in that hospital, full, as it was, of patients of every age, nation, and religion; it was pervaded by confusion, despite the efforts of the nuns belonging to it, who, although they had within the last few years regained their fervour, were not anything like sufficient for the work.

At first M. Vincent objected, not choosing, he said, to put his sickle into another's harvest. But Mme. la Présidente was persistent, as "*dévotes*," in the true sense of the word, often are; she went to see the archbishop of Paris, who approved her scheme, and bade her tell M. Vincent so. The latter, faithful to the celebrated maxim of St Francis of Sales, never to ask for and never to refuse anything, yielded at once, and united together a few ladies of the great world, who, deeply impressed with the sense of a true Christian's duties, wished to consecrate to good works all the time left free by their position, and the whole surplus of their fortune. Their first meeting was held in May or June 1634, at the house of Mme. Goussault, and M. Vincent addressed the little knot of ladies with his usual ardour, explaining to them the object of the undertaking, which was to relieve by every possible means the suffering that surrounded them on all sides. As a beginning they were to go "and visit the poor patients of the Hotel-Dieu, so sorely abandoned and so little helped in the midst of their sufferings, wounds and ailments of every kind."

M. Vincent's speech was so eloquent that at the next meetings Mme. Goussault's house was besieged by a crowd of women of all ranks. We will only mention a few names: the wife of the chancellor d'Aligre, Mme. Fouquet, the mother of the minister of finance, Mme. la présidente de Herse, Mme. Joly, Mme. Cornuel, Mme. Séguier and the indefatigable Mlle. Le Gras; then, later on, Mme. de Miramion, famed for her beauty and virtue, Mme. du Vigean, mother of the celebrated Mlle. du Vigean, the duchesse d'Aiguillon, niece to the great cardinal, who became the corner-stone of the *Dames de Charité*. The impetus once given, nothing checked it. The most illustrious names in the Parliament, Mme. de Lamoignon, Mme. de Bullion, Mme. de Nicolaï, meet our eyes in the list of the first *Dames de Charité*, side by side with the more plebeian names of Mlles. Dufais, Du Fresne, Viole, and many others. The princess Gonzaga, that charming Mary of Mantua, who became Queen of Spain, was among the first to enrol herself in the association; finally the queen, Anne of Austria, touched by this zeal, wished to imitate it, and became the honorary president. Vincent, who had perhaps scarcely expected so complete a success, could not conceal his joy, and at each of the meetings allowed it to overflow in one of those familiar causeries, which were his forte.

He drew up for the *Dames de Charité* a brief set of rules, adapted to their state of life and their social duties.

These few rules, short, simple and easy to put in practice, are essentially different from those formed

for the confraternities of Charity. The distinction drawn between them is of itself quite sufficient to show with what suppleness of mind and with what a fair and practical estimate of what he might expect from those with whom he had to do, Vincent de Paul was endowed. No one ever better understood what could really be demanded, nor how to accommodate requirements to necessities; and this is sufficient to explain the wonderful success, as well as the rapid progress, of his foundations. He never asked for more than those with whom he was dealing had to give; —one of the best methods of attaining everything.

Let us note, in passing, an item in the rules for the ladies, which, with its good-humoured sarcasm, shows how well the good M. Vincent knew his company. At these meetings "the ladies must make it a rule not to talk of their private affairs, nor of public matters, and must especially avoid discussing questions referring to the State, neither must they use these opportunities to transact their private business." By making a few alterations, for we are no longer in the days of the Fronde, when women took such a great share in politics, in negotiations, almost even in the army, might not the same advice be given to many committees of modern charity?

The work of visiting the sick in the Hotel-Dieu, which had in 1634 given rise to the meetings of the *Dames de Charité*, was speedily organised and met with the greatest success; ladies of the highest rank were seen approaching the bed of the patients, making no distinction of creed, but nursing and exhorting them, and giving them remedies or the

little delicacies which are an alleviation in sickness. Vincent soon gave them, as helpers or occasional substitutes, four Daughters of Charity. The results of this visiting were many; there were seven hundred and sixty abjurations of heresy among the inmates of the hospital, which was full of Lutherans and Calvinists, and even contained a certain number of Turks, who were taken or wounded at sea.

After the sick, the ladies turned their attention to the prisoners; they began with prisoners for debt, then went on to those of every sort, and finally betook themselves to the galley-slaves.

The visiting of the sick in the hospitals, and of the prisoners in the gaols, by pious women, having no other object but to relieve them and bring them back to the right path, which was inaugurated nearly three centuries ago by Vincent de Paul and the *Dames de Charité*, has been carried on uninterruptedly up to our own day, and it has been with sorrowful amazement that we have witnessed the passing of enactments which, under a flimsy pretext of order and administrative regularity, scarcely conceal their hatred and persecution of religion, and close the doors of the hospitals and prisons against pious souls, whose zeal is as ardent as in past days, but who are hampered in every possible way. Things were better in the days of Vincent de Paul; at least, every charitable Christian was free to nurse the plague-stricken, and exhort the galley-slaves.

It is impossible in this short résumé of such a busy life as Vincent de Paul's, to give an account of

all that he accomplished through the zeal of the *Dames de Charité*, whom he directed and encouraged for years with indefatigable ardour. Moreover, we shall presently see them at their labours, when we come to speak of the distress of the rural population and the help sent to them by the mediation of M. Vincent. But amongst all the works done through the co-operation of the *Dames de Charité*, there is one which cannot be omitted, and which has done more to make his name popular than all the others: the work for the Foundling Children.

It is said that one day, when coming back from giving a mission on the outskirts of Paris, Vincent de Paul saw a man occupied in the horrible work of mutilating a new-born baby, so as to make it a means of livelihood to himself by exciting pity of the public. Filled with horror and compassion, Vincent snatched the poor little creature from his persecutor, and carried him in his own arms to a house in the Rue St Landry, called La Couche, where children, left exposed and deserted in the street, were taken in. The sight that met his eyes there increased his dismay; two or three hundred children, of different ages, were literally heaped up anyhow in pestilential holes, looked after only by one widow, helped by two servants. It is terrible even to think of the lot of these unhappy little ones, thus left in the highways, at the street-corners, under the church porches; they either died of hunger, or fell into the hands of scoundrels, who sold them, or purposely maimed them, in order

that, later, they might beg from the charity of passers-by.[1]

It is difficult to credit the existence of such fearful and revolting barbarity, after the reforming reign of Henry IV., in the midst of civilised society, at the period when Corneille's verse was delighting the ears of the most brilliant court in Europe.

The children collected together in the house, which was supposed to be an asylum for them, were not much better off. They died of hunger, and were drugged with laudanum when they cried; none survived excepting those that the so-called nurse, who was supposed to take care of them, sold as substitutes for lost children, or to be passed off as the real offspring of their purchaser; they did not fetch a high price—fifteen or twenty sous, as a rule.

The heart of the Christian priest was full to bursting at the spectacle of these horrors, which were vouched for as true by Vincent de Paul himself, in one of his speeches to the *Dames de Charité*, and no one ever attempted to contradict him. Departing for once from his usual reserve, he took the first steps himself. He brought some of the *Dames de Charité* to La Couche, and showed them what was going on; it was quite enough to touch them to the quick. They longed to be able to adopt all the unhappy little creatures, who were

[1] These facts are vouched for by Vincent de Paul himself, in a memorandum drawn up for the *Dames de Charité*. The original, entirely in his own handwriting, has been discovered at Florence, and is now in the Mission archives.

literally dying of pestilence—the greater number without baptism,—but the means at their disposal were limited, and they were obliged to begin by ransoming twelve drawn by lot, who were installed first in a house near the Church of St Landry, then in the Rue des Boulangers, near the porte St Victor. The Daughters of Charity looked after them, feeding them first upon cows' milk, and, later, getting four wet-nurses to bring them up. Such, in 1638, was the humble beginning of the work for Foundling Children. It gradually developed and finally spread all over France, but its progress was slow, and is mainly attributable to the truly heroic efforts of Vincent de Paul and Mlle. Le Gras.

At the end of four years, as the number of the children steadily increased, an appeal was made to the charity of the king, who granted an income of four thousand pounds; two years later a fresh request was equally well received, and answered by the bestowal of eight thousand pounds, to be taken from the five large farms, after 1648. At that date four thousand abandoned children had been adopted one after another, and the cost of their maintenance had amounted to nearly thirty thousand pounds.

But the numbers continued to grow, and the expenses rose to forty thousand francs. The courage of the *Dames de Charité* failed before this sum, in those days very large, more especially in the midst of the universal distress caused by the duration of the war, and the depression in the country districts, and they sorrowfully determined

to give up an undertaking which proved too heavy for their strength. But Vincent could not make up his mind to abandon and cast out into the street all the helpless babes; he set the Sisters of Charity to work with their hands, and sold the result of their labour; he borrowed money, got help from every possible quarter, and thus gained a little time.

At last there came a day when Mlle. Le Gras, having spent everything upon her adopted children, found herself with only two pistoles with which to provide for two months. Clearly matters could not go on like that, and it seemed as though there was nothing to do but to resign herself to the ending of a work which apparently Providence did not wish to last. Vincent convened a general meeting of the *Dames de Charité*, in order that he might explain the situation to them, and come to a decision after hearing their opinion.

When in the presence of these ladies who had answered his summons in great crowds, Vincent laid before them the more than precarious condition of the work, and asked them for a "yes" or "no"; would they go on with it, or give it up? "You are free, mesdames," said he; "you entered into no engagement, you can draw back to-day. But before forming a resolution, I beseech you to reflect on what you have done, and what you are going to do. By your charitable efforts, you have preserved the life of a very large number of children, who, without your help, would have lost it both in time and eternity; for these innocent creatures, as

soon as they learnt to speak, learnt to know and to serve God. Some of them are beginning to work, and to fit themselves for not being a burthen to any one. Does not such a happy beginning give promise of a still more happy continuation?" At this point the saint, carried away by uncontrollable emotion, gave vent to the feelings of his heart in the following simple, powerful, truthful peroration: "Mesdames, pity and charity made you adopt these little creatures as your children; you were their mothers according to grace after their mothers according to nature deserted them. Consider now whether you too will abandon them. Cease to be their mothers, and become their judges; their life and death are in your hands. I will collect the votes and suffrages. It is time to pronounce their sentence, and to decide whether you will have compassion on them any longer. They will live if you charitably continue to take care of them, and, on the contrary, they will infallibly die if you abandon them. Your own experience leaves you no doubt on the subject."

The tears of the assembly were the only answer to these touching words, uttered in such penetrating tones that the *Dames de Charité* "unanimously decided that they must, at any price whatever, support this charitable undertaking, and to this end they consulted amongst themselves as to the means of securing its existence."

The work was saved; the king gave fresh donations, the ladies made more sacrifices, but, above all, the Daughters of Charity, with M^lle^ Le Gras at their head, did all that was possible, even to reducing

themselves to one meal a day, in order that the poor little foundlings might not be abandoned. At first they were lodged in the château of Bicêtre, which the king had given up to them,[1] then, as the air seemed bad for very young children, they were transferred to a large house near St Lazare, where they remained until the building of the Foundling Hospital.

Among all the works on which the good M. Vincent spent his life and his strength, this one specially appealed to him. "If," he would say, in his familiar conferences to the Daughters of Charity, "Mlle. Le Gras had angels, she would have to devote them to the service of these innocent babes, for as the aunt is (that is what they call you), so will the children be; if the aunt is good, they will be good; if she is bad, they will be bad, because they will naturally do what they see their aunt do." On another occasion he made the following reply to a member of the mission, who publicly blamed him for having spent upon the support of the foundlings the alms destined for his Congregation. "May God pardon the weakness," M. Vincent quickly rejoined, "which makes him thus turn away from the sentiments of the Gospel. Oh! what wretched faith to think that Our Lord, Who promises to repay a hundredfold what is done for Him, will be less good to us for our having sought

[1] Mme. la Comtesse de Richemont, in her excellent account of Mlle. Le Gras, thinks that St Vincent de Paul's letters warrant the conclusion that the removal of the children found at Bicêtre took place before, not as Abelly states, after, the meeting of the "*Charité*."

the welfare of poor children like these. Since that merciful Saviour said to His disciples: "Suffer little children to come unto Me," can we, without going against Him, reject or abandon them, when they come to us?"

To the end of his days he remained faithful, as we shall see, to this work of his predilection; but it was far from absorbing him entirely. No one, indeed, could have been less "*unius operis*" (a man of one work), and this is perhaps one of the least known sides of the character of the man, who deserves celebrity not merely for the wonderful holiness of his life, but for the marvellous flexibility of his intelligence, which was open to all right ideas, and which was ready to try and put them into execution, if they were likely to be productive of any good for his neighbour, whom he loved so much as the living image of Christ.

We have not room here to speak in detail of all the works undertaken and successfully carried through by the good M. Vincent. Space prevents our dwelling on the work of the Madeleine, favoured by M^me^. de Maignelais, where Vincent, with signal success, settled Visitation nuns; of the work of La Providence, founded by M^me^. de Pollalion, one of the most active and most zealous *Dames de Charité*, whence sprang the work of the "*Nouvelles Catholiques*"; of the orphan girls, of the Daughters of St Geneviève; of the Daughters of the Cross, and of a host of other orders, to whom M. Vincent rendered constantly and perseveringly all the services in his power, that is to say, everything which was

literally possible for him to do, either in person, or by means of others, without ever becoming wearied or saying that it was too much.

Meantime he devoted persistent care to the Mission and to his missionaries, sparing neither letters nor instructions in cases where either might be useful, if only to one person.

The new society, which was not to receive any definite constitution till two years before his death, was nevertheless increasing daily, and beginning to spread all over Europe. We must content ourselves with a very brief notice of its progress. Vincent, or rather the Mission (for he would not consent to figure as the superior), sent its members to Italy, Corsica, Ireland, Scotland, England, and even the Hebrides, where two missionaries were imprisoned for teaching the "Roman religion." When Mary Gonzaga became Queen of Poland, by marrying, first Wladislas Wasa, and then, after his death, his brother, John Casimir, she summoned to Warsaw the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity (1651). A terrible and almost unprecedented epidemic of plague, and the war between Russia and Sweden, afforded them the opportunity of displaying the most heroic courage. Vincent despatched thither, in turn, two of his dearest disciples, one of whom, M. Lambert, died of fatigue and exhaustion.

Whilst the name of Lazarist was thus beginning to grow famous, Vincent de Paul was likewise giving his attention to a work which he had much at heart, namely, the succour of the galley-slaves, and he succeeded, little by little, with the help of

the great ones of this world, in realising the object of his secret desires, the opening at Marseilles of a hospital specially designed for the convicts. Already, as has been said, Vincent de Paul had organised at Paris the regular visiting by the *Dames de Charité* of the men condemned to the galleys, so that they might obtain some relief, and that their wounds might be dressed. But the remembrance of what he had seen at Marseilles haunted him; a great deal more was needed than short and scattered visits: a permanent hospital was necessary for the care of the men's bodies, and a constant supply of missionaries for the healing, if possible, of their souls, which were far worse off. This time, as in the case of the foundlings, M. Vincent had not waited for the course of events, but had taken the initiative in person, and obtained from Richelieu, then at the height of his power, the establishment of a hospital for the sick convicts. The request, which was strongly backed up by the chevalier de Simiane and by the bishop of Marseilles, was most favourably received by the Cardinal, who speedily grasped its usefulness and importance.

