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LIFE OF THE VENERABLE LOUISE DE MARILLAC

(MADEMOISELLE LE GRAS)

FOUNDRRESS OF THE COMPANY OF SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

BY

ALICE LADY LOVAT

†

PREFACE BY

FATHER BERNARD VAUGHAN, S.J.

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TO

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING MEMBERS OF THE
COMPANY OF SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

THIS LIFE OF THEIR FOUNDRESS AND FIRST SUPERIOR

IS DEDICATED

BY

THE MOTHER OF ONE OF THEM

PREFACE

BY

FATHER BERNARD VAUGHAN, S.J.

My appreciation and love of the Sisters of Charity began before I made my first confession. We were then "somewhere in France," and I was allowed to accompany my bigger brothers and sisters, whose privilege it was to help *Ma Sœur* in serving out soup twice a week to the poor of the town. For the most part the fishermen sat at tables, and bowls of soup with hunks of bread were provided for them. The women and children usually carried off their supplies in cans and baskets. Later on one of my sisters joined the Company, and, naturally enough, that fact brought me into closer touch with Louise de Marillac's religious daughters.

I have known the Sisters now for over sixty years, and I have found them always and everywhere living on the same high plane of spiritual life. One could not discover anything more highly expressive of the word "Catholic" than the everyday life of the typical Sister of Charity. No work, relieving the poor, the sick, and the sad, is alien to them. When asked to minister in any form to the suffering members of Christ's Mystical Body, I have never heard them plead, "It is against our holy rule."

Some few years ago I was appealing in Dublin for an

orphanage under the care of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul. His Grace the present Archbishop was in the chair. Turning to him during the course of my address, I said, "My Lord Archbishop, the outstanding characteristic of these Sisters is that you can switch them on to almost any good work in God's Church, and they always get there." At the close of my speech the Archbishop, who had put his name down for a donation worthy of his generous heart, turning to me, said, "Father Bernard, switch my name on for double the sum I promised; these are the Sisters for me."

If before becoming a Jesuit I thought highly of the Sisters of Charity, since then I have thought ever so much more of them. I now know something more of their interior as well as exterior life. Their whole-hearted devotion to their "Masters," the poor, positively lashes you into a fever heat of ambition to emulate their lovely example. Even in self-interest it is well to be the friends of the poor, for "Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." The Sisters are to the poor as an eye, a foot, a hand, and a heart—everything.

There is another cord which has drawn me to these Sisters who look up to St. Vincent as their Co-Founder, and it is this, that between him and my own Sainted Father Ignatius there are many points in common. Both were exceptionally magnanimous Souls with an almost instinctive dread of tethering rules. Each felt that the interior law of Charity ought to be rule and law enough; both alike would have no public recital of the Divine Office, nor would they sanction any distinctive religious habit, or draw up a catalogue of what works their subjects might or might not undertake. After the example of St. Ignatius, St. Vincent too made

Obedience a very marked feature on the face of all rules, while "The Greater Glory of God" was to be the motto of both families alike, each of the two Saints describing his own as "This least Company." Louise insisted in her Conferences to the Sisters that their interior peace would be in the measure of their obedience.

I have called St. Vincent Co-founder with Louise de Marillac of the Company of Sisters of Charity. It is true he was so, but he might be more properly called its chief Spiritual Director. Between the Venerable Louise and her sainted Director there were no secrets apart; both alike were inspired to found and form and fashion a company of religious women who were to fill up a gap daily yawning wider in the Church of God. Each holy soul supplied what the other had not, each complemented the work of the other, Vincent lending the results of his large experience among the poor, and Louise gathering the raw material, which her womanly hand prepared with love and care and patience, for the Saint's inspiring counsel and direction.

Louise, if she had had the inclination, might easily have slipped into Court circles, where she would have been a shining light, but God drew this privileged soul to His own aristocracy, the poor, for whom she was destined under God's own guidance to set up a Society which was to be the embodiment of all the works of mercy. When we look back at the modest beginning of this gigantic Institution in the Catholic Church, we are forcibly reminded of what Our Lord tells us about the growth and evolution of the mustard seed. Louise dropped the seed into good soil, and God fostered it to blossom and ripened it into fruit a hundredfold. Meanwhile, what difficulties had to be met and what

objections to be answered! To the old conservative world this new Society of women looked almost revolutionary; they were not to be called nuns, they were not to wear veils, nor to live behind grilles, nor to know enclosure, nor to inhabit what were called convents. You could not tether them to any one spot, nor limit their activities to any one special work, nor confine them to any one diocese or country. Their mission field was the Catholic Church and their interests in it the greater glory of God. Humanly speaking, it looked as if this new spiritual venture might easily be condemned as a new-fangled idea which no one wanted to see realised. Speaking of its early inception, Louise wrote, "Could anything be more contemptible in the eyes of the world than our Institute in its beginning? Some village girls engaged to carry food and remedies, who, after awhile, were assembled to live together in community without making any change in their way of life or their clothes, or in the simplicity and roughness of their country habits." Speaking of those early days of the Institute, Louise tells us that "We hardly dared show ourselves in the streets in the beginning." And yet St. Vincent did not hesitate to call the vocation to which these simple and humble souls were called by God as "the greatest in the world." Before God their work was full of wisdom; before the world it was folly.

So that is the way God starts works which are to become integral parts of His Church and are found flourishing wherever the standard of the Cross is set up for the healing of the nations. Certainly His ways are not ours, His choice of subjects is peculiar to Himself. Take Louise as an example of what I mean. She was a young widow with a troublesome boy, and with wretched

health. And yet how splendid and glorious was the use God made of her. In His hands Louise became an instrument for the accomplishment of His designs not only for the salvation of human souls, but for the saving of countless human bodies. Three years ago, when I was in China, and had the privilege of baptizing a number of foundlings rescued by the Sisters of Charity, in response to a question I put to an elderly Sister, she told me she had herself baptized more than 18,000 Chinese derelict babies. The Sisters of Charity are the Rescue Society of the Catholic Church.

Of course Louise had the advantage of the guidance and experience of a Saint, but she was no automaton in his hands; she had the liberty of a child of God, and made uncommon good use of it, consulting her spiritual guide not at every turn, but at the cross-roads of life when she was not certain about which direction to follow. And not only was Louise a self-determining personality, but she exercised quite a fascinating influence over her spiritual daughters, to whom she ever showed herself as a tender, loving, and patient mother. St. Vincent called her the most motherly of all mothers. One fine characteristic about her I must mention. She was always accessible to all and each of her children, and if she was too ill at ease through sickness to hold much conversation, she more than made up for it by her charm of manner, sweetness of smile, and parting word of encouragement. She was no more afraid of praising her friends than Our Lord Himself was.

It was an immense advantage to this young growing Society to be in the hands of one who was herself subject to so many infirmities of health. The Sisters could always rely upon a mother's sympathy in their

troubles. And be sure of this, there are not a few souls in religion as well as outside it who are being starved and perhaps hardened for the want of a helpful word, or a genial look, or a kindly smile. Some people I know contend that religious do not need such a poor and paltry thing as sympathy; my experience on the other hand goes to show they need more of it than others. It is sometimes their trial that they do not get it. Our Lord sought as well as gave it. Then how carefully and patiently Louise trained her daughters to clinging, childlike prayer, to close union with God, to living in His presence and in that habit of recollection which anchors the soul to repose in God and creates an atmosphere of peace and contentment. She never tired exhorting her daughters to exercise great patience and charity to their clients, whether foundlings, or galley-slaves, or lunatics, or what not. Nor did she forget the bodily needs of her children; she knew that unless the Sisters were properly, if simply, fed and nourished, they must break down and become neurotic or neurasthenic. To me the wonder is, taking into consideration the strenuous life of a Sister of Charity, that there are not oftener lapses of health. It only shows that a willing soul can do an immense amount of work for God upon very indifferent health; indeed I am not sure that robust health is always good for any of us; it is apt to make one too self-reliant and spiritually independent. There is nothing like a few pains and aches to drive us to God for courage and help. Whatever draws us to Him is precious.

Like many other holy souls, Louise was at times not a little anxious about her want of devotion and fervour when lying helpless upon a bed of sickness. It then occurred to her that if any work among the Sisters for

the moment was going wrong, it was most probably due to the poor use she made of suffering—in other words, she blamed herself for not taking pleasure in pain. How often one's spirituality, when put to the test, takes that turn! Of course it is all wrong. If pain were a pleasure and did not hurt, it would cease to be pain. If, indeed, men and women were constituted like clams and oysters instead of being organised like human beings, they might possibly feel just as happy being forced open by a knife as lying comfortably in their beds. But it happens we are no such things as "natives" or "blue-points," but, on the contrary, creatures with nervous systems which shrink from pain almost as instinctively and sensitively as Our Lord's system itself did. If I remember rightly, we are told of Him not that He *enjoyed*, but that He *endured* the cross. Do not let us try to achieve more than this, lest, perhaps, we may deceive ourselves, and fall into mock spirituality.

A young guardsman told me, not many weeks ago, that as he lay in hospital abroad, the one and only wish which absorbed his being was that his mother might have been in the ward with him. But he was careful to add: "However, if she had been there, she could have done nothing better than just to leave me alone." That's it. When even a most holy soul is suffering, say, from such ordinary ailments as lumbago, sciatica, or a sick headache, she does quite honestly long for the close presence of Our Lord, but having said to Him: "Dear Lord, please accept every breath I inhale as an act of love for what You are in Yourself, and every breath I exhale as an act of love for what You are to me," she will have to settle down calmly and bravely to the rack, and it will be heroism in her if her guardian Angel can

record that, "having joy set before her she endured the cross." Heroic Louise stuck to her cross bravely to the end, nor must we blame her because naturally she did not like it.

Here I must remind my readers of another characteristic lesson taught by Vincent and Louise to their spiritual daughters. Throughout the whole story of the foundation of this Institute one is struck by the beautiful trust always and everywhere manifested in the Will of God. That "prudence" often enough euphemistic for want of energy and enterprise, I can nowhere discover in the lives of Vincent or Louise. It did not seem to them so terrible a thing to make a mistake. They felt you could not be sure that God was going to ripen all the seed sown in every field of enterprise, but that was no excuse for not getting busy for God and then leaving it to Him to determine what seed should and what seed should not grow. But the wonderful thing is that so much has been brought to perfection by the Institution.

What the Sisters of Charity start, that they finish, the secret of their success being *trust in God*; in other words, they practise spiritual common sense. I love the saying of Louise that, "God asks more confidence of us than prudence," and this other, "It seems to me that Our Lord would always rather have us act with trust in Him than with prudence."

Mathurine Guérin, Louise's secretary, gave the following account after her death of this episode in the holy Superior's life: "As she had no special funds for building the house, she began it with great confidence in God's goodness, and she remarked that every time she required money to pay the workmen, a sum, little or big, came quite unexpectedly, so that she admired the providence of

God. She did not, however, fail to ask for alms towards the building, and when she met with refusals she thanked God." She was shrewdly businesslike in dealing with man, not so with God.

Living as we do in England amidst a "community of shopkeepers," as we call ourselves, it is well at times to be reminded that religion is not a business transaction across a counter, with bill receipted and change given; but on the contrary, that it is a love affair between two friends, One of whom is ready to give and forgive and to forget. One is God. Life is too overwhelming a mystery to be run upon commercial lines. You have in the end, in spite of repeated general confessions, to come back to trust, for though you may not be conscious of any guilt or stain upon your soul, you still even then have to cry out with the psalmist, "If Thou, O Lord, wilt observe iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?" Personally, I do not hesitate to say that if my love of God had not shaped itself into trust, I could have worked myself into an asylum long before my seventieth birthday.

Trust is love in repose, and we ought, as Louise reminded the Sisters, "to take delectation in it." And the beauty of it is, it requires no learning or cleverness, but only that child-like simplicity and ingenuousness which Our Lord has reminded us He loves to see in those who call Him Friend. If you want to know how to put your trust in God, my advice to you is, study the life of any community of Sisters of Charity. And if you would learn how to delight in spending yourself upon the poor, get leave to accompany a "cornetted" Sister into the slums of some populous town. You, too, would then soon discover that Our Lord makes His sacred presence in a very special way felt when you are bent on errands of

mercy in some slum-warren. If reverently I may say it, you feel He is patting you on the back, and that He is giving lightness and elasticity to worn-out limbs and weary feet.

What happened to Sister André in St. Vincent's day is not a very uncommon experience among workers in the poorer quarters of our cities in our own time. Sister André on her death-bed was asked by the Saint if there was anything in her past religious life to cause her anxiety. "No, Father, none at all," came the ready reply, "unless it be that I took too much pleasure in serving the poor." Such is the wine-like delight that springs out of social intercourse with nature's gentlefolk—the poor, that one almost dreads later on to hear the word: "You have already had your reward."

I wish that space permitted me to refer to the "Ladies of Charity," but in the course of this interesting volume you will discover that the Sisters of Charity might never have been heard of at all in the history of the Church, if it had not been for the Confraternity of Ladies whose work was in a very special way prepared and helped by the Sisters, who we are told had "come into the general scheme, providentially ordained, whereby God has given us a means of doing by their hands what we are unable to do by our own." So wrote St. Vincent to M. de la Fosse when referring to the relations of the Sisters to the Ladies of Charity. If girls of the leisured classes only recognised more fully the spiritual aids to life that are to be found in the good works of the Ladies of Charity, there would be no keeping them from becoming energising and enterprising members of it in their own particular districts. It would then flourish everywhere.

Before closing this preface, the defects of which may

perhaps be excused as I have had to write it from a sick bed, let me again remind my readers that the source and origin of the Sisters' enthusiasm for the poor is their enthusiasm for Jesus Christ. There is no one but needs some strong prop on which to lean in days of distress with all his weight and might. When you become a religious, God withdraws these natural supports one by one in order to teach the consecrated soul how to lean upon His arm only for support, and how to draw from His heart only for comfort and courage. To a Sister of Charity Our Lord is not only Master and Saviour, but also Model, Friend, and Spouse. With the Apostle she can say, "I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me." She lives the Christ-life, she thinks the Christ-thought, she says the Christ-word, she does the Christ-action and finally evolves the Christ-character. Consequently, as He lived and toiled and bled and died in order to save human souls, so is the Sister of Charity prepared as His bride, herself to do no less. She is charged like a battery with the fires of enthusiasm, and can only be held in check by the reins of obedience from spending herself and being spent in the service of her poorer brothers and sisters.

If our Catholic debutantes will only peruse the volume to which these words are a preface, I venture to think that thousands more of them would pause on the threshold of the world of Society and Fashion, and plead frequently and fervently to be called by God to become His spouses with the daughters of Louise de Marillac. Some of these girls would, I know, answer me, "Father, I am not called to any such life"; to which I answer, "Why do you not then ask to be? 'Ask and you shall receive.'" Others again will say,

“ Father, I am not worthy to be made use of by God for such beautiful work.” To them I answer, “ In Our Lord’s hands did not clay and spittle bring sight to the blind? Surely by an effort of will you might live up to such a blend as that? In God’s hands even if you can yourself do nothing, He, unless you resist, can in and through you do whatever He wills. When I am in the pulpit, what inspires me with hope, as a preacher of the Word, that God is going to make use of me, is not only the fact that for the moment I have the monopoly of the Word, but more especially the fact that Our Lord must be longing much more than I could be to do good to His people seated around me. Of course we are all unworthy. If we waited till we were worthy, we should have to give up the sacraments, prayer, and even all hope itself of salvation. Just give yourself, with all your faults huddled on your back, to our dear and blessed Lord, and be sure He will not withdraw to let you fall. Beneath you, you will feel the ‘ Everlasting Arm.’ ”

A niece of mine about to become a Sister of Charity, asked me what she could do, being so unworthy, to fit herself for the vocation which it was her ambition to embrace. My advice to her was this, “ Dear child, be in the hands of God as clay in the hands of the potter. Leave it to Him to shape you into the vessel of election for which He designs you. If only you fling yourself at His feet, giving yourself to Him entirely, He will in turn give Himself to you entirely.” The child went her way, was taken up by God, was shaped into the character He wanted, and now, having been made perfect in a short time, she is in possession of Him entirely and for ever.

On one occasion, in a conference St. Vincent exclaimed :

“My Sisters, if we could see the state of the soul of a Sister of Charity who works wholly for God, we should be rapt in admiration; we should see it shining like the sun. We could not look at it without being dazzled. But we shall see it in Heaven.” To-day, God, Our Lord, beholds more than thirty thousand daughters of His servant, the Venerable Louise de Marillac, carrying forward in all parts of His Church, to those who need them most, her mission of Hope and her message of Mercy.

And pray observe how attractive the Sisters make religion. They show the hand-worker that it is worth while. God Almighty has no better advertisement for His spiritual wares among the poor than the presence in their midst of these white-winged Sisters who minister like Angels of Paradise to the temporal and spiritual wants of God’s poor. These Sisters are, as Pius X. once said to me of them, “so patient, so gentle, so charitable.” They have learned from their intimacy with their Divine Master in prayer how to please and not to hurt His fellow-workers in the slums.

The Sisters know our Lord’s own feelings were so finely attuned to His own highly organised Nature that He was as much pained, say by the studied rudeness of Simon, the Pharisee, as He was pleased by the thoughtful kindness of Magdalen, the penitent. To-day, they argue, Jesus is still as truly Man as He is truly God. Therefore they resolve to teach others like themselves never to hurt but always to please the Man-God.

This in summary is the religion of the Daughters of Venerable Louise, and they pass it on through the Ladies of Charity to all their clients.

In conclusion, let me say that there can be no finer monument erected to the holy Foundress’ sacred memory

than her Communities living and energising wherever they possess an open house; nor can there be stronger witness to her sanctity than the lives themselves of these spiritual daughters who, living by her rule, sustained by her example, and encouraged by her conferences, are to be seen like Our Lord, "going about doing good"—Saviours of the people.

BERNARD VAUGHAN, S.J.

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS,
1916.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THAT, so far, no Life of the Venerable Louise de Marillac has been written in the English language is not due to lack of material. Gobillon, her first biographer, wrote of her whilst her memory was still green, his book being published in 1676, sixteen years after her death. This Life owes its special interest to the fact that its author was Rector of the parish of St. Laurent, in which the holy foundress spent the last ten years of her life; it may therefore be looked upon as based on first-hand knowledge. It is, however, short, and leaves much of her history untold. These gaps have been filled up during the last century through the indefatigable labours of a member of the company, Sister Marie de Geoffre de Chabrignac, who devoted upwards of thirty years to collecting, sifting, and cataloguing all the documents contained in the Archives of the Mother-house in Paris and elsewhere relating to the history of the venerable superior. Amongst the treasures which she unearthed were 726 letters of Louise to her Daughters and other correspondents.

A second Life of Louise de Marillac by the Comtesse de Richemont appeared in 1894. Though Mme. de Richemont did not avail herself of Sister Marie de Geoffre's researches, under the impression, it is said, that a Life embodying them would be given to the world by a member of the company, yet her biography contributes much to our knowledge of the holy foundress.

Finally, in the year 1897 Mgr. Baunard, at whose disposal all the above-mentioned invaluable materials were placed, brought out what may be considered the standard Life of the Venerable Louise de Marillac. The author of the English biography has availed herself largely of the works of her predecessors, more especially of that of Mgr. Baunard, from which she has not hesitated to quote freely, while she has also borrowed from St. Vincent de Paul's biographers Abelly and Maynard. She wishes to record her gratitude to the community at the English Mother-house of the company at Mill Hill, and to Fr. Byrne, C.M., for the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul and other works which they have kindly placed at her disposal in order to facilitate what has truly been to her a labour of love.

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LIFE OF THE VENERABLE LOUISE DE MARILLAC

CHAPTER I

THE de Marillacs, from whom the Venerable Louise was descended, came originally from the Haute-Auvergne, where the head of the family owned a castle or stronghold near the town of Mauriac. The name figured on the roll of honour in the annals of the long and wearisome internecine struggle known as the "Hundred Years' War." During the course of the fifteenth century, it appeared in connection with various posts of authority and confidence held by them in the Government of the Auvergne and "Comté de Clermont"—then held in fief by the House of Bourbon.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century the de Marillacs found their way to Paris and became associated with, and eventually rose to the highest posts in, the society known as the "noblesse de la robe."

Gabriel de Marillac became known as a successful parliamentary advocate, and earned the praise of the President de Thou, who said of him: "That there were few of his contemporaries who could compare with him for piety, integrity and eloquence." Charles, another member of the family, began life at the Bar; he was subsequently ordained, became Bishop of Vannes, then

Archbishop of Vienne, and head of the Privy Council. He was sent later on as Ambassador to the Court of Suleiman; he afterwards occupied the same post in England during the reign of Henry VIII, and at the Diet of Augsburg when accredited to the Court of the Emperor Charles V.

The first mention of the de Marillacs at the Court of France was in the year 1550, when Guillaume was appointed to a minor post of confidence in the royal exchequer. Thence he gradually worked his way up to the important post of Comptroller-General of Finance. He received the honour of knighthood from the hands of the king, with the right of transmitting it to his heirs. His eleven children and their descendants carried on this tradition of faithful service to God and their country, and the name of de Marillac appears in its annals under many headings, as administrators in courts of justice and finance, and as priests and prelates, as well as members of religious orders, abbesses and nuns.

The elevation of the Bourbon dynasty to the throne of France led to a further rise in the fortunes of the family. Michel de Marillac was made Lord Chancellor in the reign of Louis XIII, and his brother Jean-Louis became Marshal of France under the same Sovereign. Starting life as friends and followers of the great Richelieu they became ultimately his rivals, and from that moment his enemies, and as such he never rested till he had swept them from his path.

Louis, the father of the subject of this memoir, was an elder brother of Michel's; he was a member of the French Parliament, and bore the title of "Seigneur de Ferrières en Brie." He shared this property of Ferrières with Charles, the eldest of the family; and when the latter died in 1580, the lands appertaining to it were found to be mortgaged to the extent of over a hundred

thousand livres, in addition to other family charges. Unable to meet these debts, Louis made over his share in the property to his younger brother Michel, and took in exchange the lands of Farinvilliers, from which he afterwards derived his title.