Richelieu easily obtained the consent of Louis XIII., and the work was begun, but scarcely had its plan been sketched out when he died, leaving its completion in the hands of his niece the duchesse d'Aiguillon, who brought to bear upon it all her ardent charity for the poor and all the zeal which she displayed in helping Vincent in his undertakings. In a few years a hospital was built at Marseilles for the galley-slaves, the Mission was established in the

same place by letters patent from the king for the management of the hospital, and the superior of the Marseilles mission became royal almoner, with the power of nominating and dismissing the galley-chaplains.

To the last day of his life Vincent de Paul busied himself about his dear Marseilles galley-slaves, watching over them, though from a distance, in order to see that the moral and material succour, of which they stood so much in need, was bestowed upon them as far as possible. "I cannot," wrote the chevalier de Simiane, his zealous fellow-labourer, "express to you the joy experienced by these poor convicts when they are removed from the hell of the galleys to the hospital, which they characterise as a paradise. Hardly are they within its walls than they are half cured of their ills, because they are cleansed from the vermin with which they are covered when they arrive; their feet are washed, and then they are carried to a bed which is rather softer than the wood on which they habitually lie. They are perfectly charmed to see themselves put to bed, waited on, and treated with a little more charity than in the galleys, to which we have sent back a number of convalescents who would have otherwise died there. Certainly we may say that God has blessed this work, as is manifested not only by the conversion of bad Christians, but also of Turks who ask for holy baptism."

CHAPTER X

VINCENT DE PAUL AND THE DISTRESS IN THE PROVINCES

1639

PERHAPS at first sight these words will seem, in the estimation of those who do not know the details of the life which we are relating, somewhat ambitious.

Nevertheless, despite their apparent magniloquence, they are only the simple expression of the truth, and it would be difficult to find any others to depict precisely the part played in society at that time by a lowly priest, without any resources of his own, but full of the love of God in the person of His poor and that confidence in the Divine assistance which triumphs over all obstacles. For more than twenty years Vincent de Paul was literally the recognised purveyor, the great foster-father of the Eastern provinces which were ruined by the war, and which he saved by means of his immense alms, distributed either in money or kind by his missionaries.

Then, during and after the Fronde, he discharged the same office at Paris and in its neighbourhood, in Champagne and Picardy. Such are the true unex-

aggerated facts; and modern learning, which delights to destroy what it disdainfully and often too positively characterises as "old legends," has in this instance acted in a contrary manner; recent researches as to the public weal and the state of the lower classes in the seventeenth century have brought into full light the truly incredible charity of "M. Vincent," and have made known all that he was able to accomplish, which time and perhaps also secret calculation had concealed to a certain extent. For if historical learning has revealed Vincent's miracles of charity, it has also laid bare the depths of the social wounds which the glory of warfare and literature, the splendour of a young and brilliant society, panting for stir and excitement, as striking in its disorders as in its religious fervour, had cast too far into the shade.

Here again we are compelled to be very superficial and to refer the reader desirous of further information to the curious works recently compiled on this melancholy subject. The fullest, that of M. Feillet on "Distress during the period of the Fronde," though only dealing with a limited period, whereas Vincent de Paul's charity was restricted within no space of time, is based upon original documents, and written conscientiously and accurately. Although the serious impartiality of history is slightly impaired by the author's obvious intention of seeking, in the setting forth of facts, for arguments to strengthen political opinions, still this work is amply sufficient to prove incontrovertibly both the wretchedness of the people at this time, and the inexhaustible resources, drawn from every class of society, in

order to minimise its effects, which were supplied by religion, personified in one of her most perfect representatives. Never perhaps was the power of the faith, struggling against calamities, resulting both from foreign and civil war in a country still in process of formation, more visible and indisputable. Not that Vincent was able, even with the help of all the devoted service which he called forth, to effect the disappearance of the evil, but he succeeded in lessening and mitigating it by the fervour of his charity,—that charity which works miracles and removes mountains.

During that division of the Thirty Years War, known as the *French period*, which was closed by the Peace of Munster and the Treaty of the Pyrenees, the eastern provinces of France served as a high-road and a battlefield for the armies of every nation in Europe. The state to which these miserable districts, down-trodden both by their supposed defenders and by invaders, were reduced, baffles all description. Lorraine and the three Bishoprics, then Franche-Comté and Burgundy, and finally Champagne and Picardy, underwent for more than a quarter of a century all the horrors which then followed in the wake of war perhaps in greater numbers than at any other period. Callot's engraving, as striking as it is faithful, has preserved the memory of those days; it is sufficient to glance at that wonderful series of prints in order to realise clearly all that was endured by those unhappy provinces ravaged by one army of mercenaries after another, Croatians, Hungarians, Bohemians, Swedes, led by John de Werth, Picco-

lomini, Wallenstein, Mansfeld, Bernard of Saxe-Weimar, and the other great "*condottieri*" who sold themselves to the highest bidder. To the havoc wrought by the hired soldiery was added the plague, which soon spread all over France, and, finally, to put a climax to misfortune, the civil war of the Fronde carried the misery of the frontier to Paris and its neighbourhood. It is easy to discover authentic documents to serve as a background to this gloomy picture whose colours have not been in the least heightened by us and which could without difficulty be made darker still.

M. Vincent, face to face with this mass of daily increasing misery, could hardly contain himself. In spite of his advanced age (he was more than sixty-six), and in spite of his long experience of the sufferings of the poor which is said sometimes to take the edge off sensitiveness, his heart was pierced with the "keenest suffering" at the account of the calamities crushing Lorraine, Picardy and the other provinces. Alone, without any resources of his own, he resolved to spare no effort to diminish, even in the smallest degree, the misery of the poor people, and he set to work with his usual ardent devotedness and also his practical skill.

What was most wanted and was also more scarce than anything else just then was money. How was it to be got? Vincent de Paul, who knew full well the hearts of those great Christian women whom he called his "*Dames de Charité*," did not hesitate; he laid before them the appalling wretchedness of the population trodden under foot, and asked them for

the means of relieving, if only to a small extent, their terrible suffering. How were you to resist M. Vincent, when he begged you to help him in preventing people from dying of hunger, and when, in order to set an example, he cut off a dish from his own meal, and left off eating white bread, so as to be able to send help to Lorraine? Therefore his appeal was heard, and through all this miserable period the "*Dames de Charité*" made truly heroic sacrifices.

It is sufficient to say, in order to justify the expression we have just used, that when, later on, an attempt was made to reckon up the sums distributed in alms by St Vincent, mainly supplied by the "*Dames de Charité*," the enormous sum of twelve million pounds was arrived at. To represent its value in the currency of the present day we should have to multiply it by five. When the ladies' treasury was empty, Vincent did not hesitate to go and beg resolutely from some great lady, or even from the queen.

He went thus, sure of success, to the duchesse d'Aiguillon, to the Présidente d'Herse, to M^me^ de Lamoignon, who gave away everything she had, to M^me^ de Bretonvilliers, who once bestowed upon him forty thousand pounds in one sum. On another occasion he wrote to the queen of Poland, who sent him twelve thousand pounds.

Queen Anne of Austria used to give him all her purse contained, and when it was empty, her jewels. On one occasion she parted with a diamond worth seven thousand pounds, on another with an earring which was sold for seventeen thousand. When she

asked him to keep this last gift a secret Vincent replied: "Your Majesty will pardon my disobedience in this one matter. I cannot conceal such a great deed of charity. It is well, madame, that all Paris, and even all France, should know it, and I consider it my duty to publish it wherever I can."

On seeing the success of his efforts and the inexhaustible charity of his "ladies," Vincent could not restrain his joy and emotion: "Oh! Mesdames," he exclaimed in one of those familiar instructions in which he excelled; "does not the account of these things touch your heart? Are you not filled with gratitude for the goodness of God towards you and the afflicted poor? Providence has appealed to a few ladies in Paris to help two distressed provinces. Is not that an extraordinary and new event? History does not relate anything of the kind having happened to the ladies of Spain, Italy, or any other country. It was reserved for you, Mesdames, who are here, and for a few others, now in the presence of God, where they have found an ample reward for their perfect charity."

A few years later,[1] when the continual drain on

[1] M. Feillet, in his interesting book, "Distress during the period of the Fronde," thinks that the Jansenists and Port-Royale must be accredited with having initiated the charitable movement of this date. His conclusions, which do not appear to us to rest on very solid foundations, would nowise diminish, even were they proved, the preponderating, not to say exclusive, share that cannot be fairly attributed to anyone but Vincent de Paul, his missionaries and his Daughters of Charity, in this wonderful outburst, which, thanks to them alone, bore fruit and was not an empty protestation or vain declamation.

the purse of the "*Dames de Charité*" was beginning to exhaust it, whilst the distress continued to spread, Vincent de Paul conceived an idea, remarkably original for that day, which entitles him to be considered in a certain sense the founder of the press: he printed the accounts sent to him by his missionaries, which related in minute and accurate detail the sufferings of the peasants.

These leaflets, printed in large numbers, and before long at regular intervals, were sold by criers at the doors of the churches and in the squares. They met with startling success, the public almost quarrelled for their possession, and they brought a good deal of money to the treasury of the distributors of alms.

"God," said Vincent de Paul, "showered such abundant blessings on the work that the greater number of those who read or heard these narratives opened their hands for the relief of their brethren. The reports were even sent through the provinces, and those first issued reprinted by special request, so as to show the system and results of this business, which is one of the most important of our day."

These leaflets had such a circulation that a kind of periodical gazette was started, entitled, "The Charitable Magazine," to which Vincent added an opusculum headed, "Instruction for the relief of the poor." Is it not curious to see the rôle of periodical literature thus discovered simultaneously by Vincent de Paul and Théophraste Renaudot, and to see it discovered with a view to a charitable object? Is it not still more curious to see Vincent

de Paul foreseeing, by a kind of characteristic instinct, the part that was to be played in modern society by publicity, or, as our barbarous language of to-day styles it, "*réclame*"?

Once more, in tracing back the origin of one of the customs of our own times, we are quite amazed to find the good M. Vincent as a precursor. We are less astonished, but not less, nay more, touched, to find him founding and spreading all over the devastated provinces what he called the work of *cheap soup*, the tradition of which has lasted down to our own day, in the invaluable institution of public kitchens for cheap cookery. He himself drew up with minute care directions for the making of the said soup, the quantity of dripping, butter, vegetables and bread which was to enter into it, the method of distributing it, and the cost price which "will only amount to a hundred sous for a hundred people, even this year when corn is very dear." Then it was highly important to watch over the public health, and ensure the burial of the dead, whose bodies remained uninterred, both in the towns and the depopulated districts, and Vincent de Paul is once more the founder of those societies for purifying the atmosphere and the soil, which we see multiplied to such an extent nowadays. He established everywhere bands of "*aéreux*," who were responsible for the melancholy task of burying the dead, and also for the cleansing and removing the horrible filth which poisoned the air, and was a constant source of pestilence. At the head of the "*aéreux*" were the missionaries and the Daughters

of Charity, many of whom perished in the task, "dying," as their holy founder said, "with their weapons in their hands."

Through the same channel were distributed seeds of various kinds, which enabled the peasantry to recultivate the land laid waste by the war; no other kind of alms is perhaps as useful and beneficial as this. All these different means of relief, sent first to Lorraine, later to Picardy and Champagne, were distributed systematically and methodically, so as to relieve the poor to the greatest possible extent.

From 1633 to 1639, the alms, which were then supposed to be only transient, distributed irregularly and according to circumstances, left few traces behind them. But after 1639, the year when the sufferings of Lorraine reached their height in consequence of the simultaneous invasions from every quarter endured by this unhappy province, the despatch of relief became regular and was conveyed by missionaries, at first twelve in number, who portioned it out according to a fixed rule, the original of which has been preserved, entirely written by the hand of Vincent de Paul. An enquiry was made in order to ascertain exactly what was needed, and the alms, if possible always in kind, were only given to those in the greatest necessity. It soon became necessary to add fresh missionaries to those first sent from Paris, for the journeys grew more and more frequent and the field of action wider and wider.

One of them, Brother Matthew Renard, made

thus fifty-four journeys through Lorraine, carrying sometimes twenty thousand, sometimes ten thousand gold crowns in his belt without ever being robbed by highwaymen; some respected him, others he eluded, and always succeeded in concealing his precious wallet from them.

The account of his adventures, which he wrote at the time of the canonisation of Vincent de Paul, affords a curious glimpse of the manners of the time and of the state of France at that period, and by the piquancy of its details recalls the picturesque narratives of Walter Scott. Anne of Austria frequently sent for the good brother, on his return from one of his expeditions, that she might learn all particulars from his own lips.

The Daughters of Charity were equally useful to Vincent de Paul's plans. They followed the missionaries into the country districts, and in their toilsome pilgrimages through lands laid waste by the spoiler, inaugurated that tradition of heroic devotion which they have unfalteringly maintained for nearly three centuries.

In this manner Toul, Metz, Verdun, Nancy, Bar-le-Duc, St Mihiel, Pont à Mousson, and later on the towns of Picardy, Guise, Corbie, and St Quentin received the help brought by Vincent's envoys, which, great as it was for those who sent it, disappeared like a drop in the ocean, but nevertheless was sufficient to save these unhappy provinces from utter ruin, and enable them to exist until the return of peace.

The part played by Vincent during this lamentable

period in the history of the country is to a certain extent officially proved by an authentic document discovered and published by M. Feillet, in his book on the distress during the Fronde; it is a safe-conduct signed by the king, destined to shield, on their errands of charity, the missionaries, who otherwise would have met with little more mercy at the hands of the royal troops than the peasantry themselves. This paper, which is too long for quotation, enjoins the generals to respect M. Vincent's ambassadors, to have them treated with consideration, and to grant protection to the villages for which they should demand it; it confers upon Vincent de Paul an official position, and, as has been justly observed, transforms a simple priest acting spontaneously, and entirely on his own authority, into the grand almoner of France.

A quantity of letters from the towns and villages of the distressed provinces, some containing thanks for help received, others imploring its bestowal, have also been preserved; they prove conclusively both Vincent de Paul's inexhaustible charity and its efficacy.

We must crave leave to quote this fragment from a letter of the governor of St Quentin, which has been reproduced, and with good reason, in all the modern biographies of Vincent de Paul: "The misery is so great," writes this magistrate, "that there are scarcely any inhabitants left in the villages. They have only straw to sleep upon, and even the nobility of the country have barely means of subsistence. Therefore, urged by the position which

I occupy, and the obligations which I recognise as belonging to it, I entreat you to be again the '*Father of the Country*' by preserving the life of so many sick and dying persons, who are assisted in a manner worthy of all praise by your priests."

In truth, nothing wearied the charity of him whom the governor of St Quentin called with justice the "Father of the Country." Not content with taking or sending help to the people, M. Vincent endeavoured, as far as lay in his power, to save the children and young girls of Lorraine from the brutality of the bands of soldiers who were overrunning it in every direction. He brought to Paris more than two hundred young girls, who were safely bestowed in convents, besides a number of little orphan children whom he found wandering about without shelter or care of any sort. With regard to these last, M^lle^ Le Gras undertook the girls, and the boys were lodged at St Lazare itself.

Some time afterwards, Vincent, hearing that a band of the nobility of Lorraine had come to take refuge at Paris, and were there dying of destitution, without venturing to ask for relief, did not hesitate to come to their succour with the aid of M. de Renty, one of the great Christians of this period, who was destined to die at the age of thirty-eight, leaving behind him the reputation of a saint; he founded a special "*œuvre*" for visiting the refugees of the Lorraine nobility at Paris. Once more he found fellow-labourers, and for eight years the work went on. It stopped for a short time when peace was signed, and was then resumed, not on behalf

of the people of Lorraine, but of the English and Irish Catholics who were driven from their country by the Revolution and by Cromwell's Protectorate.