Louis de Marillac was married three times: first to Marie de la Rosière, who was childless, and secondly to Marguerite Camus. This marriage was blessed with a daughter, who, born on the 12th of August, 1591, was afterwards to be known as the Venerable Louise de Marillac—an eminent servant of God, and Foundress and first Superior of the Congregation of Sisters of Charity.

The fortunes of France, which had been long suffering from the miseries and disorder consequent on civil war, were at this moment at the lowest ebb. In the previous year, 1590, Henry of Navarre had besieged Paris, and the horrors inflicted on that unfortunate city as described in the pages of contemporary history can only fitly be compared with those of Jerusalem in the hands of her Roman conquerors. No provision for a siege had been made by the beleaguered city; and its inhabitants, between two and three hundred thousand in number, found themselves confronted with an alternative of death by the sword without from the hand of a pitiless foe, or from within from disease and starvation. "The clergy¹ and the Spanish Ambassador took the lead in feeding the hungry populace at huge cauldrons containing bran and oatmeal, but their efforts barely served to give the multitude who precipitated themselves upon this food a few mouthfuls apiece. Bread was soon priceless, meal unprocurable. The flesh of such animals as mules, donkeys, or horses were luxuries reserved only for the rich. Rats, mice, the grass that grew up in the

¹ The "Journal du Siège de Paris," quoted in *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, Mgr. Baunard, p. 4.

streets, even such horrors as dead bodies dragged from the charnel-house, bones from deserted graveyards, leather, were devoured by the starving mob. Cannibalism was not a rare event, and hideous rumours spread abroad of children being devoured by their mothers. A terrible mortality ensued, and it was calculated that a seventh portion of the population of Paris died during the course of the siege." All classes suffered alike, rich and poor met in a common fate. The streets were encumbered with bodies of the dead, and there was no one in a state to render them the last offices. Nor had matters improved greatly during the year which succeeded the relief of the city. Engagements between the rival forces of the Royalists and the "Ligue" took place continually, at St. Denis, at the gate of St. Honoré, at Senlis, Corbeil, and at Meaux and below the walls of Chartres. No quarter was given between the rival parties, and proscriptive lists were passed from hand to hand bearing the names of the partisans of Henri IV followed by the initials: P. D. C.—Pendù, Dagué, Chassé.

It was amidst these scenes of hatred, murder, and revenge that Louise first saw the light.

History does not relate whether her father suffered in his parliamentary capacity at the hands of the famous (or infamous) "Council of Sixteen," but we read that her mother succumbed to the trials and privations from which few escaped in those troubled times. Louise accordingly was deprived of a mother's care at a time when she needed it most. She is described by her biographers as being exceedingly delicate and frail as an infant, and she suffered, as we learn from her own words, from similar disabilities all her life long, as it was no doubt to her weak health as well as to her other trials that she alluded when she wrote: "God manifested to me from early youth that it was His Will that

I should go to Him by the pathway of the Cross. From my birth and at all times He has hardly left me without occasion for suffering." ¹ We are told that she was the object of her father's tenderest affections, but no paternal devotion, however great, can replace a mother's care for a child in its infancy. Moreover, when Louise was little more than four years old her father married again, his choice falling on Antoinette Camus, widow of Thiboust, "Sieur de Bréan," who brought with her three children—two boys and a girl—born of her previous marriage. Under these circumstances the "Sieur de Ferrières" thought it advisable to provide a home and education for the little Louise elsewhere. He found both these at the royal monastery of St. Denis at Poissy. This monastery offered every advantage that a parent could seek on his child's behalf. It was situated in a vast park, and nature and art combined under the guidance of a cultivated taste to make it worthy of what is known as the "grand siècle." The Prioress of the Order, which was that of St. Dominic, belonged to the House of de Gondi, and one of the nuns was a first cousin of Louis de Marillac, and also, as there is strong reason to believe, the godmother of his child. Fr. Hilarion de Coste describes this lady as being "very learned"; no small praise at a time when the standard of learning among women of the upper classes was very high. To read Homer in the original was no unusual distinction in the monastery of Poissy; poetry was also cultivated by its inmates, and one of the religious, we are told, gave a translation of St. Bernard's sermons to the world in the vernacular. Mme. de Marillac was a poet; she wrote a metrical version of the Office of our Lady and of the Penitential Psalms, as well as various other verses and meditations.

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, Gobillon, t. ii. p. 162.

Whether the child Louise imbibed these literary tastes from her mistresses and companions we have no means of ascertaining, but there can be no doubt that she was unusually precocious, and that her education at Poissy and elsewhere was laid upon a solid foundation. Whilst she was still young, M. de Ferrières took his daughter from Poissy and placed her in the hands of a "clever and virtuous mistress" in order (as Louise's first biographer Gobillon tells us) "that she might learn all that was suitable for her condition." Though her father did not take her home to live with him at this time, he seems to have superintended her education and taken the utmost interest in it. Thus we are told "he neglected no means of perfecting her in the exercise of mind and body. He had her taught painting, and she showed so much taste and love for the art that she continued practising it at different periods of her life, as much as her various occupations and infirmities permitted, and some pious portraits, works of her hand, are still preserved in her religious family.

"M. de Ferrières, having discovered in his daughter a mind fitted for the acquisition of knowledge, cultivated it with the greatest care. He made her learn philosophy in order to cultivate her power of reasoning, and this training gave her such an attraction to reading that it became her principal occupation, and her father had no greater pleasure than to talk over this and kindred subjects with her, and read what she had written about them. The obedience with which she seconded his efforts pleased him so much that he declared in his last will that Louise 'had been his greatest consolation in the world, and he believed that God had given her to him for his soul's comfort in the afflictions of life.'"¹

Louise was about sixteen at the time of her father's

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, Gobillon, t. i. p. 6.

death, and this blow, which left her almost alone, turned her thoughts from a world in which she had met little but trial and disaster to the refuge of the cloister. It would, indeed, have been strange had it been otherwise. For the epoch in which she had lived witnessed an astonishing revival of the fervour and popularity of the religious orders. The Carmelites of the Teresan Reform had but recently been introduced into Paris, and the fame of their piety and austerities must certainly have reached the ears of Louise de Marillac, as her uncle Michel was the *Père syndic* of the Community and was mentioned in the annals of the Order as "The foundation stone in temporalities of the French Carmel." It was to the daughters of St. Francis of Assisi, however, who had likewise established themselves in Paris at this time, that Louise was most strongly attracted, and we learn from one of her early companions that she lost no opportunity of joining them in their prayers and exercises of devotion. Urged by this attraction and by a desire to give herself wholly to God, Louise at sixteen made a vow to join the Franciscan Order as soon as she should have reached the necessary age. But the ardent spirit of this young and devout soul did not reckon with the weakness of the flesh—a weakness which was very apparent to those by whom she was guided. Her director, Fr. H. de Champagny, a learned and pious Capuchin to whom she confided her intention, told her she had neither the health nor the vocation for the life of penance and austerity which she contemplated taking, and released her from her vow. To console his penitent, and possibly also with a supernatural intuition as to her future vocation, Fr. de Champagny told her to be consoled, "as God had other designs upon her." Having failed therefore in her intention of giving up the world, Louise submitted to her uncle Michel's choice when some years

later he proposed Antoine Le Gras as a suitable candidate for her hand.

The family to which Antoine Le Gras belonged hailed, like that of the Marillacs, from Auvergne, a point doubtless in his favour; and his relations and forbears had been distinguished for their charity and generosity to the poor, a hospital at Puy having been built by them, a strong recommendation doubtless in the eyes of his future wife. Le Gras was secretary to the Queen-Regent Marie de Médicis; and Louise's uncle, the Marshal Jean-Louis, having married the Queen's aunt, Catherine, daughter of Cosmo de Médicis, the two families were intimately connected; thus a natural expectation of favours to come contributed to make the marriage a desirable one on the part of Louise's guardians.

Louise was married on the 5th of February, 1613, to Antoine Le Gras at the church of St. Gervais in Paris. The following October she gave birth to a son Michel-Antoine, who was ever afterwards the object of her tenderest care and affections.

The position held by Le Gras in the royal household and Louise's birth would have entitled them to share in the festivities of what was then considered one of the most brilliant courts in Europe, but though we are told by her biographer that Louise acquitted herself of such duties when custom required it of her, her heart was elsewhere. It might be said of her that she bore her cross in the gay world, and took her pleasure with the poor of Christ. We owe to a brief account of a humble member of this household, which, written after Louise's death, was carefully preserved by the Community of Sisters of Charity in Paris, some details of her life at this period. "Mlle. Le Gras," the writer says, "was very pious and had great devotion to the service of the poor. She was accustomed to take them sweet dishes,

preserves, and biscuits and other good things. She combed their hair, cleaning them from vermin and scab, and performed the last offices for the dead. Sometimes she would quit the company in order to climb a hill to take comforts to a poor person, and this when it rained and hailed." ¹ Again we are told she was in the habit of wearing a hair-shirt, and taking the discipline, and when at table, though she made believe to eat with the rest, she ate nothing. Louise's charities were principally exercised towards the poor of the parish of St. Sauveur where Antoine Le Gras had built a house, and he and his wife had established themselves shortly after their marriage. Louise was not alone in her works of charity. The parish register of St. Sauveur contains the names of Mesdames Cassillac, Feydeau, Jouy, Lumagne, Olier, Renty, as well as those of Goussault and de Pollalion. Many of these, and the two last in particular, were to be known, later on, as leaders in the cause of philanthropy, and we may look upon it as certain that in these early days they were fellow-workers of Mlle. Le Gras, and possibly owed their inspiration to her example.

Louise had not long been married when heavy clouds began to gather round the horizon. In the domain of politics the breach between the Queen-Regent Marie de Médicis and her son Louis XIII had widened; and in 1617 the king asserted his right to independence, and after a struggle for supremacy in which the Queen was defeated she was forced to retire from Court and retreat to the Castle of Blois, which had been assigned to her as a residence. Whether her secretary shared her fallen fortunes and accompanied her into exile is not known. There were other matters, however, of a private nature which touched Louise and her husband even more nearly. In the same year, 1617, her aunt, Valence de

¹ *La Vénéérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 14.

Marillac, the wife of Ottavio de Atticci, a member of a noble Florentine family, died, leaving seven orphan children, the father Ottavio having predeceased her by three years. The care of these orphans fell entirely on Le Gras and his wife, and the management of a large landed property which they inherited involved the former in endless trouble and disputes. Louise, mentioning the subject in one of her letters many years later, wrote: "My late husband consumed his time and much of his life in the affairs of the House of Atticci, and this," she adds, "was to the detriment of his own fortune."

Several letters have been preserved, both to Le Gras and his wife, dealing with these family matters, from her uncle Michel de Marillac. He writes to Louise in August 1619 on the subject of placing Magdalen, the youngest of the Atticci orphans, at an Ursuline Convent, offering her the use of his wife's carriage whenever she should require it. On this occasion, as on several others, after advising Louise on business matters, he ends his letter with paternal words which showed a true insight into the state of her soul. "Seek God," he writes, "with good courage, and conform yourself entirely to His Will. Walk in humility and confidence in Him whom I pray to give you—with His grace—a long and happy life." Again later on he writes: "The soul which is faithful to God, recognising that she has nothing of her own, remains like a beggar before Him who alone is everything. The more she strips herself of her cares and activities the more clearly will it be made known to her what she is to do, and what leave undone. Let her work in God and for God. Let her seek and love Jesus Christ. Let her unite herself to Him. Let her honour His life, His toils and His sufferings. In a word, the fidelity of the soul is proved by its adherence to God." In a letter written in March 1623, some words

escape him which show what his own experience had been of the uncertainties of life. "One can be sure of nothing," he writes, "but of the mercy of God. There is nothing in this world in which one can place one's confidence outside of that; he who places it elsewhere is to be pitied. When I go to Paris I will help you very willingly to the extent of my powers."

These letters, besides throwing a light on Louise's life and character, are interesting from another point of view. For they illustrate a fact which, known to the student of history, is sometimes passed over by those whose chief knowledge of the times to which we refer has been derived from the scurrilous memoirs of the period: which is that, in spite of its crimes and appalling disregard of bloodshedding, there was in that age (which was not so very far removed from what are known as the "ages of faith,") a very high standard of piety for those who professed to be followers of Christ though they had not renounced society and were engaged in busy and active pursuits. Michel de Marillac was a courtier, a man of the world, and of so energetic a nature that his activity was almost proverbial. Yet he found time to spend long hours in prayer. The brilliant Mme. de Maigneley, whose friendship with him was one of long standing, said of him: "The day has more than twenty-four hours for M. de Marillac!" But neither his work in the world nor the cares of administration interfered with his service of his Divine Master. He spent, we are told, many hours daily before the Blessed Sacrament; and availing himself of the position he held as guardian to the Carmelites in Paris, he obtained the right of entry into their private chapel, in order to be able to go there at night as well as by day to pray.

It was from this knowledge of spiritual things gained at the foot of the Altar as well as from his intimate

knowledge of Louise's character, that enabled Michel de Marillac to lay down such admirable rules for her guidance. He did more: for it was to him that she owed her introduction to the holy Bishop of Geneva—the author of the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, who was afterwards to be raised by the Church to her altars under the name of St. Francis of Sales.

It was in the winter of 1618–19 that the Bishop of Geneva left his mountain diocese for Paris, having been summoned thither on business connected with a marriage which was to unite the House of Savoy with that of France. The negotiations lingered, with the result that the Bishop's return to Annecy was delayed till the autumn of 1619. The renown of his sanctity, and perhaps also his charm, drew crowds to hear and see him. He was said to have preached three hundred times, and upon no one did his words of unction and his piety make a greater impression than upon Mlle. Le Gras, who in her letters and conversation alluded to him ever as her "blessed father."

St. Francis of Sales died the following year, but the mantle of Elias fell on his disciple the Bishop of Belley, Mgr. Jean Pierre Camus, who, formed on the model of the saint of Annecy, inherited from him his genius for training souls in the way of perfection. Some of the letters written by him to Louise in the year 1621 and three following ones might have come from the pen of the author of *Philothea*, so full are they of the sweetness and liberty of spirit manifested in the writings of the saint.

Thus, when Louise, on the occasion of a jubilee given in celebration of the election of Pope Urban VIII to the Holy See, asked her director's leave to make a general confession, he sends her the following characteristic reply:

"What! again do you want to make a general confession! How often have I not told you that you should

make a truce with them in your heart. No, no, it is not on that account a jubilee comes to you, but to make you rejoice in God your Saviour and make you cry : *Jubilemus Deo salutari nostro !* ”

He returns later to the subject :

“ I am always waiting for serenity of soul to return to you, after the clouds which hinder your view of the beautiful brightness and joy which should belong to God's service. Do not make such difficulties about matters which are of no importance. Turn aside your thoughts from dwelling on yourself and fix them on Jesus Christ. In that way in my opinion lies your perfection, and I think I may say with the Apostle that ‘ I think with the Spirit of God. ’ ”

Again, in answer to her desire to multiply her days of recollection and retreats he cautions her :

“ I am glad to hear that you take such pleasure in your spiritual retreats. But you should partake of them as you would of honey : that is, soberly, and at considerable intervals, for there is an avidity about you in spiritual matters which requires restraining. ”

The year 1623 was an eventful one for Louise. It was also one of special trial, and the trials were from without as well as from within.

Louise's married life had hitherto flowed in a peaceful and serene channel. It had given what till then had been so sadly lacking in her life : a home, a loved husband (for we have the authority of her friend and director, Mgr. de Belley, for the statement that her married life was a happy one), and an equally beloved son. During the course of the year she was to foresee the shattering of any hopes she might have formed for earthly happiness, and in addition to this trial, and perhaps in preparation for it, she was to go through a succession of severe interior trials. The letters we have already

quoted from Louise's uncle, and her director will have enabled us to trace from their earliest beginnings these spiritual trials to which she was subject, and which, no doubt, for the glory of God were allowed to trouble this pure and beautiful soul, and impede its free access to God. We have not to go far to seek for the foundation for them. Louise felt that in her youth she had been called to a higher vocation; accordingly she could only take her pleasure in the world in fear and trembling; scruples pursued her; what were her multiplied general confessions but admissions of a mind ill at ease, pursued by idle fears, and yet unable to get free of them? That these fears were wholly chimerical we must decidedly infer from the testimony of her spiritual directors and her biographers. They are unanimous in saying that her life in the world was most exemplary. Mgr. Baunard compares her to the valiant woman of the Scriptures who "put out her hands to strong things," and the parallel might be carried out in all its fulness and detail. Her care of her household and the poor, her devotion to her husband, her training of her son, were all the subject of their just and unqualified praise. Was it that the Holy Spirit "breathing where it will" was inwardly attracting this chosen and elect soul to a life of greater perfection of entire self-abnegation? In short, had He uttered those words, "Friend, come up higher"? It was possibly in response to such inspiration that Louise de Marillac made a vow on the feast of St. Monica in 1623 of consecrating herself entirely to God in the event of her surviving her husband. This vow, which was no unusual one in the times in which she lived, was probably suggested by a study of the *Devout Life* in which St. Francis of Sales quotes with approval a saying of Origen's recommending married women to make a conditional vow of chaste widowhood should their husbands leave

them free. But that there should be no doubt of the sense in which he intended this to be done, he says in another part of the book that he "by no means approved of persons spending themselves in desiring a state of life other than that in which they have been placed. Were I to entertain a desire to be a Carthusian I should waste my time." Again: "If a married woman desired to be a nun to what purpose is it?"

That this vow was made with the consent of her director and by a divine inspiration we cannot doubt. It was followed shortly afterwards by a series of temptations attacking the first principles of religion and preceded by what Louise calls a terrible "depression of spirits." The full account of this trial, and its final outcome is as follows:

"The Ascension day following" (the pronouncement of her vow) "I fell into a great depression of spirits which lasted till Whit Sunday (4th of June) coming from the doubt I had whether I ought to leave my husband, as I wished to do, to make reparation for my first vow, and in order to serve God and my neighbour. I feared also that the attachment I had to my director should prevent me from taking another, though I considered I was called to do so; I also suffered great anguish from doubts about the immortality of the soul. These three doubts held my soul in what appeared to me unimaginable pains.

"In one moment, during holy Mass on Pentecost-day, whilst I was at St. Nicholas in-the-Fields, my soul was cleared of all its doubts; it was signified to me that I was to go on living with my husband, and that the time would come when I should be in the position of being able to make a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and that I should be associated with others who would be bound in the same way. I understood that I should be so circumstanced as to be able to assist my neigh-

bour, but how this should come to pass I knew not because of the going and coming that this would necessitate. Also it was certified to me that I should be at peace about my director, and that God would give me one, and it appears to me that He showed me who it was to be. I felt some repugnance at accepting him, nevertheless I acquiesced, and I understood that this change was not to be effected at once.

“My third trouble was removed by the certitude which I experienced in my soul that it was God who was teaching me what I have put down above, and that granted His existence I could not doubt the rest.” Louise concludes by the statement, “I have always believed that this grace was given me through the holy Bishop of Geneva, and I had some grounds for this belief—though what they were I cannot at this time remember.”¹

Peace followed this revelation, the peace promised by Jesus Christ to His disciples, and which invariably follows His heavenly communications. But although Louise's soul was at peace, and strengthened to accomplish the Will of God in all things, He did not leave her long without earthly trials. In the autumn of the same year Antoine Le Gras was attacked with a mortal disease, and his life for some time was in imminent danger. He rallied from the attack, but though his life was prolonged for a little over two years, he was never restored to health. Mgr. de Belley, who was in the habit of coming to Paris yearly to preach a course of Advent sermons, was on this occasion prevented from doing so. In the following letter he breaks the news to his penitent, who was anxiously expecting him:

“This is indeed a blow to your heart, my dear sister! Your much-loved husband has been on the point of death and this wretched Father who writes to you is not

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, M. Gobillon, t. ii. pp. 127-30.

coming to Paris this winter. Do not sigh over yourself, my very dear daughter, but over my fate, separated as I am from my country and my people, and relegated to an exile which has nothing lovable about it except the loved will of God which makes all lovable." He ends his letter thus: "O Jesus lover of our souls! preserve this dear daughter, bless her and her husband and her son and her house with Thy sweet hand. Pour forth all Thy consolation on this soul, which, as Thou knowest, stands so high in my esteem."

Louise had need of all the consolation she derived from the heavenly Voice which spoke to her on Whit Sunday, as well of the graces which followed it, to enable her to bear the trials which were to be her portion during the years which followed; for the malady which her husband had developed attacked brain and temper as well as health, and she had much to endure from both, though we are told that her unalterable patience was proof against every assault that was made upon it. Mgr. de Belley, who still directed her, appeals to both her piety and her philosophy in a letter which must be assigned to this period.

"I truly sympathise, my dear sister," he writes, "with the anxiety of mind in which your husband's malady has plunged you. In truth this is your cross. And why should I grieve to see it borne on the shoulder of a daughter of the Cross? You have everything you require to bear it well: you want neither piety, nor good advice, nor books, nor intelligence. Please God you will not be wanting either in courage." Neither Gobillon nor Louise's more recent biographers mention the exact date at which she placed herself under St. Vincent's direction. That she did so at first somewhat unwillingly we have already learnt from her own words. Probably she was familiar with his appearance as he

lived as chaplain to the De Gondi family in their hôtel, which was situated in a quarter of Paris not far removed from her own, and she must have heard of his life of devotion to the service of the poor, but these merits we know were hidden under a somewhat unprepossessing exterior. He had also, according to his own admission (especially in his earlier years), a "cold and somewhat severe manner of address." No wonder that a woman of Louise's diffident character shrunk from submitting herself to his guidance. Nor was St. Vincent very ready to accept the task imposed upon him. He had no desire to undertake the direction of persons of quality; his mission was to the sinner and the poor sinner, and Mlle. Le Gras did not come under either heading. Mgr. Baunard remarks: "If on this occasion he suspended his ordinary rule it was no doubt out of deference to the Bishop's strongly expressed wishes."

How wonderful are God's dealings with man! Here were two individuals who had by nature nothing in common, except a common desire to accomplish God's will at all costs. To one He signifies His wishes by a communication from on high, to the other He speaks simply by the mouth of a superior; and the bond thus effected—of obedience on one side and spiritual direction on the other—which owed its origin to no human source but was wholly supernatural, remained supernatural in all its workings to the end. As we shall see, great things were to be accomplished by means of it, but perhaps the greatest of all was that never for one moment did director or penitent look upon themselves as anything but humble instruments in the hands of God, nor fail to attribute the glory to Him and the shortcomings to their own demerits.