How did Vincent de Paul manage to keep up so many immense charities for such a long space of years? That is a question, which, when all is said and done, would remain incomprehensible, if it were not an acknowledged fact that the example of charity is infectious, and if M. Vincent had not set this example up to the last day of his life to a degree that may be, without exaggeration, described as heroic. If he demanded much of others, he began by spending himself and giving away all that he had, a method which invests a person with a certain authority and ensures his obtaining all he wants. If he sometimes imposed heavy sacrifices on his community, he bore the lion's share himself. "M. Vincent," says a contemporary account, "was always the first to give. He opened his heart and his purse, so that when anything was wanted he contributed everything of his own, and deprived himself of necessaries in order to finish the work begun."

On one occasion, when three hundred pounds were required to make up a considerable sum, he produced them at once, and tradition declares that they had been given to him by a charitable person for the purchase of a horse better than his own, "which had several times fallen under him from weakness, proceeding from extreme old age. But he preferred enduring the risk of being hurt to leaving without assistance people whom he believed to be in want."

His confidence in Providence, when it was a case of works of charity, was boundless, and was characterised by that deliberate imprudence which is found in all the saints and which they alone are justified in possessing. One day he made the treasurer of St Lazare give him fifty crowns which lay at the bottom of the community treasury, and which were destined for the payment of next day's food. Without even excusing himself, or saying how he proposed to replace them, Vincent transferred the fifty crowns to his charity purse, which was empty. God, he felt convinced, would provide for his servants, and sure enough the next day a benefactor sent a bag containing a thousand francs to St Lazare.

Thus for the space of nearly thirty years Vincent de Paul, by giving away the very necessaries of life, managed to keep abreast with his charities, and always to discover fresh resources, even when everything seemed exhausted. The good that he achieved in those distressful years, the sufferings of which are too often forgotten in their outward brilliancy, stir, interest and variety, cannot be accurately described in such a short *résumé*, but history has done him justice—even authors most hostile to the religious past of France are forced to acknowledge his services, and if one of the most famous amongst them, Michelet, has thought fit to qualify the eulogium which he sees himself compelled to pass on a Catholic priest, in the person of Vincent de Paul, by a reservation as to the small efficaciousness of his charities when confronted with the greatness,

the number and the intensity of the sufferings of the people, this very reservation is a guarantee of their extent and usefulness.

Certainly the charity, even of a Vincent de Paul, could not alter facts, nor cure evils all at once, but it softened them, and was the means of obtaining peace, which allowed exhausted France to dress and close her wounds.

It is easy to understand, after what we have said, and we have merely glanced at the horrors caused by the length and fierceness of the struggle, it is easy, we repeat, to understand with what ardour Vincent de Paul, a witness of all this misery, desired peace. An avowed supporter of what was then called the party of the Saints, headed by the Cardinal de Bérulle, which strongly blamed the Protestant alliance, M. Vincent especially desired peace, as entailing the cessation of these ever-recurring calamities which followed in the wake of the war. Besides, and this is one of the characteristic traits of his original mind, he had a secret instinct as to the radical and deeply-ingrained viciousness of Richelieu's great policy,—a policy entirely devoted to the exterior, and of set purpose neglecting the interior, the administration, the prosperity and the material happiness of the people. This policy, wholly directed to the greatness of France without, and the strengthening of the absolute power of the king within, was indeed that of a great nobleman and a man of genius, who considered administration almost beneath him, and who never thought that if it were imperative at all

costs to break the circle of iron with which the power of Austria had surrounded France, it was perhaps not less necessary to lift her up interiorly, and to endow her with that prosperity which is the true strength of a nation, and without which its exterior power always collapses sooner or later. Vincent de Paul, who was so close a spectator of the suffering and distress of the poor, guessed, with the instinct born of charity, that this was an urgent necessity, not sufficiently considered at court. Moreover, he had, with regard to the duties of the powerful towards the lowly, ideas which were very Christian, but hardly those which governed Richelieu, or, later, Mazarin.

The part he played during the Fronde will exhibit his character with singular clearness, but already, during the later years of the great Cardinal's life, he did not conceal his sentiments, but expressed them with the greatest freedom. One day, not being able to contain himself, he went to see Richelieu, and said to him with tears, "Monseigneur, give us peace, have pity on us, give peace to France." "Which he repeated," says the oldest biographer of Vincent de Paul, "with so much feeling that the great Cardinal was touched, and, having taken his remonstrance in good part, told him that he was working for peace, but that it did not depend upon him alone, but upon several other persons, some within the kingdom and some outside it."

This pretty scene, which is worthy of being represented on an artist's canvas, depicts the

personages concerned with marvellous fidelity, and the terrible statesman is for once in his life touched, despite himself, by the infectious warmth of the man who loved the poor so much, because he loved Jesus Christ so much!

CHAPTER XI

VINCENT DE PAUL AT THE COUNCIL OF CONSCIENCE

1643

ON the 14th of May 1643, five months after Richelieu, Louis XIII. breathed his last at St Germain-en-Laye, in the arms of Vincent de Paul. How was it that he, who had never been to court save on rare occasions when constrained by necessity, was summoned to discharge the last sacred duties to the king? St Simon has told the story with his inimitable talent, and we shall not try to repeat it after him. The piety of Louis, which had always been remarkable, was kindled to still greater fervour by the near approach of death, and made him desire on his death-bed to have at his side to help him in crossing the narrow strait, that good M. Vincent, whose eminent sanctity was already unanimously extolled by everyone. Great was the surprise of Vincent de Paul when, towards the end of April, 1643, he was sent for to St Germain by the express command of the king. Despite his repugnance for everything that might bring him forward and draw attention upon him, he obeyed immediately and started for St Germain.

On entering the room where lay the king of France,

with the shadows of death already upon him, Vincent de Paul, who knew with whom he had to deal, and why he had been called upon, greeted the sick man with the words of Scripture: "Sire, *timenti Deum bene erit in extremis*" (With him that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end), to which the king instantly and unhesitatingly answered with the end of the verse, "*et in die defunctionis suae benedicetur*" (and in the day of his death he shall be blessed). The humble mission-priest remained a whole week at St Germain with the king, on whom he doubtless bestowed lavish consolation from the depths of his soul, steeped, as it was, in the love of that God before Whom the dying man was about to appear. Nothing has transpired concerning their interviews. It would have been interesting to know something of the last conversations between those two men who were so widely separated and yet, who, at that great moment which bridges every gulf, were drawn together by the same faith and the same hope. Especially would posterity have been glad to learn what words of comfort and strengthening Vincent uttered to the dying prince, worthy by his greatness of soul of having such a consoler at his side. His character is shown by a speech made in public at the end of Vincent's week's stay at the court, when a deceptive improvement in the sickness allowed the priest to go back to his work, which was in urgent need of him: "Oh! Monsieur Vincent, if I were to get well I should never nominate a bishop who had not been three years with you."

On the 11th of the following May, the king's illness having again taken a turn for the worse, and being clearly hopeless, Louis again sent for Vincent de Paul, that he might be with him in his last moments.

For three days Vincent remained at the bedside of the king, who beheld the approach of death with calm courage, and resignation that was almost joyous, worthy of a Christian life and a lofty soul. Louis XIII. set all the affairs of the State in order; arranging for the regency, dictating his will, causing it to be read aloud by his pillow, and asking the bystanders if they approved it, preserving meantime an astonishing composure which never gave way.

From his bed he could see the towers of St Denis. "That is where I shall soon be," he said, "and where I shall remain for a long time; my body will be well shaken about, for the roads are bad." Vincent never left him, but constantly exhorted and consoled him with that strong simplicity, which he knew so well how to use on occasion. It was on the evening of the 13th of May, in the presence of a number of witnesses, who, according to the custom of the day, filled his room, that Louis XIII. had that celebrated vision of the battle of Rocroi, whose victorious issue he announced to the prince of Condé, father of the young duke d'Enghien. This fact, which has never been disputed, produced then on the minds of all who heard the king's words the effect of a prophecy.

The next day, feeling his strength declining, he asked Séguin, his physician, to feel his pulse, and

tell him how many hours he still had to live: "But feel it carefully, for I shall be glad to know accurately."—"Sire, your Majesty may have two hours, or at the utmost three."—"Well, my God, I am resigned, and that right cheerfully." Then, showing to Vincent de Paul his emaciated arm, he added: "See, M. Vincent, is that the arm of a king? You see how kings fare, just like other men." The prayers for those in the last agony were said, and he responded in a voice that grew weaker every instant. Then suddenly opening his eyes, the dying man began to repeat aloud, in tones of extraordinary fervour, the "*Te Deum*"; he died with its last words on his lips. "Never whilst I have been in the world," wrote Vincent de Paul a few days later, "have I seen anyone die in a more Christian manner. I have never witnessed greater lifting up of the soul to God, greater tranquillity, greater fear of the slightest actions which might be sinful, greater goodness nor greater judgment in a person in like condition."

By the death of Louis XIII., his wife, Anne of Austria, became regent in the name of the child, Louis XIV.

She hastened, perhaps on the advice of Mazarin, who wished to make the position secure before governing alone, to create various councils of government apparently destined to help in the onerous task. One of the first summoned was that called the "Council of Conscience," which was to give the regent the aid of its lights as to the conferring of benefices. It was composed of Cardinal Mazarin,

the chancellor Séguier, the bishops of Beauvais and Lisieux, and, lastly, of her own accord, the queen joined with them Vincent de Paul.

It would be difficult to express the surprise, we might almost say terror, of the humble servant of the poor, when he was informed of the queen's choice. His disquietude and anguish were intense at the thought of the immense responsibility which he should incur by co-operating, even to the extent of advice, in the nomination of the bishops, and the great benefice-holders of the Church in France, and of the necessity under which he should be of frequenting the court. So deep was his perturbation that he, who was so seldom troubled, endeavoured to avert this favour, which, as he clearly foresaw, would only be a source of bitterness to him. He caused representations to be made to the regent, he even went so far as to go and plead his cause himself with her, and entreat her not to lay this burthen upon him; she remained deaf to his entreaties, and he was compelled to yield, though foreseeing from the first "the great storms and the violent shocks to which he would be exposed on that sea of the court."

A few days after his admission into the council, which many probably secretly envied, Vincent de Paul wrote to one of his brethren at Rome: "I have never been more worthy of compassion than I am now, nor have I stood in greater need of prayers than at present in the new office which I hold; I hope it will not last long. Pray to God for me.' The priests of the Mission preserved the memory of

words which they heard him say at the same period: "I pray God every day that I may be regarded as a fool, which I really am, so as not to be employed in this sort of business, and as to have more opportunity for doing penance for my sins."

The task once undertaken had to be accomplished as well as possible. Vincent de Paul took care not to fail in this duty, which he fulfilled with his usual simplicity. From the outset, he laid down for himself two rules of conduct, which were to serve him as a support on the unknown and slippery ground of the court, which he was going to tread. He resolved never to go to court without being summoned thither, either to be present at the Council of Conscience, or to render some service urgently required for the good of religion. Secondly, he made a promise to himself never to ask for anything in any shape, either for himself or for those belonging to him, that is to say, for his Mission priests, and he faithfully kept his word on these two heads.

For the rest, he made no change, either in his life or his dress. He used to go to St Germain, or the Louvre, in "the same coarse, patched cassock, the common sash of woollen stuff, thick shoes and shabby hat, but all without stains or holes," for, if he loved poverty, he loved cleanliness almost as well, and always observed it in his own person. This attire, so different from the brilliant costumes then worn by great noblemen, at first caused a certain amount of merriment at court. "See, Madame," said Mazarin, one day to the queen

taking him by the sash; "see how M. Vincent dresses when he comes to court, and observe the beautiful sash which he wears." M. Vincent smiled, but made no alteration in his shabby dress.

Neither was there any change in his attitude or demeanour; he remained as simple, as modest, as full of Christian humility on this new scene of action, amidst all the compliments and interested flattery by which he was instantly surrounded, as he could have been at St Lazare, or in the house of the good Daughters of Charity. Le Pelletier, Secretary of State under Louis XIV., made the following deposition to this effect at the process of canonisation: "I was still very young, when I first saw the servant of God at the Louvre, where I often saw him afterwards. He bore himself with a modesty and humility full of dignity. The courtiers, the prelates, the ecclesiastics and others, on account of the esteem in which they held him, paid him great honours; he received them with much humility. On quitting the council-chamber where he had settled the fate of some of the most important matters in the kingdom, he was just as easy, just as familiar with the lowest of men, as he was among the slaves at Tunis, or on the benches of the convicts. A good bishop, who had not seen him since his entrance at court, finding him quite as humble, as affable, as ready to do anyone a service as before, could not help saying to him: "M. Vincent is still M. Vincent."

If M. Vincent's humility had not much difficulty in resisting the flatteries whose motives he easily

divined, he perhaps found it harder to stand firm against the numerous petitions which then, as in our own day, instantly besieged everyone who had a share, however small, in the distribution of favours. On the very morrow of the day when he received from the queen a summons to the Council of Conscience, requests flowed in; one wanted an abbey, another a bishopric; he had to listen to everyone, and manage to refuse without hurting their feelings—not always an easy matter.

He who had hitherto always been accustomed to deal with the poor, who, even when guilty or unworthy, are still the poor of Jesus Christ, had then to learn to say "No,"—to close his ears to the most pressing applications from suppliants of title and reputation, who had become habituated to regarding Church property as their own possession, designed to strengthen or repair their fortunes. But the poor priest in the patched cassock, who laughed at finding himself in the galleries of the Louvre, and exclaimed involuntarily, on seeing his image reflected in the Venetian mirrors which adorned the walls: "Oh! you country bumpkin!" was then again the inflexible defender of the sacred interests of religion, and nothing and no one could bend him. Neither the offer of patronage for his favourite work, that of the Missions, nor the promise of large sums of money for the poor obtained so much as a moment's consideration on his part. "God forbid!" was all his answer on one occasion to a tender of a hundred thousand pounds, if he gave his support to a proposal

contrary to the interests of the Church: "I would sooner die than say a single word on that subject." But that was only the negative side, so to say, of the part that he felt himself called upon to play, and he set himself from the first to try to fulfil the other, the active part, and to labour for the reformation of abuses.

This task was far more difficult, and he had to make head against opposition so powerful, that, if it did not completely paralyse his influence, it nevertheless prevented its bearing full fruit. Vincent de Paul was not unaware of the obstacles he should meet with, but he was not to be turned back by that consideration, when it was a case of discharging a duty. He set to work at once, and, doubtless foreseeing the necessity of profiting by the beginning of the regency, when the queen, being still full of indecision and alarm at her unaccustomed responsibilities, would be more easily awakened to the existing evil, and more readily induced to try to remedy it, he suggested and got accepted a few rules of conduct, designed to reform abuses in the distribution of ecclesiastical preferment. A glance at them is sufficient to show how widespread, how inveterate and how common was the evil, when so many precautions were required before it could be even approached. First and foremost, Vincent induced the Council of Conscience to pass the resolution that under no circumstances should children be appointed to episcopal sees. Ten years old was to be the minimum age for obtaining an abbey, sixteen a priory or canonship in a cathedral, and fourteen in

a collegiate church. Before becoming a bishop, at least a year's priesthood would be necessary.

The second rule that Vincent de Paul caused to be put in force, at any rate for a time, is worded thus: "The queen shall grant no pension-warrant on the bishoprics, except in cases allowed by the Church." For a custom had become established of giving pensions on the property of the bishoprics to laymen of every degree, at the expense of the goods of the Church, which were thus used for the support of the courtiers.