Mgr. le Camus still continued to write to Louise at intervals after she had taken St. Vincent as her director, and a letter of his has been preserved in which a touch of

irony mingles with his usual honeyed sweetness, as he insinuates that she leaned almost more than was necessary on those who conducted her spiritually. Louise had written to lament M. Vincent's absence, and this was the Bishop's reply :

“ Behold, M. Vincent is absent, and Mlle. Le Gras is quite discouraged and out of countenance ! It is no doubt right to see God in our directors and see them in God. But at times it is better for us to see God alone, Who without man or piscina can cure us of our palsy.¹ It is not, O beloved soul ! that I shrink from advising or leading you, for I hope by means of this direction you will direct me on the straight road to Heaven, whither your example leads me more powerfully than any advice I can give you can serve you in your journey thither. But it is because I do not like to see little weaknesses and passing clouds even on the surface of the soul of Mlle. Le Gras, who has always appeared to me so strong and courageous, and of whom I have always thought so highly.”

The Bishop in conclusion begs to be remembered to some mutual friends, such as the pious widow Mme. de Marillac, whose husband René was Louise's son's godfather, and who had lately lost his life at the siege of Montauban ; also to the daughters of Ottavio de Atticci—Anne, “ *la trop-belle de Atticci* ” (as the Bishop styles her), who became afterwards the Comtesse de Maure and one of the most remarkable women of her day, and Geneviève, who as the Duchesse D'Atri occupied a prominent place in the historic salons of the seventeenth century. Some of the other names he mentions we shall come across later as members of the Association of the Ladies of Charity and similar organisations, such as Mlle. Pollalion

¹ A reference, needless to say, to the complaint of the paralytic at the pool of Bethsaida that he “ had no man,” etc.—*John v. 7.*

and Mme. de Villesavin (veuve de Philippeaux), of whom it was said that "she was the very humble servant of the human race." Nor were Louise's friends, Mother Magdalen of St. Joseph, prioress of the Carmelite convent, and Mother Catherine de Beaumont, of the Visitation convent, also in Paris, omitted; to all these Mgr. Camus sends his salutations, with the concluding words:

"May father, mother, and son receive from me—unworthy—the blessing of the Heavenly Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

The malady from which Antoine Le Gras suffered increased in severity as he drew near his end. His pains were extreme, and we are told that for many months he would not suffer Louise, "the good angel of his life," to leave his side. Faithful and devoted to the last, she supported him in his last agony—suggesting pious words and ejaculations to him and turning his thoughts to God. He died on the 21st of December, 1625.

Louise's first act, when she had done all that duty and affection could suggest for the mortal remains of her husband, was to go to the parish church, and there, after confession and Communion, to renew her act of consecration to God.

The following letter (the first of hers which has been preserved) gives further details of Antoine's last illness; it was addressed to his cousin, the Carthusian Fr. Hilarion Rebours:

"VERY REVEREND FATHER,

"Since you wish to be acquainted with the graces our good God gave my late husband, after beginning by saying that it would be impossible for me to tell you all, I can testify that for a very long time through the mercy of God he had renounced all affection for aught that could lead to mortal sin, and that he showed a great

desire to live piously. Six weeks before his death he fell into high fever which affected his brain very seriously, but God mercifully interposed and restored him to his senses, in thanksgiving for which grace he was determined to spend the rest of his life in His service. He hardly slept at all at night, but his patience was such that he gave hardly any trouble to his attendants. I think God willed in this last illness to make him participate in His sufferings and death, as he was in pain all over his body and lost all his blood. His mind was almost always occupied with meditation on the Passion. He had seven violent hæmorrhages from the mouth, and the last deprived him instantly of life. I was alone to assist him in this last passage into eternity, and he gave proof of much devotion as he breathed out his last sigh to God. All he could say was: 'Pray to God for me. All is over!' words which will be graven on my heart. I beg of you to remember him when saying Compline; it was a particular devotion of his, and he never failed to say it every day."

Louise preserved during the remainder of her life a faithful remembrance of her husband, and never failed to commemorate the anniversary of their marriage with Mass and Communion. Many years later, when making her will, she alludes to him in the following touching words: "I beg of my son to remember to pray constantly to God for the repose of his father's soul, and to call to mind his good life, how much he feared God and sought to keep his life free from sin; and above all, to think of his patience in suffering the very great pains which came upon him in his last years, in undergoing which he practised very great virtue."

CHAPTER II

LOUISE DE MARILLAC¹ was thirty-four years of age when her husband died. She had therefore reached what the great Dante calls the "mezzo dal cammin di nostra vita." In the light of the knowledge of God's designs upon her which we now possess, one cannot but look upon these as years of preparation. She had gained much and varied knowledge in the hard school of affliction, all of which was to stand her in good stead in the years that were to follow. An orphan, sickly, hardly ever free from physical or mental pain—would it not appear as if Providence had marked her out as one specially fitted to bring a sympathetic and understanding soul to the redress of suffering and wrong? Louise's thorough and systematic education was also to be of infinite use to her. Above all, she had a heart on fire with the love of God and desire to give herself entirely to His service, and a character disciplined by the experience of varying fortunes and profound interior trial.²

Such were Louise's qualifications when at Antoine Le

¹ Louise resumed her maiden name after her husband's death, as was commonly done in France when the husband was of inferior rank. As the wife or widow of Le Gras she was only entitled to be called Mademoiselle; the title of Madame being reserved for the wives of the nobility.

² Spiritual writers have frequently drawn attention to the fact that founders of religious Orders, and Superiors, have been permitted by God to suffer from interior trials, and scruples, in order to be able to deal with similar trials in the souls committed to their charge.

Gras's death she put herself in the hands of St. Vincent de Paul, asking to be used in any capacity he saw fit in the service of God and her neighbours. If she expected a speedy response to this appeal, she was doomed to disappointment. The first principle of St. Vincent's direction was to wait and give time for the designs of Providence to manifest themselves; above all to do nothing on human motives and at the dictate of human reasoning, and though his penitent was sufficiently versed in the science of the saints to submit to the decision, it was none the less a trial to all her instincts and aspirations.

A letter written very soon after her husband's death to the Carthusian Fr. Hilarion reveals the thoughts that were passing through her mind at this time: "Is it not," she writes, "reasonable that after having given so many years to the world I should now give myself wholly to God? I protest to you, my dear cousin, that I desire to do this with all my heart, and that in a way that will be pleasing to Him. But I have much cause to distrust myself as regards my perseverance in holy aspirations, on account of the continual obstacles which I meet to the fulfilment of God's designs upon me. I beg of you accordingly, my dear Father, help me by your prayers to break those ties which bind me to all that is not God."

Mgr. Camus, still the confidant of Louise's anxieties, sends her the following paternal admonition in answer to a letter of hers which has not been preserved: "In truth, my dear child, I know not why your soul is troubled and believes itself abandoned. Why should this be so? You are no longer torn by conflicting interests. You belong entirely to a heavenly spouse, having lost your earthly one. . . . What dost thou fear? O daughter of little faith! Say to yourself what our Lord said to Mary at the resurrection of Lazarus: 'If thou believe

thou shalt see the glory of God.' What that will be I cannot now see clearly, though I believe firmly it will be made known in due time."

To wait before taking any decided step till God should manifest in an unmistakable manner His holy will, and meanwhile to lead a hidden life united with that led by the Holy Family at Nazareth, these were the propositions put before Louise both by her old friend, and her director, and she was henceforth to adapt her life to them and make them her own. Her notes of retreat show how this thought had sunk into her soul. "The rest of my life should be consecrated," she writes, "to tracing the holy hidden life of Jesus Christ upon earth," and as apparently she had written in these terms to St. Vincent, his answer shows his appreciation of them. "I shall preserve in my heart," he writes, "the words in which you express your generous resolution of honouring the adorable hidden life of our Lord in this manner—He having given you the attraction of doing so since you were a child. O my dear daughter, how impregnated this thought is with the inspiration of God, and how far removed it is from aught that savours of flesh and blood! In truth, that is the fitting standpoint¹ for the true child of God!"

Shortly after her husband's death Louise moved from the fashionable quarter of the Marais to the Rue St. Victor, in the parish of St. Nicholas Chardonnet. More than one reason must have influenced her in this decision. Michel, her son, was twelve years old, and the school which he attended was situated, as well as numerous other religious and educational establishments, in this parish. St. Vincent had also recently settled at the College of the *Bons Enfants*, which the Archbishop of Paris had made over to him as the cradle of his community of Priests

¹ *Assiette*, an untranslatable word, is the one used by St. Vincent.

of the Mission. Louise's straitened means—Antoine Le Gras having, according to her own showing, neglected his affairs in the interest of others—was another reason for her removal to less expensive quarters. Here, in this quiet locality far from the great world, Louise made a home for herself and her boy. No doubt she willingly severed her connection with the Court of Louis XIII, in which she could never have found herself anything but a stranger and a spectator. Still, voices—rumours—must have come to her from it, for at this time her nearest relations were high in the favour of the reigning king and his imperious minister, Cardinal Richelieu. But no sign of worldly avocation or tastes is visible in the rule of life which Louise marked off for herself after a retreat, and which belongs to this time. Prayer and meditation take a foremost place in it, and next to that work for her neighbour.

Her hour of rising is fixed for five in summer and six in winter. Her meditation, which is to last half an hour, is to be made on the Gospels, or life of the saint of the day. This is followed by Prime and Terce of the Office of our Lady. Then Mass, and subsequent work at home. Dinner at 11 o'clock is preceded by a short reading of the New Testament, and followed by ten minutes' prayer in honour of the mystery of the Incarnation.

After dinner she resolves "to set to work gaily" at her household duties, or work for the Church or the poor. She is to employ herself in this way unless prevented by having to receive or make calls at the voice of duty. Then comes a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, recitation of the Vespers of our Lady, and half an hour's adoration. Returning home she works, reads, makes an examination of conscience, followed by Matins, and the recitation of the Rosary, and so the day ends. Frequent

elevation of the mind of God during her work, at least four times in each hour inciting herself to acts of love of God, are amongst her resolutions. There are others also with regard to austerities and the frequentation of the Sacraments. She will go to Communion three times a week, and on those days wear instruments of penance. She will take the discipline two or three times a week, fast on all the Fridays in the year, vigils of our Saviour and our Lady's feasts, and those of the Apostles, as well as on all the days commanded by the Church. On non-fasting days she resolves to take two meals only, unless obliged to do otherwise out of consideration to the wants of her neighbour. "With the object," she writes, "of mortifying my vanity, my hastiness, and above all, with that of honouring the sufferings of Jesus Christ."

Small wonder that Louise's director, taking into consideration her weakly constitution, a fact of which this holy soul made no account, should have cut down her many fasts, and substituted some milder penitential exercises for her hair-shirts and flagellations.

Nothing is more striking in the saint's direction than its holy liberty of spirit. Whilst recognising the generous instinct of his penitent, who was willing to give *all*—time, health, life itself to her heavenly Spouse in return for all He had given her, yet he wished this done with prudence and discretion which the saints have called the measure of all virtues. Thus when Louise in her desire for union with the sacred humanity of our Saviour had formed a resolution to make thirty-three acts of adoration in honour of the thirty-three years spent by our Lord on earth, St. Vincent remarks: "With regard to the thirty-three acts of adoration do not worry if you fail in making them. God is love, and He wills that we should go to Him by the path of love. Do not therefore consider yourself bound by all these holy purposes."