Finally, what were then called "*dévolus*" had to be, if not suppressed, at least diminished to the greatest extent possible. This extraordinary custom consisted in a warrant granted by the king to an ecclesiastic approved of by himself, which allowed the latter to cast his *dévolu* on a bishopric, an abbey, or a canonship, whose succession was secured to him if the lawful incumbent resigned in his favour. It is not difficult to conceive the results of this custom and the persecutions of all kinds to which the unhappy possessors of a *dévolu* benefice were exposed. This abuse, one of the strangest to be found in the long list of the miserable effects of human ambition and covetousness applied to sacred things, was lessened by the efforts of Vincent de Paul, but not rooted up, for it had taken too firm a hold upon the manners of the day. Vincent also succeeded in obtaining other reforms, more especially in the appointments to abbeys of women, which had been bestowed upon children of six years old.

But the end which Vincent chiefly strove to ac-

complish was the choosing subjects for the bishoprics and other benefices from amongst priests worthy of the offices by their learning, their virtue and the excellence of their lives.

This was the hardest part of his task, and at the very outset he encountered almost insurmountable difficulties. But he was not discouraged, and, as long as he could do anything, spared no pains to banish favouritism, intrigues and politics from intruding into the sanctuary, where they ought never to be allowed to enter, through all ages and periods of history, under any pretext or in any shape whatever. In the early days of the Council of Conscience, Mazarin, not yet feeling himself sufficiently strong or sure of his ascendency over the queen to resist, let Vincent do as he would, and consequently the interests of religion alone guided often, if not always, the choice of the regent. Vincent openly advised her not to yield to petitions for unworthy candidates, and she usually listened to him. This intervention, which thwarted the ambition of many families, drew down upon him a good deal of enmity and calumny. But nothing could shake nor intimidate him when the interests of religion, that is to say, the glory of God, were under consideration. He never justified himself, and only replied by silence to the abuse with which he was sometimes loaded in public. "You are an old lunatic," once said a young man, to whom, owing to Vincent, a benefice had been refused.—"You are right, my son, and I ask pardon for having given you the opportunity of saying such words," was his only answer. On another occasion a father

whose son Vincent had declined to recommend for a bishopric, got so angry as to lift his hand against the Saint, who, without being discomposed, courteously saw him into his carriage.

Being one day insulted in public by a magistrate of one of the supreme courts, whose interests he had refused to take in hand, he rejoined in the following noble words: "Monsieur, you endeavour, I am persuaded, to acquit yourself worthily in your office, and I must try to do so in mine."

Occasionally actual courage was required to hinder appointments of pure favouritism, extorted by means of persistent solicitation. As an instance of this we may quote the following anecdote, related in detail by the Abbé Maury in his panegyric of Vincent de Paul, based upon the archives of St Lazare, which were almost entirely destroyed at the Revolution.

A lady of the highest rank, the wife of a duke, and belonging to the household of the queen, obtained from her, by taking her unawares, a brevet conferring upon her son, a man of notoriously bad life, the episcopal see of Poitiers, whose somewhat scanty revenues did not constitute what was then called a good benefice. Anne of Austria, who strongly suspected that M. Vincent would not approve of her choice, and who was afraid of his blame, charged the mother herself to make it known to him. The duchess, thinking her position perfectly safe, went to St Lazare, and delivered, in an extremely overbearing manner, the queen's message. Vincent, thunderstruck, did his utmost to deter the imperious lady from her criminal project, but in vain. The

next day he presented himself at the Palais-Royal with a roll of paper. "Ah!" said the queen, quickly, "you have brought me the nomination of the bishop of Poitiers to sign"; then perceiving that the paper was blank, she added: "Why have you not drawn up the form?" "Pardon me, Madame," replied Vincent simply, "if your Majesty's mind is fully made up, I beg you to set down your wishes yourself. I cannot in conscience have any share in them," and thereupon, with the boldness imparted by the conviction that he was fulfilling an urgent duty, he plainly set forth to the queen the reasons against a nomination, which would be a simple scandal. "This abbé, Madame," said he, "whom you propose to make a bishop, spends his life in public-houses, and is habitually in such a state of intoxication, that he is found almost every evening at the corner of the street so dead-drunk, that he does not even remember his own name. His family is not unaware of his conduct, and wishes with good reason to remove him from Paris, but an episcopal see is scarcely a fitting place of retreat for him."

Struck with consternation, the queen revoked her consent, and annulled the nomination, but she charged Vincent de Paul to "go and make her peace" with the lady of her household. Vincent accepted the difficult commission; when he had executed it with all possible tact, the anger of the mother, thus disappointed in her hopes, knew no bounds. Rising to her feet, the duchess seized a stool, and flung it at the head of M. Vincent. Without saying a word he staunched with his

handkerchief the blood, which was flowing freely from a wound in his forehead, and went out without uttering a complaint. The brother who always accompanied him, and who was waiting for him in the ante-room, seeing him in such a state, wished to protest, and was hastening towards the room, whence his master had just issued, but Vincent stopped him: "My brother, your business does not lie there; this is our way, let us go. Is it not wonderful," he added smiling, "to see to what lengths the affection of a mother for her son will go?"

This is an example of the patience and energy which he displayed in defending against ambition or covetousness these bishoprics which the upper classes were gradually coming to regard as being exclusively reserved for them.

He did not always succeed, but nothing discouraged him, as long as he was able to accomplish anything. The future Cardinal de Retz relates, with revolting cynicism, in his memoirs, how he managed to deceive the clear-sightedness of M. Vincent, who nevertheless felt for this unworthy son of virtuous parents all the tenderness of a father for a prodigal child. He began by feigning a return to piety, which took in the devout, even M. Vincent. Then, with a *sangfroid* which cannot be contemplated without indignation, Retz tells us that when the coadjutorship of the archbishopric of Paris had been obtained for him, he simulated a conversion, of which he felt not the slightest inward stirring, before receiving Holy Orders. Nay, impersonating Tartuffe before that

type was created, he shut himself up for a space of time at St Lazare, made a retreat, the announcement of which was spread abroad, and exhibited with consummate skill all the signs of real repentance, which was absolutely non-existent. He left St Lazare, having determined, in his own words, "to do evil designedly."

It was the Archbishop of Paris who had asked the regent for his nephew as coadjutor. His request had been supported by all the canons of Notre Dame: the Père de Gondi had left his retreat, in order to plead his son's cause with the regent. If Vincent de Paul did not ally himself with such powerful petitioners, all he could do was to let things take their course. His conduct is more than justified by the cynicism of de Retz, who, in his pithy and brilliant language, makes us witnesses of these unhappy scenes, mocking at his dupes long years afterwards with bitterness which has something appalling about it. Is it wonderful that Vincent was deceived, like the rest of the world? What could he, first the protégé, and then the friend and confidant of M. de Gondi and his wife, do except hold his peace and pray to God that the pretended conversion of his former pupil might become real?

If, as the great writer says, with sinister irony, the example of his religious parents and of M. Vincent proves that "nothing is so subject to illusion as piety," the persons to be called to account are assuredly not those who are the dupes of such illusions, but those who are accountable

for their arising. It would have required a man of the same calibre to understand and unmask the future Cardinal de Retz.

But Vincent de Paul had not only to deal with the cunning hypocrisy of de Retz: he had, within the Council of Conscience itself, another far more formidable opponent, in the persistent and crafty opposition of Mazarin, who was fully resolved to annihilate an influence which might have stood in his way, and lessened, even in the smallest degree, his dominion over the mind of the queen. Mazarin, who was thoroughly acquainted with the disposition of Anne of Austria, knew the sincerity of her religious faith, and her scruples when the affairs of the Church were concerned. From the very beginning he was firmly determined to get rid at any price of those who formed what was then called the party of the Saints, and of Vincent de Paul before anyone else.

At the beginning of the regency he did not interfere, in order to avoid scaring the queen, but having made up his mind that no one but himself should gain the ear of the sovereign, and at the same time that he was not going to be deprived of one of his most powerful means of action, namely, the arbitrary distribution of benefices according to the interests of policy and ambition, he speedily succeeded in everywhere thwarting the good intentions of the queen, in removing Vincent de Paul, and in putting everything back on its old footing. Vincent soon perceived that all his efforts would be fruitless; he tried to struggle on, but his opponent

was too powerful for him, and he had to own himself conquered. It must be admitted that his adversary set about operations with his usual skill, and with the art, which he possessed in a pre-eminent degree, of attaining his end by a constant change of tactics.

At first he tried to carry things with a high hand, and to get Vincent ejected from the Council, indeed it was actually rumoured at court, and through the town, that the priest's complete overthrow was at hand. "Would to God that it were true," said Vincent to someone who spoke to him on the subject, "but a sinner like myself was not worthy of such a favour."

The queen did indeed resist for once, and would not consent to send away him whom, in common with all true Christians, she regarded as a saint. Then the wily minister, whose tricks of policy have been revealed to us by the curious journals, wherein he daily noted down his impressions and his projects, altered his method of proceeding. He pretended to like and admire the good M. Vincent as much as and more than anybody else, but began to summon the Council of Conscience only at very long intervals, finally putting its meetings so far apart as to completely nullify their effect. This time he had calculated aright, thanks to the incurable indolence of the queen, who did not like being disturbed in the midst of her frivolous occupations, and who was only too willing to leave the management of business to her minister; and the Council of Conscience soon came to be only called now and then, merely as a matter of form. Then, as we shall see later

on, came the troubles of the Fronde, with their disastrous consequences. The court left Paris, nothing was thought of but reducing the rebels to submission, and the Council of Conscience ceased to meet at all; the distribution of bishoprics and abbeys became more than ever a means of retaining partisans, or of acquiring fresh ones. Political considerations and favouritism, far more than the interests of the Church, for a time (it would not be fair to speak thus of what was done under the actual government of Louis XIV. himself) decided the fate of what, in all times and under all forms of government, ought to be regarded as the most sacred of all the obligations of power, and that which entails the most overwhelming responsibility.

In bitter grief and almost in despair at his own helplessness, Vincent de Paul beheld a sight which pierced him to the heart both as a Christian and a good citizen, for he knew that no one trifles with sacred things with impunity.

"I fear," he wrote in one of his letters, "that this accursed barter of bishoprics will draw down the curse of God upon this country." The good M. Vincent was not mistaken; the misery, resulting from the Fronde, from which all classes had to suffer, civil war and all its attendant evils were soon added to the foreign wars, and proved conclusively that he was right.

CHAPTER XII

VINCENT DE PAUL DURING THE FRONDE—CONSTITUTIONS FORMALLY GIVEN TO THE GREAT "ŒUVRES"—LAST YEARS

1649-1660

TO all outward appearance the Fronde is one of the most brilliant and interesting periods of the seventeenth century. Noble ladies and great generals, prelates and courtiers, grave magistrates and adventurers of every class meet confusedly in the most picturesque of *mêlées;* for once politics are as amusing as a romance of chivalry. Moreover no epoch was more productive of memoirs equally remarkable for their wit and the liveliness of style; they include one of the masterpieces of the French language, the "Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz," which have become classical as a finished model of keen observation and biting irony.

But beneath this varied exterior is hidden a substratum of suffering and unhappiness which has been too long ignored, and which casts a sinister shadow over the brilliant actors in the drama. It has been dragged to light by the historical researches of late years, and after their perusal it is not difficult to understand the attitude assumed by Vincent de

Paul at this mournful crisis, nor his constant efforts to bring back peace and put an end to a struggle, of whose terrible consequences he was so near a spectator.

Vincent de Paul, a protégé of the Gondis in his youth, the tutor of the famous Cardinal, openly attached to what was then called the party of the Saints, almost all the members of which were notoriously hostile to Mazarin, and sided with the Fronde, Vincent de Paul, I repeat, belonged naturally to the Frondeurs. But, on the other hand, he was a member of the Council of Conscience, entirely devoted to the regent, who gave him her confidence,—we might almost say showed him deference—and he entertained no doubts as to the submission due to the king when public affairs were in question.

It is thus obvious that he was in a situation of peculiar delicacy. We shall see with what moderation, what courage and independence of all parties, what fidelity to his friends, and what true patriotism, this son of a poor peasant managed to steer clear of all difficulties.

Never were the words of Christ, spoken when He announced to His apostles the coming of the Holy Ghost, more literally fulfilled: "He will teach you all things, *suggeret vobis omnia*." The simplicity of the Gospel taught Vincent de Paul, in a moment, more than he could ever have learnt from all the arts of diplomacy.

The narrow limits of this sketch, which must necessarily cramp the life of Vincent, full to overflowing of events, does not allow us to relate the

confused occurrences which constitute what has received the name of the Fronde. We shall here only speak of those in which M. Vincent was immediately concerned without lingering over the rest.

The beginning of what has received the name of the "Parliamentary" Fronde (August 1648), the riots in Paris, accompanied by cries of "Down with Mazarin," the arrest of the president Broussel, and his restoration to freedom in the teeth of popular fury, the secret flight of the queen and her son, her retirement to St Germain-en-Laye, where Mazarin continued to dominate her counsels, and to direct all her actions, are facts well known to everyone. When, after all these events, which seemed to be the prelude to a revolution, the queen had recalled to her side the young conqueror of Rocroy and Lens, to whom history has given the title of the "great Condé," and had bidden him reduce rebel Paris to submission by blockade, there was great alarm and dismay in the capital, where, in consequence of all the troubles, great distress already prevailed. What would become of the population, very large even in those days, were it reduced to famine? what would happen if scarcity were to take up its abode for any length of time in that great town? what terrible results would not ensue? Ought not the queen to do everything to prevent things reaching such an extremity, and was not Cardinal Mazarin bound in conscience to retire for a time so as to let the storm subside?

So, it cannot be doubted, said Vincent de Paul

within himself, and with his usual decision he formed a bold resolution, which, although it might compromise him both with the Frondeurs and the people of Paris, at least freed him from individual responsibility, and made it possible for him to do himself the justice of having risked everything, even his own person, in his efforts for the re-establishment of peace.

On the 14th of January, 1649, in the middle of the night, he left Paris on horseback with his secretary, a priest of the Mission, named Du Courneau.

Getting out of a town under arms and bristling everywhere with barricades was no easy matter. Several times, particularly at Clichy, the two horsemen, who had all the appearance of fugitives, were nearly arrested amidst the threats and shouts of the armed inhabitants who were patrolling the streets. But as soon as good M. Vincent was recognised, heads were respectfully bared and he was allowed to pass. At Neuilly, the Seine had overflowed and was flooding the bridge. But nothing could stop Vincent de Paul when he believed that he had a duty to accomplish, and to the extreme dissatisfaction of his companion who, as he tells us himself, was "quivering with fright," he undauntedly urged his horse upon the bridge, and, breasting the water which covered it, arrived with Du Courneau wet to the skin, but safe and sound, on the other side of the Seine.

Thence he immediately betook himself to St Germain, where his arrival caused a certain flutter and was at first interpreted as a sign of the ap-

proaching submission of the rebels. Therefore the queen received him at once. Vincent de Paul, far from announcing to her that Paris was about to lay down its arms, painted the state of the city in the darkest colours, and concealed none of his opinions from her. "Is it just, Madame," said he, with eagerness full of emotion, "to cause the death of a million of innocent persons in order to punish twenty or thirty culprits? Think of the misery that will overwhelm your people, of the ruin, the sacrilege, the profanation attendant upon war. And why should it come about? In order to keep with you a foreigner, the object of public hatred. But if the presence of the Cardinal is the source of the State troubles, are you not under obligation to sacrifice him, at any rate for a time?" It would have been difficult to speak more frankly and clearly. This independence, to which sovereigns are so little accustomed, does honour to him, who, urged by his conscience, dared to make use of such language. Touched by the vehemence of the holy man, Anne of Austria promised to mitigate the rigour of the blockade, and sent him to the Cardinal without showing any vexation at his frankness of speech.

Vincent next had an interview with the first minister, and, feeling almost repentant for having been so vehement with the regent, and being well aware that nothing in the way of sentiment would have the smallest effect on Mazarin, he defended the same thesis before the person principally concerned, with a moderation bordering on humility, but without losing anything of his first firmness. He

ended his speech, for he spoke a long time, by these remarkably bold words: "Monseigneur, yield to the times, and cast yourself into the sea to calm the storm." "You have read me a very severe lecture," rejoined Mazarin, without showing any anger, "no one has ever before ventured to address me in such terms. Nevertheless, Father, I will go and see whether M. le Tellier shares your opinion." Vincent bent his head, feeling that his attempt had failed, for he knew the court too well to mistake the drift of this final plea; to refer the matter to the Secretary of State, le Tellier, a creature of Mazarin, indebted to him for everything, was a polite but unanswerable manner of dismissing him, and of closing the conversation by a positive refusal.

The next day, in fact, the Council, on the motion of le Tellier, decided that the Cardinal must remain at court, and at the head of affairs. Having nothing more to do at St Germain, Vincent de Paul did not remain there a moment longer than was necessary; his friends feared that his liberty might be in danger from the displeasure of the queen and the resentment of the Cardinal, but such was not the case, and he was even provided with a royal escort, in order to pass through the troops surrounding St Germain. But he was not able to return to Paris. In spite of the precautions he had taken of writing before his departure to the president Molé to explain his actions, and to assure him that they were absolutely spontaneous, the rumour of his departure, and then of the failure of his attempt, were no sooner spread through the

city than he was accused of treason and of having been bought over by "*le Mazarin*."

The coarsest abuse was heaped upon him, songs turning him into ridicule, and accusing him of the basest servility towards the favourite, were sung about the streets, his name was covered with insult in public, and for some days the population of Paris, hitherto accustomed to bless M. Vincent, pursued him with rough jests. The house of St Lazare, which up to then had been spared, was invaded by eight hundred of the rabble rout, who plundered it, and consumed the provisions destined for distribution to the poor.

Vincent de Paul, hearing of these events, and not choosing by returning just then to furnish the populace with opportunity for fresh violence, which would have made peace still more difficult, decided to go and visit the Missions in the provinces. Three days after his arrival at St Germain, where, to use his own words, he had not succeeded on account of his sins, he departed sadly, and began his visitation at Villepreux, where Père de Gondi had retired. Thence he went to the different houses of the missionaries and of the Daughters of Charity, doing good everywhere, distributing alms, for which he always succeeded in finding the means—in short, giving himself up to the poor in the country just as he did in Paris, with a boundless devotion. But he did not for all that forget his dear poor in the capital, who were suffering from all the miseries of a siege conducted by Condé with the utmost vigour. The queen, when he came to St Germain, had

promised him to temper the rigour of the blockade by letting corn be taken into the town, "like a mother, who is obliged to punish her child, but can never make up her mind to see it die." The orders, ill expressed, were worse carried out, and the soldiers pillaged the convoys of corn, which were trying to make their way within the walls. Vincent was not afraid to write straight to the regent in order to implore her to keep her promise; he ended his protest by these words: "I know that if it pleases his Majesty and you, Madame, to remedy the hindrances which are being put in the way, the people will be convinced that you are better disposed towards them than they think for."

His request was not heard, and hunger soon compelled Paris to open its gates, but the public mind was not pacified. The peace of Ruel, signed on March 11th, 1649, put an end to the first Fronde, and on the 18th of August the queen and her son made their solemn entrance into Paris, between Condé and Mazarin, in the midst of a murmuring populace, subdued indeed, but not submissive, as was demonstrated by subsequent events. Vincent de Paul was then at Richelieu, where the duchesse d'Aiguillon had summoned the Fathers of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity.

He had fallen seriously ill in consequence of the numerous and laborious undertakings with which, despite his age, he had charged himself. The queen, who bore him no ill-will for his frankness, sent for him directly she returned to the Palais-Royal, and M^me^ d'Aiguillon despatched a little two-horse carriage to

fetch him. Vincent consented to use it on account of his illness and returned in it to St Lazare, but when there, he immediately sent away the duchesse d'Aiguillon's conveyance. That was not at all what she wanted; this carriage was only a very modest vehicle, which already, several years before, the *Dames de Charité* had wished to give to Vincent, whose weak and swelled legs now almost refused to bear him, as a substitute for the old and half worn-out horse which served him for long journeys. But Vincent de Paul had absolutely refused to go in the carriage, and had answered all pressing by saying: "When I cannot walk any longer, I shall not leave St Lazare."

This time the duchesse d'Aiguillon insisted; she wrote him an urgent letter, which only met with a categorical refusal; she then betook herself to the queen and the archbishop, who ordered the humble priest, in the name of obedience, to accept M^me^. d'Aiguillon's offer, thanks to which he would be able to continue to serve God and the poor. He was obliged to yield, but it was not without an inward struggle, and for once Vincent found difficulty in resigning himself. He never called the little carriage anything but his "ignominy." "See, my Fathers," said he one day to the Oratorians, whom he had been to visit, and who were accompanying him to the door, "see the son of a poor villager venturing to use a carriage." "M. Vincent's little carriage" was soon as well known in Paris as his old horse had been. He managed moreover to make use of it in the cause of charity, lent it to everyone at St Lazare, and more than once took up a poor person, put him by his side

and brought him to his home. But from the time of his possessing it, he never ventured to preach mortification to his brethren at the Mission, and reproached himself in public with his luxury.

If the queen, in recalling Vincent de Paul to Paris, had intended to get the help of his advice, she had reckoned without Mazarin, who had not forgiven him, and never forgave the speech at St Germain, and who soon succeeded in removing him from the court.

This was likewise the period when the Cardinal, having more ascendency than ever over the mind of the regent, openly crushed the opposition of the party of the Saints, by getting its principal members out of Paris, and by showering benefices on his own creatures. He could not rid himself thus of M. Vincent, but he took from him all real influence, by hindering his having access to the sovereign. Nevertheless the events which occurred before long, and which are known as the second Fronde, or the Fronde of the Princes, speedily compelled Vincent de Paul once more to play a part in public affairs, whatever might be his reluctance to tread on ground, whose pitfalls he well knew, and which alarmed his humility.

We have no intention of relating here, however briefly, this second period of the Fronde, still more complicated than the first. The arrest of the prince de Condé, of the prince de Conti, and of the duke of Longueville, which united all parties in one common fury against "*le Mazarin*"; the intrigues of de Retz in his conflict with the skill and tenacity of the Cardinal, the retreat of Mazarin before the popular fury, which threatened to sack Paris amidst cries of "No

Mazarin," and which was only brought to a standstill before the cradle where the young king was sleeping; the civil war, first in Guienne, then in Picardy and Champagne, the short defection of Turenne, who quickly returned to his duty, and the errors of the great Condé, who, after his restoration to liberty, persisted in revolt; the return of the Cardinal at the head of an army of which Turenne assumed the command, the battle of the faubourg St Antoine, where the conqueror of Rocroy was only saved by the discharge of the cannon of the Bastille at the orders of *la grande Mademoiselle*, and the " day of the hôtel-de-ville," which has left an indelible stain on his glory; — all these movements and counter-movements of events are most difficult to follow, and would require, even if they were merely enumerated, a great deal more space than is at our command.

From the retirement of his house at St Lazare, Vincent de Paul followed with mournful eyes all these successive crises, whose terrible consequences to the people and the poor he clearly realised.

After having made several attempts to induce the queen to yield spontaneously to necessity for a short space of time, and to preserve peace, even at the cost of the most painful sacrifices, in view of the host of misfortunes which war would let loose upon the country, he held his tongue, and waited for the moment when the minds of all parties should have calmed down before trying fresh intervention. But if he could not hinder the scourge of civil war, he could try to diminish its effects.

With the help of the Sisters of Charity, who

suffered more than others from the public misfortunes, seeing that they were deprived of their usual resources, whilst their responsibilities were increased, Vincent de Paul and the Fathers of the Mission performed positive miracles of charity during the troubles of the Fronde. As we have related above, with as much detail and accuracy as befits this sketch, it was then that he furnished Picardy and Champagne, the two provinces which suffered most from the war, and were pillaged in turn by the armies on both sides, with assistance of every kind—money, provisions, clothing, seeds. These relays of supplies, which went on for almost a year, amounted to fifteen thousand pounds a month —an enormous sum for those days. How, we ask ourselves, could he have means sufficient for such copious almsgiving? It would be difficult to understand if we had not already frequently spoken of his marvellous power over hearts; when he was begging for his dear poor, the ardour of his charity was infectious, and scarcely ever met with a refusal.

Vincent de Paul went himself to Noyon and Chauny, in order to make himself acquainted with the devastation, never at any previous period greater, wrought by the soldiery let loose over the country. Thence he despatched his envoys into all the surrounding districts; some of them even went as far as the Flemish frontier, distributing alms everywhere, visiting the battle-fields, in order to bury the dead, gathering together the wounded to nurse, and if possible to cure them.

After Picardy and Champagne it was the turn of Burgundy, Provence, and then Normandy, in which last province the plague broke out. At Rouen such was the state of things that ten sick persons were found in one bed, and seventeen thousand people died. Thence the scourge spread to Paris, and there also made terrible havoc.

When hostilities drew near the capital, and especially when the famous skirmish of the porte St Antoine had been fought, the town experienced all the horrors of war, and Vincent de Paul's charity had a still wider field of action. He himself relates in detail, in a letter dated the 21st of June, 1652, everything which was being done for the poor of the town: "Soup, distributed every day to fifteen or sixteen thousand poor, some of them refugees from the country, some of them ashamed to beg; eight or nine hundred young girls sheltered from poverty and vice; lastly, all the poor rectors, curates, and other country priests, who have left their parishes to flee to this town. We have them coming here every day to be fed and trained in the things which they ought to know and practise. This is how it pleases God that we should participate in so many good undertakings. The poor Daughters of Charity have more share than we in the corporal relief of the poor. They make soup, and distribute it every day in Mlle. Le Gras' house to thirteen hundred poor, who will not beg, and in the faubourg St Denis to eight hundred refugees, and in this parish of St Paul alone four or five of them give it to five hundred poor, not

counting sixty or eighty sick, whom they have on their hands.

"There are others who do the same things elsewhere. I beg you to pray for them and for us."

If to Vincent de Paul's account we add the ravages committed by the bands of soldiers, who were pillaging the suburbs of Paris, just as they had pillaged Champagne and Picardy, it is easy to understand with what ardour peace was desired by all those who worked for the relief of the unfortunate. Vincent de Paul longed for it more than anyone, and in his ardour he went so far as to write a most eloquent letter to the Pope, imploring him to intervene and use his mediation for the hastening of the pacification of the two parties. In this letter, which is too long for quotation, he paints a dark picture of the state of France during the troubles. This step, which shows how bitter was the anguish of Vincent de Paul at the sight of suffering, which he beheld, and was powerless to prevent, was fortunately rendered unnecessary by the astute policy of Mazarin, who skilfully seized the opportunity, and profited by the desire for peace which prevailed everywhere.

On the 26th of August, he published a general amnesty, which inflicted a mortal wound on the Fronde of the Princes. Everyone hastened to profit by it, and the leaders found themselves left in an isolation which compelled them to submission. M. Vincent, always ready, in case of necessity, to expose himself to risk, intervened again, and undertook several journeys to St Denis, where the

court was, in order to have interviews with the Cardinal. These expeditions were not unattended by danger; he received more than one insult and even more than one blow, from both the royal troops and the people in Paris, who accused him of betraying them. When peace was concluded, and the Frondeurs laid down their arms, Vincent again gave a proof of his courage by writing a letter to the Cardinal, who was hesitating as to including Paris in the amnesty and as to letting the young king return thither, unless he himself made a solemn re-entry at his side. This letter, prudently conceived and worded, deserves quotation; it does honour both to the perspicacity and frankness of the author, and shows that, when he chose, he could handle the pen with as much skill as moderation.

"Monseigneur,—I venture to write to your Eminence. I entreat you to receive this favourably, and to allow me to tell you that I now behold the town of Paris returned from its former state, and clamouring for the king and queen with might and main; that I never go to any place, nor see any person without hearing the same talk. Nay, even the *Dames de Charité*, who belong to the first families in Paris tell me that if their Majesties draw near, they will form a regiment of ladies, and give them a triumphal reception.

"Having regard to all this, I think, Monseigneur, that your Eminence will be doing an action worthy of your goodness in advising the king and queen to come back, and take possession of their town and of the hearts of Paris.

"But since there are several things to be urged against it, here are the difficulties which seem to me the most considerable, with the answers which I make to them, and I most humbly beg your Eminence to read and consider them.

"The first is that, although there are several good souls in Paris, and numbers of good *bourgeois*, who harbour the sentiments which I have mentioned, there are nevertheless numbers of others of contrary sentiments, and of others still who halt between the two. To which I answer, Monseigneur, that I do not think there are more than a very few who are of contrary sentiments (at least I do not know a single one), and that the indifferent, if there are any, will be carried away by the number and strength of those who are warm in the matter, who are the greater part of Paris, with the possible exception of those who would fear violence, if they were not reassured by the amnesty.

"Secondly, that there is reason to fear the presence of the heads of the contrary party will bring back the days of 'the Palace' and of 'the Maison de Ville.'

"To which I reply that one of them will be delighted with this opportunity for being thoroughly reconciled with the king, and that the other, seeing Paris restored to the king's obedience, will submit; there need be no doubt on that score, as I know on good authority.

"In the third place, some may perhaps tell your Eminence that Paris must be chastised for her own good; I, for my part, Monseigneur, think it is expedient for your Eminence to remember how the

kings behaved under whom Paris revolted. You will find that they proceeded gently, and that Charles VI., by having chastised a great number of rebels, dismantled the city, and taken away its chains, only flung oil upon the flames, and set fire to what was left, so that for sixteen years they continued the sedition, withstood the king more than before, and to this end leagued with all the enemies of the State; and finally neither Henry III. nor Henry IV. fared well in consequence.

"Further, if it is thought that before the return of their Majesties to this town it is better to treat with Spain and the Princes, allow me, Monseigneur, to tell you that in such case Paris will be comprised in the conditions of peace, she will hold the benefit of her amnesty from Spain and the aforesaid lords, not from the king, and the gratitude she will feel will induce her to declare for them on the first opportunity.

"Some may tell your Eminence your private interests require that the king should not receive this people back into favour, and should not return to Paris without you, but that affairs must be embroiled, and the war kept up, in order to show that it is not your Eminence who raises the tempest, but the malignity of the minds of those who will not submit to their prince. I reply, Monseigneur, that it is not of much importance whether the return of your Eminence takes place before or after that of the king, provided it is brought to pass, and the king, being re-established in Paris, will be able to recall your Eminence when he pleases;

of that I am assured. Besides, if so be that your Eminence, who is principally concerned about the welfare of the king, the queen, and the State, contributes to reunite the royal house and Paris in obedience to the king, certainly, Monseigneur, you will win back the minds of men, and within a short time you will be recalled and in a satisfactory manner, as I have said.

"Such, Monseigneur, is what I am emboldened to write to you, being convinced that you will not take it amiss, especially when you know that I have told no one in the world, except one servant of your Eminence, I am doing myself the honour of writing to you, that I hold no communication with my old friends, who entertain sentiments contrary to the king's will, that I have not communicated the contents of this letter to anyone, and that I shall live and die in the obedience which I owe to your Eminence, to whom our Lord has given me in a special way.