On the subject of her Communions St. Vincent is firm ; no scruples are to be allowed to keep her away from the Holy Table. Thus on one occasion he writes : " You were ill-advised in giving up going to Holy Communion on account of the spiritual trial you were undergoing. Do you not see that it was a temptation ? And is it right therefore to give in to the enemy of Holy Communion ? Do you think by withdrawing yourself from God you can make yourself less unworthy of approaching Him ? This indeed is an illusion ! "

Louise had the habit from the time she became a widow of making two retreats in the year, one at the end of Advent, the other from the Ascension till Whit Sunday. St. Vincent approved of these temporary retirements—which were sometimes made at the Carmelites, and sometimes at the Visitation convent, where she found her great friend, Mother Catherine de Beaumont. At other times she made them at her own home. Her director drew up the rule which she was to follow. It consisted in three meditations of half an hour each, two in the morning, one in the afternoon, whilst three times a day she was to spend a quarter of an hour in spiritual reading. This was in addition to her daily Mass and recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. The subjects of her meditation, which were drawn up by St. Vincent, were generally taken from the life of our Lord, the spiritual lecture from the New Testament. He ends by saying, " Write to me every two days and describe briefly what has passed, and the state of your soul and body, and try and master your eagerness, doing all things quietly and sweetly in the same way that you can represent to yourself the holy Bishop of Geneva would have acted in your place." He adds this wise postscript: " I forgot to bid you not to overload yourself with rules and practices, but to strengthen yourself in your resolve

to perform well those you have undertaken, namely your daily actions and your duties. Dismiss from your mind all thoughts leading to singularity such as have tormented you hitherto, and from which the devil draws profit. I conclude with the prayer which I am making to our Lord that He Himself may be your Guide in your retreat, as well as His Blessed Mother."

A few notes made by Louise of her retreats have been preserved. They are brief, expressed in very simple language, and very characteristic of their author. The fundamental idea in her meditations is the example of our Saviour Jesus Christ; her book of Meditations is the holy Gospel; the object of them (thus she expresses herself) "is the contemplation of Jesus Christ in herself by the imitation of His virtues." Again, "I should strive to imitate Jesus Christ as a wife strives to conform herself to her husband's ways." "I must make Jesus willingly possessor of my heart, since reason instals Him as King of it." "I have desired to have no existence of my own, having been so constantly sustained by God's grace it seems to me all I am, or have, is due to Him." In future she will be content to spend her life "hidden in God, heedless of the testimony of man." Another resolution recorded amongst her scattered notes seems to foreshadow the future God had in store for her. "In imitation of our Blessed Lady I wish to dedicate myself to God for the service of my neighbour in a manner which will subject me to blame in the eyes of the world, thus imitating our Lord Who throughout His life despised all such considerations for the good of His creatures. All that I wish is to accomplish His divine Will." Later on she adds: "I will accept the choice that Jesus wishes me to make to serve Him in the most abject manner possible, with the least possible grounds for satisfaction from a worldly point of view."

Again, she notes down that "On one occasion, passing before the Blessed Sacrament, I was interiorly moved to place myself in a state of complete indifference, in order thereby to be more ready to receive the call of God, and to render His divine Will effectual in disposing of my whole life."

In her Advent retreats at the foot of the crib, which she calls "the throne of the King of holy poverty," she writes: "I have much desired to be admitted into this kingdom, this same poverty being the virtue best beloved by the King of the poor." There at the feet of the Babe of Bethlehem she asks Him to give her for life, as He gave Himself, a never-ending life of poverty and obedience. "Being rich, He chose a state of holy poverty and obedience which made Him subject to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. I implore Him with all my heart to give me the grace to imitate Him in this, unworthy of it as I am; but I trust as an effect of His goodness, that having long given me this desire He will enable me to carry it into action."

In her reflections during her Pentecost retreats she is led to draw an example from the zeal of the Apostles: "The Apostles, not content with going alone to meet our Lord on the mountain where He had promised to meet Him, took a great number whom they had invited by word and example with them; this I should imitate, whenever it is possible, by procuring the salvation of my neighbour for the glory of God." She is encouraged to do this by the example of the woman of Samaria, who after drinking in the water of life from the Saviour's words ran to announce to her people that she had found the Messiah, and so made the whole of Samaria participate in her joy at the heavenly visit.

It was on the conclusion of this retreat (one made soon after her husband's death) that, after writing out

a rule of life, she followed it up with the following humble and fervent consecration of herself to the service of God :

“ I, the undersigned, in the presence of God, having taken into consideration that on the day of my baptism I was vowed and dedicated to God to be His daughter, and that I have nevertheless many, many times sinned against His holy Will : considering also the immense loving-kindness and sweetness with which the good God has maintained me in the desire of serving Him in spite of an almost continual resistance on my part, for which I am deeply guilty, unworthy and miserable creature that I am : finally, coming to myself, I detest with all my heart the iniquities of all my past life which have rendered me guilty of high treason to God, and of the death of Jesus Christ, and have merited for me a punishment greater than Lucifer's. Nevertheless, confiding in the infinite mercy of my God, I ask of Him pardon and absolution from the bottom of my heart for the sins I have forgotten as well as for those of which I have accused myself, and especially for the bad use I have made of the Sacraments, for all of which I repent with all my heart, trusting to the merits of the death of the Saviour of my soul as the only foundation of my hope. It is in this confidence that I renew the professions made on my behalf to God at my baptism, and I resolve to serve and love Him with greater fidelity, and to give myself wholly up to Him. I also renew the vow I have made of widowhood, and my resolution to practise the holy virtues of humility, obedience, poverty, patience in suffering, and charity in honour of the same virtues in Jesus Christ, protesting that I will never offend Him again in any part of my being, and abandoning myself entirely to the designs of His Divine Providence to the accomplishment of His holy Will in me, to the service of which I desire to sacrifice and dedicate myself for

ever. . . . This is my irrevocable will which I confirm in the presence of God, the Blessed Virgin, my good angel and all the saints ; also before the Church militant in the person of my spiritual father, who, holding the place of God with regard to me, will if he please assist by his charitable help the execution of the said resolutions, and make me accomplish the Divine Will, I giving him my obedience with this object.

“ Mayst Thou be pleased, O my God, to confirm these resolutions and receive them with an odour of sweetness. And since Thou wert pleased to inspire me to make them, give me the grace to carry them out, O my God.” She concludes with, “ Thou art my God and my All ; I adore and recognise Thee as such. One only true God in Three Persons, now, and for all eternity.

“ (*Signed*) LOUISE DE MARILLAC.”

The following oblation she makes of herself to the Blessed Mother of God is also assigned by her biographer to this time : “ Most holy Virgin, take my son and myself under your protection, and may this choice I make of your guidance and protection be pleasing to you.” She then salutes first Mary’s Conception as “ Immaculate, the graces earned for man by her Divine Son having been anticipated in her regard.” She goes on to hail her, in every mystery of her life, as a model to virgins, to spouses, to mothers, and to widows. Above all, she honours her in her Assumption, which she declares to be “ the triumph of that heart consumed with Divine love which was the cause of the death of her holy body ; of that beautiful soul which had been chosen amongst millions on account of her fidelity to God’s designs upon her—of that blessed body united to a perfect soul and glorified with it by the testimony of the love borne by the Holy Trinity for her to all eternity.”

This devotion to the Immaculate Conception manifested by Louise is remarkable in the light of future events; as it was the Institute of which she was to be made Mother and co-foundress which was first to invoke Mary under the title of "conceived without sin," and to propagate a devotion which has been since rewarded by innumerable conversions and signal marks of Divine favour. Next to the love of God, which breathed in every utterance of this holy soul, came love for the poor. Much of her time was spent in visiting them and in working for them; also in nursing them in their own houses. Thus on one occasion St. Vincent writes to her to beg of her to moderate her too great ardour on account of the state of her health: "I beg you will abstain from visiting the poor to-day; you will thus honour the quiescence of the Son of God, Who will communicate to you the grace of humility, with that of compassion for the sick, in making you feel your powerlessness to carry out the longing with which your fervour inspires you."

Louise divided her time between making church vestments and work for the poor; and a letter is preserved from St. Vincent in which he records his gratitude in language worthy of St. Francis of Sales. He had just returned to his chapel in the *Bons Enfants*, where Louise's gift awaited him. "I was quite enchanted seeing your work suddenly on entering the chapel, not knowing I should find it there, and this pleasure, which lasted all yesterday, and which I still feel very deeply, has brought several thoughts to my mind. If God pleases I will tell you of them, but it suffices now to say that I pray God that He may embellish your soul with His divine and perfect love, whilst you embellish His house with these beautiful ornaments."

We may safely assign to these early years of Louise's widowhood some pictures painted by her, one of which

has been preserved, and is at present in the possession of the mother-house in Paris. It bears the inscription: "This picture has been painted by Mlle. Le Gras, our honoured Mother and Instructress." It is a representation of our Saviour standing with outstretched arms, His hands pierced, and with an expression of the utmost benignity in His face as if He were inviting all to come to Him. His Divine Heart is depicted on His bosom surrounded with rays. The figure is nearly life-size. Louise's letters mention pictures which she asks her director's leave to present to various churches and chapels, and Gobillon leads one to suppose that they were also her work. Pictures attributed to her have been preserved in Houses of the Order at Maily and at Bouloges, though we have been unable to ascertain what proofs there are of their authenticity.

A letter from St. Vincent dated October 1626, shows that he was much engaged at this time with missionary work. He writes from a village near Montmirail: "I received your letter here, at Loisy in the Brie district, where we are giving a mission. I did not inform you of my departure, as it was a little more rapid than I expected, and I was sorry to give you pain by telling you of it. Our dear Lord will, if it please Him, gain from this little sacrifice you will make, and will take upon Himself the office of directing you. Assuredly He will do this, and in a way that will show you it is in truth He who is doing so. Therefore be His dear child; be humble, and submit yourself to Him in complete confidence, waiting always patiently for the manifestation of His holy and adorable Will."

The first letter we have of Louise to her director is dated 15th of June, 1627: "I beg you will forgive," she says, "the liberty I take in expressing my soul's impatience, not only at your long absence, but at the pros-

pect of the future, and of my ignorance of your destination when you leave the place where you now are. It is true, Reverend Father, that the thought of the cause of your absence lessens my distress, but it does not prevent the days appearing to me, in my cowardice, like months. In spite of this I will try to expect God's hour in tranquillity, and to recognise that it is only retarded by my unworthiness. Our good God has during the last month allowed me more perception of His presence in my soul than is usual with me, nevertheless I am not cured of my imperfections. If I did not place obstacles to the effects of the prayers which I owe to your charity I believe there might be a chance of my amendment. I have had a great desire during the last few days that you should remember to make an offering of me to God, and should ask Him that His holy Will may be accomplished in me notwithstanding the obstacles caused by my shortcomings."