"Wherefore, Monseigneur, I assure you that I am for ever your very humble, very obedient, and very faithful servant."

This time Vincent had aimed truly. Mazarin listened to these firm tones, and yielded to the advice offered him. He started with great parade for the strong town of Bouillon; his retreat there did not last long. The re-entry of Louis XIV. and Anne of Austria into Paris took place on the 21st of October, 1652, amidst the enthusiastic acclamations of the crowd. Less than four months afterwards (February 3rd, 1653), Mazarin had returned to Paris

more powerful than ever, and victorious over all his adversaries.

This they soon discovered to their cost; if he contented himself with removing Vincent from court by ceasing to summon the Council of Conscience, he showed less regard for the de Gondis. Retz, who had thought to brave him by showing himself everywhere in Paris, was arrested as he was leaving the Louvre, and shut up first at Vincennes, and then at Nantes. Père de Gondi, who had for a long time been living in retirement on his property at Villepreux, was exiled to Clermont, which he never left. Vincent, who was very far from having approved the coadjutor's conduct during the Fronde, and had told him so plainly, openly displayed his attachment to the house of Gondi in this period of misfortune. He did not fear to render both to father and son all the services in his power, with tranquil independence and absolute contempt of court favour, to which, be it said, his humility prevented his even laying claim. He went so far as to borrow three hundred pistoles, and to offer them, without making any mystery about it, at the time of his escape, to the Cardinal de Retz, who had the good taste to refuse them. It was with the Fathers of the French Mission of Rome that Retz took refuge. When Mazarin heard of the fact, and of the shelter that the missionaries had, by command of the Pope, given the fugitive, he was so much irritated that he caused an order to be given, through the young king Louis XIV., to Hugh de Lionne, recently appointed ambassador at Rome, bidding him drive

the religious out of the house of the Trinità di Monti, and send them back to France, which was done.

Père Berthe, who was superior of the little house at Rome, returned to France, as well as his three colleagues. Vincent did not complain, did not protest; but, whilst submitting to the king's commands, he manifested no disturbance, no outward regret at the consideration shown to a cardinal, to whom the Mission as well as he himself, Vincent de Paul, owed so much gratitude. Here are his own words on the subject, uttered at a conference a few days after the closing of the house at Rome; it would be difficult to observe greater moderation, and to unite greater dignity to more perfect humility; Mazarin could not complain, but I doubt his having been pleased. "We have cause," said he, before the assembled community (April 5th, 1655), "to give thanks to God for what has been done with regard to Mgr. the Cardinal de Retz, whom the Mission at Rome received into its house; first, because in that we accomplished an act of gratitude, having ordered the superior of the Mission at Rome to receive the aforesaid Monseigneur Cardinal; and lastly, in the second place, because we put in practice another great duty, that of obedience, by complying with the command of the king, who, not being satisfied with the behaviour of the said Mgr. Cardinal, has been displeased at his being received into our house at Rome, which has caused him to order the superior of the aforesaid Roman Mission, and all the French missionary priests who were there, to leave Rome, and come

back to France, and the superior has already arrived here." The good M. Vincent did not trouble himself otherwise about the misfortune to the work of the Missions, which, when all was said and done, was not of long duration; the court perceived its usefulness too clearly to cease to protect it.

If circumstances had forced Vincent de Paul to leave his habitual reserve and to play a part in the political events which had just exposed the destiny of the monarchy and of France to considerable risks, he had only done so with great reluctance, and to as small an extent as possible; he was far from wishing to occupy himself with public affairs, or to become a politician, as is sometimes the case even with sincerely pious natures.

On the contrary, as soon as it was possible, as soon as he saw public peace restored, and the people once more occupied in tranquil work, he retired as speedily as possible to his charitable undertakings. The Sisters of Charity, who were in requisition everywhere, had suffered much from the war; more than one had died of exhaustion and privation. But trial and suffering were powerless to stop them; far from it, the Sisters increased in number daily, and the services which they rendered became also greater each day. It was indeed, in the midst of the turmoil of the Fronde, that the queen of Poland, Maria Gonzaga, summoned the Sisters of Charity to her, in that Northern land which was so very distant in the eyes of French women in the seventeenth century.

In spite of her usual strength of mind it was not

without uneasiness that Mlle. Le Gras deferred to Vincent's opinion, and with great anguish of spirit she watched the departure on the 7th of September, 1652, of a little band of Sisters, who were destined to witness at Warsaw very different calamities from those of the Fronde, and troubles still more fearful, and to begin work in one of the most terrible epidemics of plague which has been recorded in the pages of history.

Some time afterwards, at the opening of 1653, Vincent was led to make another foundation which, like all those in which he had a hand, has survived.

A little while before the end of the troubles, he founded the hospital of the Holy Name of Jesus, which became later on the Incurables' Hospital, and is now moved to Ivry. At the beginning of 1653, a burgess of Paris, who wished to remain anonymous, had offered him a hundred thousand pounds, either to be securely invested, or paid down at once in order to make a pious foundation, leaving him free to make of it what use he thought best. After giving the matter careful consideration in the presence of God, and submitting his scheme to the donor, whose desire has been fulfilled, and whose name remains unknown, Vincent resolved to found a house of refuge for old people of both sexes, where they might find shelter and work proportioned to their condition. "We see every day," said he, in explaining his plan, "a number of poor artisans, who, being unable through infirmity or old age to gain their living, are reduced to beggary. In this state, being entirely occupied with the means of

livelihood, they generally neglect their salvation. By opening for them a place of refuge, it would be possible to care at the same time both for their bodies and their souls, a double charity, which would be extremely pleasing to God."

As soon as the scheme was formed it was put into execution, and a house was bought in the faubourg St Martin. Forty old people of both sexes were installed there, in two separate wings, and entrusted to the care of the Sisters of Charity. Vincent remained the superior of the house, and was to be replaced by a priest of the Mission; the poor who were taken in would be employed in work suitable for them, and the proceeds would be sold; the total amount of the sale would be divided into three parts, two of which would go towards the support of the hospital, and the third would be handed over to the person interested. The court approved the foundation of the hospital of the Name of Jesus, and gave it official recognition; by the end of 1653 it was in full work. It was destined to become the Hospital of Incurables, which, despite all the changes that have taken place in France, remains now, after more than two centuries, on the same lines, broadly speaking, as it was founded by the good M. Vincent.

But this time also, one foundation led to another, and from the hospital for old people sprang the general hospital, one of the greatest works of charity of the seventeenth century, which was in truth an event of public importance, and marks a date in the history of hospitals in modern days.

The sight of the forty old people, ending their

days in peace and contentment in the midst of regular and useful work, inspired the *Dames de Charité*, especially the duchesse d'Aiguillon, their president, with the idea of extending this benefit to the crowds of beggars who then infested the streets of Paris. Why should these troops of poor people who hid themselves by night in the "*cours des miracles*" (as the squalid alleys of Paris were then called) and by day were scattered over every district of the city, where they were an absolute danger to the public safety, not be shut up in a spacious hospital, where they would be employed in useful work, and where efforts would be made for their improvement?

Encouraged by M^lle^. Le Gras, who approved of her project, in spite of its vastness, M^me^. d'Aiguillon and her friend M^lle^. de Lamoignon resolved to submit it to M. Vincent at the next meeting of the *Dames de Charité*. As a beginning one lady offered fifty thousand pounds and another nine thousand pounds' income.

The magnitude of the undertakings (and according to the most moderate calculation, not less than forty thousand vagrant and homeless poor were then to be reckoned in Paris) frightened Vincent at first, and he asked for a week to think about it. During that time he prayed much and considered the scheme in every light before the altar.

Like a true disciple of Francis of Sales, in whom humility and self-distrust in no way impaired confidence in God and generosity, Vincent, after deep reflection, changed his opinion and answered the

entreaties of the *Dames de Charité*, which had become more urgent than ever, by professing himself ready to begin the work. He asked for and obtained from the king, through the mediation of Anne of Austria, a large piece of ground on which saltpetre was manufactured, whence the name Salpêtrière, which has lasted to the present day.

The king gave the land to this new undertaking by letters patent in 1653, and on his side Vincent renounced in the royal favour the château of Bicêtre, whence the Foundlings had just been removed to Paris. No sooner was the work decided upon than gifts flowed in: the king granted fifty thousand pounds and an annuity of three thousand; Cardinal Mazarin sent a hundred thousand crowns as his first donation.

The Parliament, which had likewise hesitated at first, solemnly approved the new project, and the président de Bellièvre bestowed upon the hospital twenty thousand crowns to be raised from the town. M^lle^ de Lamoignon one day obtained, from M^me^ Bullion, sixty thousand pounds in ready money, which she carried off at once, bending under the weight.

After many obstacles, such as might naturally be expected to arise, this wonderful movement of charity resulted in the general hospital, where a great number of the Paris poor were shut up. Vincent de Paul took an active share in this institution, truly original for those days; but once more he signalised himself by the qualities peculiar to him, by that disposition to pause, that moderation

so singularly noteworthy in an eager soul, entirely given up to the practice of the most perfect charity. It is this mixture of characteristics opposed to each other, and at first sight seemingly irreconcileable, which forms his distinguishing feature, that indefinable something which is his inimitable stamp, and has given him in the Church and in the moral history of humanity a truly unique place.

As soon as the buildings of the general hospital began to rise and were able to receive within them a few unfortunates, the *Dames de Charité*, with the duchesse d'Aiguillon at their head, burning with zeal for their undertaking, began to talk of the manner of filling the new hospital, and of effecting the entrance into it of the poor, who, being for the most part vagabonds, accustomed to the free and disorderly life of the streets and highroads, displayed a very moderate desire for being imprisoned within four walls, and occupied in regular work.

In their zeal, the *Dames de Charité* went at one bound to extremities, and unhesitatingly demanded the use of force: what we want, they said, is the good of the poor; force may be legitimately employed to attain so desirable a result. This reasoning, which agreed only too well with the ideas then dominant, and with those which the young king strove to make prevalent everywhere, on all subjects, was not to the taste of old M. Vincent, who strove to combat it with his simple and piquant eloquence, which was perhaps already beginning to get a little old-fashioned in 1634, when, as we shall see, Bossuet was about to make the roof of the chapel of that same hospital

echo with the thunders of the greatest and most brilliant oratorical genius of modern times.

"The works of God," said Vincent de Paul, in a conference that his first biographer, Abelly, has preserved for us, "are done little by little; they have their beginnings and their progress. When God wished to save from the Deluge Noe and his family, He commanded him to make an ark, which might have been finished in a short time; nevertheless He made him begin it a hundred years beforehand, so that it might be done gradually. In the same manner, when it pleased God to lead out the children of Israel, and bring them into the Promised Land, He might have let them accomplish the journey in a few days, and yet more than forty years elapsed before He granted them the favour of entering it.

"In like manner, since God had designed to send into the world His Son, in order to remedy the sin of the first man, which had infected all the race, why did He delay three or four thousand years? Because He does not hasten in His works and does all things at their fitting time.

"And Our Lord, in coming upon earth, might have come of full age to compass our redemption, without spending thirty years of hidden life which might seem superfluous; nevertheless He chose to be born as a little child and grow like other human beings, so as to arrive little by little at the consummation of that incomparable benefit. Did He not also say sometimes, speaking of the things He had to do, that His hour was not yet come; in order to teach us not to press forward too much in matters which

depend more upon God than on ourselves? He might, even in His own day, have established the Church throughout the world, but He contented Himself with laying the foundations, and leaving the remainder to be done by his Apostles and their successors. Following this out, it is not expedient to wish to do everything at once and all on a sudden, nor to think that all is lost if everyone does not promptly co-operate with us with the little good-will that we may have. What must we do then? Pray to God very much, and act in concert with Him.

"In my judgment we ought at first only to make an attempt, and take a hundred or two hundred poor, and then only those who come of their own accord, not constraining anyone. Those, being well-treated and happy, will attract others, and so the numbers can be increased in proportion as Providence gives us funds. By acting in this manner we are certain of spoiling nothing, whereas, on the contrary, the hurry and force which some are disposed to employ, might prove an obstacle to God's designs. If the work is from Him it will succeed and continue, but if it is only from human skill, it will neither get on very well nor go very far."

Therefore it was not without a certain mistrust that when the general hospital, the "*New Town*," as Bossuet calls it, was built and delivered over to the poor, he witnessed the publishing of that famous royal manifesto forbidding beggary in Paris, and distributing the beggars among different asylums. This edict, if it did not produce its full effect, and thus partially justified the Saint's doubts, was never-

theless a useful event, and for a time put, if not a stop, at least a check, to the habits of vagrancy and beggary of a whole section of the Paris population.

The fear of being shut up acted as a sovereign remedy on a multitude of infirm and maimed people who infested the streets.

"On n'a jamais vu dans Paris
Tant de gens si soudain guéris,"

said the journalist Loret *à propos* of this.

The real poor made no difficulties about being helped and lodged, even at the expense of a certain amount of their liberty. It is said that during the first five years of their existence, nearly sixty thousand poor were received at la Salpétrière, at the Grande Pitié or the Grand-Bicêtre. The general hospital produced a great effect on men's minds; all the memoirs of the time speak of it with admiration, and testify gratitude to its founders and organisers. If Vincent de Paul did not approve of everything in the execution of the great design, he worked eagerly for it, and the first religious superior of the new foundation was no other than his dear disciple, Louis Abelly, his future historian, who only accepted the office at his entreaty. The Sisters of Charity were also the first nurses ready, and they were installed at the general hospital, where they remained till the Revolution, keeping the name of their founder in benediction by their inexhaustible virtues.

Thus the general hospital was justly reckoned "as one of the greatest works of the century." It was there, in the chapel of the new hospital, that Bossuet in 1657 pronounced the celebrated panegyric of St

Paul, in which from the very first he rose to the most sublime heights of Christian eloquence, and delighted the heart of Vincent de Paul, who was listening to him, by exhorting the noblest amongst his audience to works of charity. For three years Bossuet had been attending the Tuesday Conferences held at St Lazare, and the impression made by the sight of old M. Vincent, as young in his heart and in his devotedness as if he were just entering the sacred ministry instead of preparing to leave it, was never effaced from his mind.

What grieved Vincent de Paul's charitable ardour in the regulations concerning the distribution of alms, was, on the one hand, the forcible shutting up of the beggars, and the design that was at first entertained of only receiving the poor of Paris and sending the others back to their native provinces; on the other hand, the prohibition to distribute food at the door of St Lazare. The edict of 1637, in fact, forbade all public distribution of food.

"What will become of these poor people?" said M. Vincent, speaking of those who were to be driven out of Paris. "To make a general hospital, to put in it only the poor of Paris, and to leave those from the country, is a thing to which I cannot reconcile myself.

"Paris is the sponge of all France, that which attracts the greater part of the gold and silver. And if these poor people have no entrance to it, once more, what is to become of them, more especially those from Champagne and Picardy and other provinces ruined by the war?" As for the

cessation of distribution of soup to the beggars, he submitted to it ruefully for the sake of obeying the laws, but resumed it as soon as the severity of the winter afforded him a pretext, and, wherever he could, he established what he called the work of the "*Bouillons*," which were simply the soup-kitchens that modern beneficence perhaps regards as its own discovery, but which the charity of the monks and the inventive charity of Vincent de Paul had discovered long before the philanthropy of the nineteenth century.

If Vincent de Paul did not approve of everything in the organisation of the "*great marvel of charity*" during the first years of Louis XIV., if above all he always adhered with unshaken fidelity to the Christian idea of liberty in alms-giving, liberty on the part of the donor and of the poor who were relieved, he nevertheless continued to the end one of the strongest supports of the new work. It was also he, who, in spite of his great age, directed from afar off the foundation of another hospital, this time in the provinces, at Sainte Reine, the ancient Alesia, in Burgundy, where every year the pilgrims flocked to the mineral waters which surround the miraculous tomb of the virgin martyr. Thanks to the help and to the powerful support of Vincent de Paul, a hospital was built in 1659, which is still in existence, where the sick were received and the passers-by found food. It was a work after his own heart, and nothing could detach him from it.

The years which passed in no way impaired his ardour or the vigour of his intelligence. He was

always the same M. Vincent, the first to get up, and the last to go to bed at St Lazare; as amiable, as accessible to all, always as "gracious," as people sometimes said then, with that touch of gentle irony which gave so much charm and piquancy to his conversation, spending himself ungrudgingly, as unostentatiously active and mortified at past eighty as he could ever have been at fifty. But if he had not changed outwardly, the weakness of age, which had long been visible to those who were about him, steadily increased, and he was more clearly aware of it than anyone.

Accordingly he began to put everything in order for his "departure," as he said, and watched with anxious care to see that nothing should be neglected nor require arranging after he was gone. He began by giving constitutions to the Mission priests and to the Sisters of Charity. These two great works in fact only received definite rules in the last five years of Vincent de Paul's life.

During the thirty years and more that it had existed, the congregation of the priests of the Mission had developed in the most surprising manner. After having spread all over France, preaching everywhere, occupying themselves with the seminaries, the hospitals, the visiting of the sick, M. Vincent's priests had crossed the frontier, bearing afar good words and good example.

In a few years the Mission had houses at Rome, Genoa, and Naples, in Corsica, in Piedmont, and in England, where two missionaries were imprisoned for teaching the "Roman" religion, in Ireland, Scot-

land, and even in the Hebrides. The missionaries also went to Austria, Prussia, and Portugal. In the French Colonies, in the islands of Bourbon and of the Mauritius, the missionaries followed the colonists, many of them dying in Madagascar, where France was then beginning to extend her protectorate.

It was when sending them into these distant countries that Vincent wrote to one of them, by name Pierre Nacquart, who had eagerly desired this Mission, where he was destined to fall a victim to his labours and to the climate, an admirable letter on the duties of the true missionary of Jesus Christ among savages, which would deserve to be quoted *in extenso*, did space permit. Vincent de Paul, habitually so modest in his desires, became ambitious for his missionaries, that is, for the Missions they served; he would have liked to see them all through the East, and even in the furthermost parts of China; he cherished dreams of foundations for them in Persia and India, and was never afraid of being importunate when his dear Missions were concerned. The king, having made the Lazarists at Tunis consular agents, bearing the title and prerogatives of the consul, Vincent de Paul defended the attempt, which was both bold and novel, against the Roman Propaganda, by whom it was, perhaps not unreasonably, regarded with alarm, and he secured its continuance.

A few words will suffice to depict the good effected by the priests of the Mission in Africa; in the lifetime of Vincent de Paul they ransomed more than twelve hundred captives in the convict prisons of Tunis and Algiers, and even in the East. The

development of his Missions, and the work which they would be able to do amid the heathen and the many captive Christians, kept in the hardest of slavery in barbarous countries, constantly filled his thoughts and, as he owned, his dreams by night. In this old man, at the gates of the grave, might be seen all the burning ardour of the young slave who, more than sixty years before, had seen for himself what was the real state of those sunny southern countries, which, from a distance, wore a poetical appearance, and what horrors were concealed there. M. Vincent's visions of holy ambition have been accomplished, and continue to be accomplished; there is no distant shore in Africa or Asia where the Lazarists have not carried, together with the Gospel of Christ, the light of Christian civilisation, even at the price of the most fearful martyrdoms; and the sons still show themselves worthy of their father's name.

Nevertheless, although the congregation of the Mission priests had been acknowledged and authorised by the Archbishop of Paris, and then by the king, Louis XIII., and officially approved by a bull of Urban VIII., it was not yet provided with a definite Rule recognised by Rome. Vincent de Paul had made a point of allowing time to set its imprint and consecration upon it before having it formally acknowledged. But seeing his end approaching he would not leave the work unfinished, and drew up with the greatest care a copy of the constitutions, which he sent to Rome, so that the work of approbation and recognition might be pursued. Once, perhaps through malevolence, the copy was lost; and a

second had to be made. The holy founder's intention, expressly and plainly stated, of preserving for his *Little Company* the character of a congregation, and of not making it a regular community, which was then very unusual, gave rise to fresh delays.

It is even possible that the business would have fallen through if the Cardinal de Retz, who certainly did not come to Rome for that purpose, had not arrived in the nick of time to take it up.

In 1655, after more than three years "postulation," Alexander VII., by a brief dated the 22nd of September, approved the fundamental principle of the statutes drawn up by Vincent de Paul, namely, that the priests of the Mission should pronounce simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but with this express condition, that these vows should not make the Mission into a religious Order. Vincent's joy was deep, and he did not try to conceal the expression of it; the brief was solemnly received by the whole assembled community, and, in spite of his age and increasing infirmities, Vincent spent three years more in drawing up the constitutions, welcoming all opinions, and obtaining light and inspiration from everyone, even the humblest, without, nevertheless, losing sight of his scheme and his firm intention of putting it into execution.

In 1658 he had finished his work; he then had the rules printed, and on Friday evening, the 17th of May, having called together his community, he spoke long and unreservedly, explaining why he had delayed so long to give Rules. "If we had given Rules," said he, "at the very beginning, before the Company had

acquired any experience, it would have been regarded as a design formed and concerted in a human manner, and not as a work of Divine Providence.

"But Messieurs and my Brothers, all these Rules and everything else which you see in the congregation has been done, I do not know how, for I had never thought of it, it has all been introduced little by little, without anyone being able to say who is the cause of it. No, it has not come from man, but from God. Oh! Messieurs and Brothers," he went on, "I am so amazed to think that it is I who give rules that I cannot conceive how I managed to get to the point, and the more I think of it, the more it appears to me that it is God alone Who has inspired the Company with these rules; that if I contributed any small share, I fear it will be just that little which will perhaps hinder their being so well observed in the future, and prevent their producing all the fruit and all the good which they ought."

He continued for some time to speak about the object of the Rules and their observance, and then ended by himself distributing a copy of the constitutions to each of the members present:

"I should much like," he said, "to spare you trouble by carrying it to each in his place, but I cannot; pardon me my afflictions. Come, Monsieur Portail (he was his oldest disciple), come, come if you please, you have always borne my infirmities. May God bless you." Then when each member present had received the Rules, he, at their own request, blessed the whole assembly in a few words full of humility and emotion, pronounced, according

to Abelly, "in a moderately loud tone of voice, humble, gentle, and devout, in such a manner that he made all his listeners feel in their hearts the peculiar affection of his own."

The establishment of the Rules for the Sisters of Charity was not less characteristic. For a long time, in spite of the daily increasing development of the new institution, Vincent de Paul had refused to give it written constitutions, preferring to let it grow spontaneously, according to its own interior principle. Mlle. Le Gras, who was of a more ardent nature and was always afraid of seeing him depart this life before the work was definitely constituted, could not resign herself to these delays, and was constantly urging him to draw up rules and get them approved: "Oh! woman of little faith," he answered smiling, "why have you not more trust in and more compliance with the conduct and example of Jesus Christ? The Saviour of the world committed Himself to God His Father as to the state of the whole Church, and do you think that He will fail you with regard to a handful of daughters, whom He most evidently raised up to you? Go, Mademoiselle, and humble yourself before God."

Finally, seeing the Sisters of Charity becoming each day more numerous, beholding them in request all over France, leaving the kingdom and spreading throughout Europe, and foreseeing the time when God should send them to Africa and India, M. Vincent, who was not less wise than he was good, thought the time had come to give them rules, and set to work.

More than a year previously, Mlle. Le Gras had written to her spiritual father on the subject a long letter, the original of which is still in existence. It is supposed to have been penned in 1646. She asked him, in terms which excite our admiration by their humility and simplicity, to establish the new association definitely by giving it constitutions. "It seems reasonable to believe," she said, in conclusion, "that the weakness and lightmindedness of young women require to be helped by the sight of something in the way of an institute, so as to overcome temptations which they would otherwise have against their vocation. And the foundation of this institute without which it is impossible for it to subsist, or for God to obtain from it the glory which He plainly manifests to be His desire, is the necessity under which the aforesaid company is, of being set up either under the title of a company or of a confraternity, entirely under subjection to and in dependence on the revered government of the honoured general of the priests of the Mission. . . . That, my most honoured father, is what I had thought of proposing to our Sisters before speaking to you, but I can assure you that it would be a most humble request made by the most unworthy of all the Sisters of Charity."

On reading these urgent entreaties, the justice of which he could not fail to perceive, M. Vincent himself drew up a memorandum addressed to the Archbishop of Paris, Jean François de Gondi, the uncle of the famous co-adjutor, in order to solicit approbation of the work of the Daughters of Charity

and to get them raised to the dignity of an officially acknowledged confraternity.

He thus concludes the letter in which he sends his work to M^lle^ Le Gras, that she may make herself acquainted with it: "I suppress a quantity of things that I might have said about you. Let us leave them for Our Lord to say to everyone, and let us keep ourselves hidden."

The documents, duly approved by the Archbishop, had been sent to the Parliament and furnished with the signature of M. Méliand, the Parliamentary solicitor. They were about to be registered in proper form, when, by a singular chance, which the Sisters of Charity have always regarded as providential, they were lost, and lost so effectually that no trace of them was ever found. All the work had to be begun again. But meantime the Fronde and its troubles intervened, and hindered the new compilation, which was not completed till eight years later, in 1655.

This delay had permitted the working of a radical change in the very essence of the constitution of the Order, to which it doubtless owes in great measure its wide-spread extension. In the original Rule, which so curiously went astray, the Archbishop of Paris expressly mentioned as Superior of the Daughters of Charity a priest whom he might choose at his own pleasure outside the Lazarists, or from among them, it mattered not. Neither was anything decided about the Superioress, who might be a "*Dame de Charité*," merely a married woman leading an ordinary life in the world; the first object of the

Sisters of Charity having been, as we must remember, simply to afford help to the ladies who formed first the confraternities, then the Assembly of Charity. During the nine years which intervened between the first and second organisation of the rules, Mlle. Le Gras on several occasions drew the attention of M. Vincent to the disadvantages which would result from removing the direction of the Daughters of Charity from the Lazarists, thus separating the two congregations, which had till then been united, and had been born of the same impulse. She often returned to the charge with a persistency rare in her, and even compiled a detailed memorandum, which has come down to us; in short, she spared no pains, and finally brought Vincent over to her opinion. In his new petition, he expressly requests that the Superior of the Daughters of Charity should always be the Superior-General of the priests of the Mission, which the Cardinal de Retz, this time Vincent de Paul's old pupil, graciously granted from Rome, on the 18th of January, 1655. It was also decided that the Superioress-General should be chosen from amongst the Daughters of Charity, which single fact separated them at once from the *Dames de Charité* and made them a separate Order, though it remained specified, as at the beginning of their foundation, that the Daughters of Charity should not be religious in the strict sense of the term, that they should not be enclosed, should take only yearly vows, not perpetual, whether solemn or simple, that they should not wear a religious

dress, in short, that they should be everything which in our own day constitutes the Sister of Charity whom we see pass along the street.

All these ideas were very new at that period. Vincent is so well aware of it that he lays down at the head of the Rules, with absolute clearness, the principle that "his daughters" are not religious in the sense that was then given to that word, for, as he said, "when one speaks of nuns one implies a cloister, and the Daughters of Charity are to go everywhere." Therefore he opened his list of rules by this famous exhortation, which is, as it were, the living manifestation of the ideal type of the uncloistered religious, with whom he had just enriched the world.

The Daughters of Charity are to have "for their only convent the houses of the sick, for their cell a hired room, for their chapel the parish church, for their cloister the streets of the town, or the wards of the hospitals, for their enclosure obedience, for grill the fear of God, and for a veil holy modesty."

It was likewise enacted that they should retain the dress which they wore in their beginning, the secular dress, as M. Vincent constantly repeated, that is to say, the costume of the women of the lower class at that date, together with the white *cornette* worn by the peasants of the Ile-de-France. Thus it was that Vincent de Paul succeeded in carrying through the most original and at the same time the most useful and fruitful of all his creations; and that he endowed the Church with one of her

most serviceable means of action, and, we may say without exaggeration, bestowed upon the whole world an army of indefatigable Christian women, irrevocably devoted to the relieving of every kind of misery.

St Francis of Sales, when he founded the Sisters of the Visitation, had also designed making them leave the walls of their convent at least occasionally and each in her turn, but without ever assigning to them as their chief object the care of the sick and the visiting of the poor. He had failed, in consequence of the ideas with regard to religious life which were then prevalent, and universally accepted

The Bishop of Geneva had wished to begin by making nuns, and then drawing them forth from the cloister; St Vincent de Paul set to work by the contrary method. He trained secular women, living in the world, in every religious virtue and only brought them into the sanctuary afterwards. Whether he was wise in making the attempt, and whether he succeeded in it, facts have proved. In 1633, M^lle^ Le Gras, with five companions, entered the little house in the rue des Fossés St Victor; in our day, despite the countless vicissitudes, and the many revolutions of France, the Daughters of Charity number more than twenty thousand, and there is no distant shore where they have not borne the white *cornette* of the Sister of St Vincent de Paul, and where it has not won love, respect and admiration.

Approved by the king in 1657 and registered by the Parliament, the Rules of the Sisters of Charity

did not receive Rome's final approbation till 1668, but they had been in force in the community since 1655, and it was Vincent de Paul himself who had the joy of transmitting them to his "good daughters," at a meeting which has remained famous in the annals of the Order.

The account of it is too long for insertion here; it is impregnated with that deep humility and that ardent, though restrained, piety, which, in all the discourses of Vincent de Paul, are hidden under a smiling simplicity. We shall only quote one passage, in which he explains why he had so long delayed to give Rules to the new institute.

"Your confraternity," he said, after having read the Rules, "bears the name of Sisters of Charity, servants of the sick poor. Oh! what a glorious title! What a high character! It is the same thing as saying servant of Jesus Christ, since He regards everything done for His members as done for Himself. Besides, He never did anything but serve the poor. We have desired, my daughters, that what was said of Our Lord, that He began to do and then to teach, should be said of you also. Is not what you have just heard exactly what you have been doing for twenty-five years? Is there anything in it that you have not done? No, by the mercy of God, and you have done it before you were commanded to do so, at least in an explicit manner."

When the Sisters, after having each in turn received and accepted the Rule, asked him for his blessing, Vincent refused, "because the faults that

I have committed with regard to you prevent me," he said, prostrating himself and kissing the ground. As they persisted with tears, he at last said: "You will have it so, my daughters. Pray then to God that He may not regard my unworthiness, nor the sins of which I am guilty, but that, showing mercy to me, He may vouchsafe to pour down His holy blessing upon you when I pronounce the words."