St. Vincent's answer to this humble and touching appeal is as follows: "No, Mademoiselle, you do well to seek light in your doubt about our Saviour's designs upon you without any fear that you are burdensome to me. Once for all, know, that when God has appointed some person in His wisdom to advise another, that individual is no more troubled by the instructions which his penitent asks of him than a father would be by the like petition of his child." He ends his letter: "Let therefore our Saviour abide in our hearts, and our hearts in His, so that they may be three in one and one in three, and we may desire nothing but what God wills."

We see no sign during the years that elapsed between her husband's death and the first occasion when St. Vincent invited her active co-operation with the works of charity in which he was engaged in May 1629, that Louise's thoughts had reverted either to the Franciscan

Order to which as a young girl she had been so deeply attracted, or to that of the Visitation. Neither of these Orders, much as she loved and revered them, offered her the prospect of that life of active charity at which the goodness of God had vouchsafed her a moment's glance, but as to which she still awaited a further manifestation of the Divine Will.

Meanwhile her director was continually enlisting her services for his poor missions, and in aid of the Associations of Ladies of Charity¹ which he founded in connection with them. In October 1827 he asks for fifty livres to help to establish a confraternity in a district where the Catholics were very poor. He tells her to assure the person who had advanced the money that our Lord Himself would be surety for it, and that he had already spent four livres in establishing a *Charité* that had been started there. He adds: "We find very great temporal as well as spiritual destitution here; a number of rich Huguenots have taken advantage of the relief they have given in order to corrupt the people, and have inflicted untold injuries in so doing. You may send us four more under-garments." In January 1628 the saint asks for another kind of service from Louise. "Will you," he writes, "exercise your charity towards two poor girls whom we have thought it expedient to send away from here, and whom you may expect in eight days' time? and will you see that some respectable woman takes charge of them, unless you know of any good lady who requires their services?" A letter follows shortly afterwards thanking Louise for having taken one of these "good girls" into her employment, and for various articles which she had sent for the use of the Association.

During the winter of the year 1628, Louise became

¹ This name being exceedingly lengthy we propose adopting the saint's abbreviation for the Associations—of *Charités*.

acquainted with a holy servant of God whose singular life and striking piety attracted much attention at that time. His name was Antoine Flandin-Maillet. A peasant by birth, he had been educated for the priesthood, but after entering the novitiate of the Recollet Order he felt himself called by Him Whom he habitually spoke of as "his Good Friend" to lead the life of a hermit. Later on he took to a nomad life, and was given the name of the "pilgrim of Christ." St. Vincent said of him: "I look upon this good brother as one of the holiest persons of our generation." Besides his gifts of wisdom and piety, which were the cause of many conversions, Brother Antoine manifested an astounding power of reading the secret of souls. Many went to consult him, amongst others the Queen-Mother, Marie de Medicis, and like the rest she was filled with admiration of his wisdom and simplicity.

Louise was amongst the number of those who bared their souls to him, and the notes she took of his advice to her have come down to us.

"The first thing said to me by Brother Anthony," she writes, "was that we should be always united to God, and utterly dependent on Him, attribute all honour and glory to Him, be satisfied with all that befalls us, desire only what He desires, and practise fidelity to Him on all occasions." Louise confided to him the trouble and remorse she had felt when she had been once on the point of death because she had so far done nothing in the service of her neighbour, and she ended by telling him that she was going to employ the rest of her life in trying to make up for her past deficiencies. "I learned," she continues, "from this good Brother, that it is not the habit nor the rule of life in which the love of God consists, but in the preparation of a heart disposed to consider only His good pleasure." Doubtless her mothers'

heart revealed itself in this holy conference, and she confided to Brother Antoine that her worship of her only son disputed the possession of it with God and His possible designs upon her, as she notes: "The Brother told me that I should look upon my son in the light of a son of God only, and love him as such, and suffer for the love of God the deprivation of his society."

This interview was probably the first and last Louise had with Brother Antoine, as he met his death soon afterwards from wounds and blows inflicted on him by a dissolute mob in Paris.

Prayer, the duties of her state of life, the service of the poor, and the cultivation of such talents as she possessed for the glory of God and the good of her neighbour—these were the "strong things" which Louise de Marillac took hold of, and with which she filled her days during the first two years of her widowhood. Early in the third year, when her son Michel had reached the age of fourteen, at the advice of St. Vincent she took him away from the day school which he had hitherto attended and entered him at the semi-ecclesiastical college of St. Nicholas de Chardonnet. That the change was welcomed by the youth himself, who, like many boys of that age, seems to have had a passing attraction to the priesthood, we learn from a letter of St. Vincent's, in which he expresses his pleasure at hearing that Michel is determined to go to college, and he begs of the mother not to grieve too deeply at the approaching separation.

Michel entered the college early in the year 1628, and thus the daily intercourse which must have been of such unspeakable consolation to the mother's heart ceased, and she no longer saw him except at stated and distant intervals. It is impossible to doubt, however, that all Louise's hopes for her son would have been fulfilled had he persevered in his intentions and become a priest.

Such, however, was not to be the case; the youth, before he had been long at the seminary, tired of the life and asked to be taken away from it. He subsequently tried other professions, but a certain fickleness of disposition and weakness of character prevented his success in any, and were long a cause of deep anxiety to his mother. St. Vincent's letters to his holy penitent at this time, and long afterwards, contain frequent allusions to Michel. He inquires after the boy or gives her news of him, or consoles her for his absence, and on one occasion rallies her gently on her too great absorption in her son, saying: "I have never met a mother in whom motherhood was more strongly marked than in you. In nothing else are you so eminently feminine."

The immediate effect of this loosening of home ties was that Louise had more time to give to good works. Accordingly we find St. Vincent's appeals to her for help and co-operation in his many charitable enterprises increasing in frequency in the succeeding months. The Association of Ladies of Charity had been already established in considerable numbers, especially in Paris and its neighbourhood; and here Louise could feel that whilst following the promptings of her heart she was also acting under holy obedience.

It was on the 6th of May, 1629, that St. Vincent for the first time sent Louise on a mission, in which she acted as his representative, to examine into the organisation of the newly-founded *Charité* at Châtillon, and report its progress to him. As this was to be henceforth her life's work, before following up her journey thither, and the developments to which it led, we propose giving a chapter to tracing these charitable institutions to their source: namely, in the history of the man of God to whom they owed their origin.

CHAPTER III

VINCENT DE PAUL was born on the 24th of April, 1576, in the parish of Pouy near Dax. His father was a small peasant proprietor and an honest God-fearing man, and, perceiving signs of great piety and intelligence in his son, he made considerable sacrifices in order to have him educated for the priesthood. M. Vincent—to adopt the name which was given him universally during his lifetime—was ordained in the year 1600. Previous to his ordination and for four years afterwards he took in pupils as a means of livelihood, while at the same time he occupied himself in studying for his degree in the College of Toulouse. He took his degree in 1604, and followed it up with a journey to Bordeaux. His object in going there has never been ascertained, but it led him into serious debt, and when, on his return to Toulouse, he discovered that he had been left a legacy by an old woman of the town, it became an object of some importance to him to secure it. This led to a journey to Marseilles; the money was of the nature of a bad debt and was held by a scoundrel of that city, who, in spite of being well off, refused to give it up. M. Vincent was successful in his suit and started off on his return home. Having taken ship from Marseilles to Narbonne, the boat he was in was attacked by Turkish pirates, several of the crew were killed, all brutally treated, and M. Vincent

himself bore till his death marks of a wound received in his arm. The prisoners were landed on the coast of Barbary, and after having been paraded through the streets of Tunis were sold to the highest bidder. Vincent became the property of an old doctor and astrologer, who kept him constantly employed in heating furnaces in the wild hope of discovering the philosopher's stone. His treatment of Vincent was uniformly kind; and before his death, which occurred ten months later, he had confided many curious secrets to his slave and pupil, amongst others an infallible cure for the stone. On his death Vincent, with the rest of his master's property, reverted to a nephew, and by him was sold to a renegade Savoyard who carried him off to his farm in the mountainous regions of Barbary. The rest of his adventures must be given in his own words: "One of the three wives owned by this man—who was of the Greek Church though schismatic—had a noble soul, and took a great liking of me; and though herself Turkish, she eventually by the mercy of God became the instrument of converting her husband from apostasy, restoring him to the fold of the Church and freeing me from slavery. Being curious to find out our manner of living, she followed me daily to the fields where I was accustomed to work, and in the end she desired me to sing the praise of my God. The recollection of the Israelite children singing their 'quomodo cantabimus in terra aliena' in Babylon brought tears to my eyes, and caused me to sing the psalm 'Super flumina Babilonis,' then the Salve Regina, and several other things, in which she took a pleasure which was truly amazing. She failed not in the evening to tell her husband that he had done wrong to give up his religion, for, judging by the account of our God that I had given her, she had conceived a very high opinion of it; this was also increased by reason of these praises

which I had sung in her presence, in which (she said) she took so deep a delight that she did not think the paradise of her fathers, or the one she hoped for herself, could be more glorious, nor accompanied with more joy than what she experienced when she heard me singing God's praises; and concluded by saying that there must be something marvellous in it. Thus like another Balaam's ass, or a Caiaphas, did this woman hold forth, with the result that her husband told me next morning that only the opportunity was wanting for us to escape to France, but the means would be forthcoming, and that in a very short time, to the glory of God. This short time lasted no less than ten months, during which time he fed me with vain hopes, which were at last realised; and we escaped in a small sailing vessel, which landed us on the 28th of June at Aigues-Mortes, and soon after we went to Avignon, where the Vice-Legate publicly, with tears in his eyes and a sob in his voice, reconciled the renegade, in the Church of St. Peter, to the glory of God and the edification of the spectators. The said prelate detained us both in order to conduct us to Rome at the termination of the three months, which will end on the feast of St. John, when his successor shall have arrived. He had promised the penitent to procure his entrance into the austere Order of the *Fate bene fratelli*, he having made a vow to that effect." ¹

As M. Vincent's debt had not yet been wholly discharged, this was a matter of considerable importance to him, though, as we are informed later, the promise was never fulfilled. A letter from M. Vincent to the same friend and correspondent shows that he was in Rome part of the following year and was attached to the person of Montoris, the papal Legate. In 1609 he was employed on a confidential mission to Henri IV, and returned to

¹ *St. Vincent de Paul, sa Vie, son Temps*, etc., par Maynard, t. i. p. 41.

Paris in the character of an unofficial emissary of the Holy See ; but although his interviews with that monarch have been recorded by his biographer, their purport has never been divulged. M. Vincent's life in Paris from 1610 to 1612 need not detain us long. He offered his services as chaplain to the great hospital of La Charité, and, becoming known for his self-sacrificing zeal in the service of the sick and poor, he was chosen by Margaret de Valois, wife of Henri IV, as her almoner.

It was during the course of these two years that M. Vincent became acquainted with M. (afterwards Cardinal) de Berulle, an acquaintance which soon ripened into friendship, and which was to have considerable influence on his after life. These two holy souls had much in common—above all, a burning zeal for the glory of God, which in the case of de Berulle bore fruit in a great and much-needed work for the reform of the clergy. It was under the influence and probably through the initiative of de Berulle that M. Vincent was offered and accepted the little parish of Clichy, a poor and neglected suburb in the neighbourhood of Paris, where at last he found work absolutely suited to him, and in which his love of souls found full vent. Here he spent nearly two years, at the end of which time he was persuaded by his friend, who was also his director, to go as tutor to the sons of Count de Gondi, general of the French galleys.