It is thus that, having reached the age of eighty, the good M. Vincent, after having "done" all his life, made up his mind to "teach" the two new religious families, which, with the help of God, he had founded, and to give them Rules which have already resisted two centuries of existence, and still remain just as he established them. Therefore he might die in peace, his work was based on a solid foundation, and would continue to bear fruit; but he did not for that reason consider himself relieved from the care of watching over his "dear children." Quite the contrary; after having given them Rules, it was necessary to make them understand the spirit of them, to teach them to love and apply them. In this task he spent his last years, with zeal that was absolutely youthful, and with inexhaustible ardour; every week he gave two conferences, on Wednesdays to the Sisters of Charity, on Fridays to the priests of the Mission, in order to explain their rule to them. Nothing, neither the multifarious business which might have absorbed him, nor his enormous correspondence, the extent of which is proved by the thousands of letters which

escaped his frequent works of destruction, caused him to omit what he regarded as a stringent duty. In spite of his daily increasing infirmities, he never missed the conference, even when his swollen legs, often covered with open sores, refused to carry him, and he was compelled to be supported in order to reach his arm-chair. Then, in the unreserve of a familiar address, he poured forth his whole soul, with that fulness, that delicacy, that persuasive art, that winning way of gaining hearts by *bonhomie*, and absolute lack of affectation, to which the numerous extracts, preserved by the piety of his audience, bear witness.

They allow us to picture to the life, so to say, that familiar, even impulsive eloquence, which uses every means in order to make his hearers understand the thought expressed, to captivate their attention, to move and convince them, which goes and comes, interrupts itself at intervals, and sometimes rises into a burst of wonderful power, due entirely to the perfect truth and to the depth of the sentiments. One might almost say that it is Montaigne Christianised—passionately Christianised, for the supple flexible language bears a certain impress of irregularity and simplicity, which might easily delude us as to the period in which we are, and which in no way recalls the style of the great classical writers.

We will only quote, in order to give an idea of the heights to which the holy conference-giver rose (I use the word designedly, for he always vehemently repudiated the idea that he preached

sermons, and this kind of discourse, which enjoys so high a reputation now-a-days, may almost claim him as its creator, so great a point did he make of not overstepping the modest limits of a conference), we will only quote the peroration of the address on the object of the congregation of the Mission, an address which has remained celebrated among the Lazarists, and which was given quite in the last days of the life of St Vincent de Paul, in 1659, a short time before his death. "I shall go soon," he said at its close; "my age, my infirmities and the abominations of my life do not admit of God's enduring me on the earth any longer. It is possible that after my death, a spirit of contradiction will arise, and that lax people will say: 'What is the good of troubling ourselves with the care of hospitals? How is it possible to help such a number of people, who have been ruined by the war, and how are we to go and seek them out in their homes? Why should we direct Daughters of Charity who serve the sick, and why lose our time looking after lunatics?' And others will say that sending missionaries to distant countries, to India, Barbary, and such like places, is far too great an undertaking.

"Messieurs and brethren mine, before I leave you I warn you of this in the spirit in which Moses warned the children of Israel: 'I go away and you shall see me no more; I know that some among you will rise up and lead the others astray; they will do what I forbid you, and will not do what I command you in the name of God.'

"'After my departure,' said St Paul in like manner, 'there shall come ravening wolves. If that were to happen, say, "Leave us under the law of our fathers, leave us in the state in which we are. God placed us there, and desires that there we should remain."'

"Stand firm.—'But the Company is weighed down by such and such a charge.'—Alas! if in her childhood she endured that and bore other burdens, why should she not manage to do so, now that she is stronger?

"Leave us in the state in which Our Lord was upon earth. We are doing what He did; surely no one will hinder us from imitating Him."

We must also mention a passage on religious poverty; it is remarkable, not only for the sublimity of thought, which imparts a touch of real oratory to the words, but for one of these personal allusions which are so common in Vincent de Paul's discourses, and which distinguish them so clearly as to be sufficient of themselves to serve as a hallmark. In this respect they indeed belonged to another period, for the taste of the seventeenth century strictly forbade any personal reference, and Bossuet's celebrated peroration, about the echoes of a failing voice, was regarded as very bold. "Yes, Messieurs," said old M. Vincent in one of his most eloquent conferences, "this virtue of poverty is the foundation of the congregation of the Mission. This tongue now speaking to you, has, by the grace of God, never asked for any one of those things which the Company now possesses.

And if it were only necessary to take one step, or to pronounce one word, in order to bring about the establishment of the Company in the provinces or the large towns, and its increase in numbers and in important offices, I would not pronounce it, and I trust that Our Lord will give me the grace not to utter it. Woe! woe, Messieurs and brethren, yes, woe to the missionary who becomes attached to the perishable goods of this life. For he will be caught by them, he will remain exposed to the pricks of those thorns, and held fast in the midst of those possessions. . . . O my Saviour, how can I speak of that, I who am such a wretched creature, I who had formerly a horse and carriage, and who even now have a room with a fire in it and a well-curtained bed! . . . I, I say, who am taken so much care of that I want for nothing. Oh! what scandal do I give to the Company, by the abuse which I make of the vow of poverty in all these things and others like to them. I ask pardon of God and the Company, and beg my brethren to have patience with me in my old age. I have great difficulty in bearing with myself, and it seems to me that I deserve to be hung at Montfaucon! May God give me the grace to mend my life, even now that I have come to my present age."

We may imagine the effect of such words pronounced by this old man, who for more than sixty years had only lived for God and the poor. The circle of his listeners drew closer round him in deep silence, and, when he had finished speaking,

their tears were their only answer. These last conferences were in truth, as it were, the spiritual will and testament of Vincent de Paul, in which he summed up his teaching and his instructions in order to transmit them to his disciples before leaving them.

It was a glorious coronation to the long career which was closing in. For this wonderful life was drawing to an end; everyone perceived it, and no one knew it better than Vincent de Paul himself. Every day his infirmities, which had long been heavy to endure, increased in number and intensity. An intermittent fever, to which he had for years been subject, and which he called his "*fièvrotte*," hardly left him any respite, and exhausted him; his legs, which, as was constantly said by those about him without his ever contradicting them, always kept the mark of the irons which they had worn, were now not merely heavy and swollen, but full of open wounds, and were absolutely useless to him. He had to be carried to chapel and to refectory, and back again to his room. Finally, irresistible attacks of sleep fell upon him all at once, whilst his nights sometimes remained wakeful: "It is the brother," he said laughing, "coming before the sister."

Always calm and smiling, retaining to the end the full clearness of his mind, he led up to the last the ordinary life of a Lazarist, without any indulgence or mitigation. Sitting in his arm-chair, with his little table in front of him, he kept up his correspondence, dictating letters to all Europe,

where the missionaries and the Sisters of Charity had houses everywhere, and we find in the last pages, dictated by this old man almost in his agony, the same good sense, the same steadiness of judgment, the same unimpaired clearness of conception, as in the letters written forty years sooner, when he was still in the prime of life.

At the beginning of 1660, he became so very weak that there could be no doubt as to the end not being far off. Nevertheless God had still in store for him two great sorrows, which were to be the final test of his submission to the Divine Will, and which compelled him to provide for the government of his foundations; M^lle^ Le Gras and M. Portail, one the first Sister of Charity, the other the first priest of the Mission, and Vincent's most faithful friend, fell ill at the same time, in the beginning of 1660, and received the Last Sacraments on the same day, the 14th of February of that year. M. Portail died first, on the 15th of February; and, by dint of a supreme effort, Vincent de Paul had himself carried to his bedside, in order to help him at his last hour. M^lle^ Le Gras died a month afterwards, and her death was the death of a saint. Vincent, who was too weak to go and see her, sent her the following message: "You are going first, Mademoiselle; I hope that in a short time I shall see you again in Heaven."

Far from being in a hurry to replace M. Portail and M^lle^ Le Gras, Vincent, true to his usual method of action, waited and took a long time for reflection.

Although his state got worse each day, and violent pain was added to his other complaints, he allowed more than three months to pass without deciding on anything. On the 24th of July, he assembled all the Sisters of Charity then in Paris for the last time in the parlour at St Lazare, and there, according to the custom of the community, he gave, in the midst of universal emotion, a conference on the virtues of Mlle. Le Gras. It was the last time of his speaking to his "dear daughters"; although he abstained from referring to his approaching end, not one of them had any illusions on the subject, and the parting was stamped with peculiar solemnity and gravity. But Vincent did not yet indicate who was to succeed Mlle. Le Gras; he paused, and his delay was voluntary and made of set purpose. He was so fully convinced that very few days of life remained to him, that he wrote at this time two farewell letters, one to Père de Gondi, who was still in exile at Clermont, and the other to Rome to the Cardinal de Retz, who, having become Archbishop of Paris, was his ecclesiastical Superior.

He asked their pardon, in terms of touching humility, for all the faults that he might have committed against them, for any annoyance that his "rusticity" might have caused them, and thanked them for their constant protection.

This fidelity to his two first and most illustrious protectors, both of whom had fallen into misfortune, and one of whom had by his misdemeanours caused him some of the greatest sorrows of his life, depicts

the man, and requires no commentary; it assigns to him a rank apart amongst those whose names live in history.

The days went by, and Vincent felt that his end was near; his sufferings steadily increased, and his weakness grew worse. He never sought for any relief, and all he would consent to have was a cord fastened to a beam in the ceiling, which was passed round his body, so that he might be able to turn himself in bed.

On the 27th of August he gathered his "Daughters" round his arm-chair for the last time, and named as their Superioress one of the first Sisters of Charity, Marguerite Chétif, who had, he told them, been pointed out to him by M^lle^ Le Gras on his enquiring of her, shortly before her death, who was the member of the community most fitted to stand in her place. Then, in a letter which was not to be read till after his death, he appointed M. Alméras his successor in the government of the priests of the Mission. Without informing him of the choice, he was constantly, in his correspondence with him, urging the future Superior, then ill at Tours, to come back to St Lazare; for the first time in his life he was almost impatient, feeling as strongly convinced as he did that his hours were numbered. On the 24th of September M. Alméras returned to Paris, still very ill and borne in a litter. Vincent de Paul was so anxious to see him that next day he caused himself to be carried to the infirmary to the side of the sick man, with whom he had a last conversation, of which unfortunately nothing is known.

On the 27th of September 1660, at four o'clock in the morning, the great servant of God and the poor breathed his last, gently, without effort, almost without any agony, surrounded by his spiritual sons, and repeating up to the end words of humility and trust. His last utterance was "*Confido*,"—"I have confidence," which he repeated with joy, pressing his lips to the crucifix the while.

We shall make no attempt here to describe the deep emotion caused through all classes of society by the death of Vincent de Paul, nor his funeral, nor the grief of his two spiritual families. "All France has lost by the death of M. Vincent," wrote the Président de Lamoignon a few days afterwards. Not a single voice was raised to gainsay the universal praise, and the Jansenists themselves were compelled to hide their ill-will. Everyone felt that one of the greatest souls whom God had ever lent to the earth had just returned to his eternal country. The poor throughout the whole of France shed tears of sincere grief on learning that they had lost their best friend, and preserved his memory so faithfully that immediately after his funeral, in fact the very next day, they made his grave a place of pilgrimage.

The memory of Vincent de Paul was indeed one of those whose lustre cannot be dimmed by time, and long before the Church had solemnly consecrated it, it became more and more widely spread. The crowd of pious pilgrims, of every rank and class, who soon besieged his tomb, the daily favours, proved by incontestable evidence, obtained through devout confidence in his intercession, his virtues, which be-

came better known as time went on, and were revealed by witnesses of unimpeachable veracity, soon verified the prediction made the day after his death by the journalist Loret, who concluded the portrait drawn in his riming history of the man who had done so much good, with these lines:

> "Qu'en vérité si c'était moi
> Qui fût le pontife de Rome.
> Je canoniserais cet homme."

But faithful to the example which he had given them of not acting in a hurry, and obedient in this matter to the rules wisely laid down by the Church, the Lazarists were in no haste to introduce at Rome the cause of their founder's canonisation. It was not till 1705, forty-five years after his death, that in deference to the countless entreaties of all those who had preserved Vincent's memory and paid him the secret homage of the heart, the superiors of the Mission asked for and obtained the drawing-up of the process of canonisation. They were supported by a great number of bishops in France; Bossuet, Fénelon, and Fléchier, as well as the Cardinal de Noailles, wrote to the Pope Latin letters, which are absolute panegyrics. The general assembly of the clergy, which was assembled at this same date, composed, by the unanimous consent of all the members present, a petition to the Pope for obtaining the introduction of the cause; and all the religious Superiors in the Kingdom also gave in their adhesion. Finally Louis XIV. wrote direct to the Pope with the same object, and a number of princes and great personages followed his example.

The cause was therefore introduced without further delay, and carried on through all the customary forms with the deliberation and precision usual in such a business. The process lasted no less than twenty-two years, and the collection of justificative documents, of "informations," as they are called in theological language, depositions, and statements forms nearly fifty folio volumes, of which an authentic copy (the original having been inexplicably lost) is preserved now-a-days in Paris at the National Library.

The process has remained famous in religious history on account of the urgent and incisive manner in which the advocate of the opposite party, who was no less a person than Prosper Lambertini, later Benedict XIV., led the attack against the defenders of the future Saint. The vigour and animation of the "*promotor fidei*" imparted a peculiar brilliancy to this process, and Vincent's memory stood out more pure and more worthy of admiration than ever, after being subjected to the inflexible severity of his scrutiny.

Such indeed was the object of the spiritual adversary, who was so keen a partisan of the Saint whom he was attacking, that he wished to show of what pure ore was his virtue by passing it repeatedly through a sieve. At last, on the 22nd of September, 1727, Pope Clement XI. published the decree which declared Vincent de Paul venerable; the congregation charged with the process having by the mouths of its members unanimously answered "yes" on all points, an occurrence absolutely without parallel.

Two years later, on the 14th of July, 1729, after a fresh and searching examination, when Lambertini again pleaded the opposing cause with eagerness and vigour, the Pope solemnly placed Vincent de Paul in the ranks of the "blessed."

Finally, eight years later, after a new and minute enquiry had been set on foot, the solemn canonisation of the blessed Vincent de Paul took place, and he was formally classed among the Saints by a bull of Clement XII., dated the 16th of June, 1737, which is as remarkable for the beauty of its form as for the precision and clearness of its matter, containing, as it does, the most complete résumé of the wonderful life, whose principal features we have here endeavoured to sketch.

Since then the Saint's fame and the devotion to his memory, shown in many different ways, have steadily increased, and when in 1885 a decree of Leo XIII. made him the patron of all the charitable works and associations throughout the world, not a voice was raised in contravention of a decision which was simply the statement of a fact recognised by everyone.

Vincent de Paul's name stands in truth amongst those of the great and holy men whom Christianity has given to the world; one of the best known and the most universally venerated, we must also say the most loved, and in the best sense of the word the most popular, that has ever been or ever will be.

Possibly this is because, with all the admirable qualities which constitute sanctity, Vincent de Paul remains *par excellence* the French Saint, who has

made the name of France known, loved, and blessed everywhere. For, whatever may be said to the contrary, sanctity takes nothing, from those who attain it, of the distinctive characteristics of their original physiognomy. In the long gallery containing the portraits of those whom the Church exhibits for our public homage and pious veneration, there are no two which, closely looked at, are alike. Grace raises and transforms, but does not destroy what it has created.

Amongst all these ideal types of human nature, so different, sometimes so unlike in the unity of one common faith and love, St Vincent de Paul will always remain one of those most in harmony with the French character, and also one of those who will be best understood, most loved and imitated by his compatriots. With his gaiety, his smiling *bonhomie*, which concealed a subtle intellect and a marvellous perspicacity and steadiness of view, with a comprehension of the new requirements brought about by the changes of time, with that passionate ardour and holy violence concealed under a moderation and gentleness, which in a certain sense only rendered them more salient, that perfect simplicity which nothing could disconcert, that goodness and warmth of heart which were moved by every kind of suffering and longed to alleviate it; finally, that unquenchable enthusiasm in well-doing which remained with him to the end, and under which he strove, not very successfully, to keep out of sight his heroic virtues, his severe austerities and the observance of humility, so deep as to alarm our weakness, Vincent de Paul