“The just man lives by faith.” No better explanation can be given of this incident in the life of our saint. He left a charge to which he must have felt he was eminently suited, in which he was working wonders—for in the short time of his residence there he had built a fine church and reformed the whole parish—to go and occupy a most uncongenial post, which took him away from his beloved poor and brought him in daily contact with the gay society of the French capital. But

God had spoken to him in the person of his director ; to his humility that was enough.

M. Vincent occupied the post of chaplain and tutor in the de Gondi family for ten years ; but the duties of tutorship were superseded by one which was to prove beyond any doubt the designs of Providence in his regard. This duty or office was that of director to Mme. de Gondi. This excellent woman had not long enjoyed the benefit of his direction when an accident revealed both to priest and penitent the deplorable ignorance of the greater number of the peasants on the vast properties owned by the de Gondi, for the salvation of whom she rightly felt herself to a large extent responsible. This event appears to have been a landmark in the life of both ; with Mme. de Gondi it resulted in important schemes for the good of her tenants, some of which she lived to see carried out ; and with M. Vincent a renewed desire to give himself up to missionary work.

Six months later (in July 1617) M. Vincent, with M. de Berulle's concurrence, accepted a parish which was offered to him in the province of Dombes and which bore (to him) the special recommendation of having a poor and scattered congregation. Once more, at Châtillon, as at Clichy, M. Vincent's zeal and holiness worked miracles. His sermons were attended with striking conversions, and his influence was felt wherever he showed himself ; but he was not allowed to remain there long. Mme. de Gondi exerted all her influence with M. de Berulle to procure M. Vincent's return, and was finally successful ; and it was not till her death in 1625 that he severed his connection with the de Gondi family. Though Mme. la Générale (as Abelly calls her) gained her point, the success remained with the saint, and from that moment not only did she do nothing to interfere with his projects, but M. Vincent found in her an invaluable

support and coadjutor in all his great works for the glory of God and the good of his neighbour.

The beginning of the Association of the Ladies of Charity dates from M. Vincent's residence at Châtillon, and arose from a slight cause. M. Vincent had asked from the pulpit after Mass the help of the congregation for a poor family, who were stricken with disease. His holy words, burning with charity and love of God, had their usual effect; and going himself in the direction of the cottage after vespers he met a great number of the congregation on their return from it, many of whom, exhausted by the heat, were resting under the trees by the side of the road. He took occasion to point out their mistake, saying: "Your charity is great, but it is ill-regulated. These sick people have been given too much food at a time, consequently half of it will be spoilt and wasted, they will then have to fall back on their previous state of destitution."

These words fell on attentive ears: at his instigation a confraternity was formed of members of the congregation. M. Vincent drew up its rules, which three months later were confirmed and approved of by the vicar-general of Paris.

The rules are distinguished by great simplicity. They begin by stating that membership is open equally to married and unmarried women and widows, but in the case of the two former classes the consent of husbands and parents must be gained before they were to be admitted. There was to be a Council composed of a President, and two assistants, one of whom should be treasurer. The confraternity was placed under the protection of Jesus and Mary, and every word of the beautiful and simple summing-up spoke of the holiness of the saint who composed it. After going into minute details as to the food with which the poor should be supplied,

he speaks of the manner in which they should be served. He recommends that the visitor, on entering the sick person's room, should greet them kindly and cheerfully, and after washing their hands and saying grace, and making all the needful preparation of food, should then charitably invite them to eat "for the love of Jesus and His holy Mother," and all this with the same amiability "as she would use in serving her own son, or rather, the Son of God Himself, Who treats as done to Him all she does for the poor." In speaking of the spiritual side of the service of the poor, he makes use of these touching words: "Since this institution is not intended solely for the corporal help of the needy, but also to assist them spiritually, so the servants of the poor should try and make it their study to dispose those who are regaining their health to lead better lives, and those who are likely to die to make a good death, having this object in view in their visits, praying to God and raising their hearts to Him frequently with this intention. Besides this they might occasionally read with profit a pious book to those whom it would be likely to benefit, exhorting them to bear their pains patiently for the love of God and believe that they were sent for their greater good, and try to induce them to make an act of contrition which should consist of regret of having offended God out of love of Him, and a petition for forgiveness with a firm purpose of amendment. They will take care to inform the parish priest, should any be in danger of death, so that he may administer the last sacraments to them. They should lead their patients to place all their confidence in God, and to think of the Passion and death of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and recommend themselves to our Lady and the angels and saints, especially the patron saints of the town as well as of those whose names they bear. All this the visitors will do with great

zeal to co-operate for the salvation of souls, thus leading them as it were by the hand to God."

The remaining rules refer to the meetings, which were to be held on stated days and in a certain manner. A list of pious practices is drawn up for the use of the members; and they were enjoined to receive the Sacraments on four days in the year, namely, on Pentecost Sunday, the Assumption, and the feasts of St. Andrew and of St. Martin.

Before M. Vincent had left Châtillon he had the satisfaction of seeing the Association firmly established in the parish. Mme. de Gondi was not slow in appreciating the good which was likely to accrue from this work, and with her warm concurrence similar Associations (*Charités*) were set up first at Villepreux, then at Joigny and Montmirail, and in thirty other parishes dependent on the house of de Gondi.

This work, great and far-reaching in its results as it was, in a sense occupied a secondary position only, in M. Vincent's estimation. His missionary experience in two poor and obscure parishes had opened his eyes to the deplorable ignorance of the peasantry in the poverty-stricken districts of rural and suburban France. The incident at Montmirail to which we have already alluded pointed to the good which might be done by missionary priests who would devote their lives to visiting the people, preaching to them, and lifting them out of the rut into which they had sunk. Mme. de Gondi, ever zealous for the salvation of souls, was prepared to second any steps taken by the saint by her influence and wealth. Again M. Vincent waited: in a matter of such importance he would allow no human voice to sway his opinions: it was for Providence to point out the way. Though he waited, it is not to be supposed that he was inactive. Mme. de Gondi had promised to settle 16,000 livres a

year on a community of priests who would give retreats every five years to the villagers on her estates, leaving the choice of the Order to M. Vincent. Under these circumstances he had recourse first to the Jesuits, who, after much correspondence with the General in Rome, declined to interfere. He then turned to the Oratorians; they also did not consider the work compatible with their Rule and would have nothing to do with it. These protracted negotiations lasted nearly seven years, during which time M. Vincent, indifferent to all discouragement, continued his self-sacrificing work in the provinces, sometimes, as at Maçon, organising relief work for the beggars who crowded the slums—distinguishing between the really necessitous and the impostors—starting *Charités* at other places, and everywhere preaching and converting souls to God.

The solution came in 1624, when Archbishop Jean François de Gondi handed over the *College des Bons Enfants* to M. Vincent as a first step towards the establishment of a congregation of missionary priests, whose chief duty it would be to go about preaching and teaching wherever they were invited or their presence required. The saint accepted the decision as coming to him from the hand of God; and placing M. Antoine Portail, his first and devoted follower, in possession, he continued to live at the Hôtel de Gondi. A little more than a year later Mme. de Gondi died, but not before she and her husband (as co-founders in this admirable work) had made over the promised income of 16,000 livres in perpetuity to the congregation of the Missions¹ in the person of Vincent de Paul. After the saint had paid fitting tribute to the memory of his benefactress, he hastened to Mar-

¹ This congregation of missionary priests became better known under the name of Lazarists; also, especially in the British Isles, as Vincentians.

seilles to break the news to her husband, who was on duty at the time with the fleet under his command. Having done so he returned to the *Bons Enfants*, where he was joined soon afterwards by François du Coudrai and Jean de la Salle, who with M. Portail share the honour of being the foundation-stones of the new congregation.

It was, therefore, when this work of God was still in its infancy that Louise de Marillac first made acquaintance with M. Vincent and sought his direction. In the year 1629, when he first invoked her aid in connection with the rapidly increasing *Charités*, it had already made vigorous growth and was sending out roots in all directions. Probably it was on account of the ever-increasing burthen of work which was coming upon him that the saint felt the necessity of sharing it with one who—like him—would see God alone, and in all things, and at the same time join “a man’s heart to a woman’s thought.”¹

One detects accordingly a certain solemnity, as beautiful as it is simple, in the terms in which the saint addresses her when sending her out on this Divine mission for the salvation of souls. Besides a memorandum of instructions and letters of recommendation to ecclesiastical authorities, he writes to her as follows, borrowing the formula of priests when sent on missions.

“Go then, Mademoiselle, in the name of God. I pray the Divine Bounty to accompany you, that it may be consolation on your pathway, your protection against the ardour of the sun, your shelter against cold and rain, your soft couch in your fatigue and lassitude, your strength in labour. May it bring you back in good health, and full of good works. You will go to Holy Communion on the day of your departure in order to honour the charity of our Lord and the journeys He took

¹ 2 Maccabees vii. 21.

out of charity, and the pains and contradictions and fatigues and toil that He suffered from the same cause; and in order that it may please Him to bless your journey, to give you His spirit, and the grace of acting in this spirit, and to enable you to endure your pains in the same manner as He endured His own." His instructions which follow allow of much latitude; she is to stay one or two days at each parish, or more if she finds it expedient, and "above all," he begs of her, "take care of your health, which I beg of God to preserve to you."

Louise de Marillac's itinerary, as mapped out for her by M. Vincent, led her first to Montmirail, which had been the scene of one of the earliest of his missionary enterprises, and where she must have seen, and saluted on entering the town, one of the statues of our Lady which he had caused to be erected over all the four gateways on the occasion of his solemn consecration of it to the holy Mother in 1618. The journey was made in a public coach, a convenience of doubtful luxury, which Louise was not always able to secure, her missions frequently leading her to villages out of the route of public conveyances, when she was thankful for a cart, or horse, or mule, to enable her to reach her destination. The hospitality which was accorded to her was of the same character as the means of progression, in other words, rough in the extreme. Her desire was ever to share in the poverty and privations of those she had come to succour, and her wishes were frequently granted. The life led by the peasants of France in the seventeenth century has been described by the well-known writer La Bruyère; and there is no reason to suppose that the picture he has drawn is exaggerated. "We see scattered about in the country districts," he writes, "certain wild animals male and female, black, livid, all burned by the sun, attached to the soil which they culti-

vate with invincible obstinacy and perseverance. They are articulate in their speech, and present on rising to their feet a human appearance; and as a matter of fact they are of the *genus homo*. At night they retire to dens and feed on black bread, water, and roots. They spare the rest of mankind the trouble of sowing and gathering in the harvest in order to live, and thus deserve that they should not want for the bread which they have sown."

If the life led by the villager was a little more civilised than that described by La Bruyère, his food was not much more luxurious. It consisted chiefly of barley or rye bread, which, baked at considerable intervals, presented the consistency of leather and was only made palatable by being steeped in soup made from the produce of the vegetable garden, or from herbs culled in the fields. To this was added, on days of feasting, a lump of coarse bacon. The poverty of both peasant and villager, and even the ordinarily well-to-do middle class, had been aggravated in these unhappy times by the devastation wrought by civil war, and the crushing taxes imposed by the Sovereigns of the day to enable them to keep up their armies.

It was to these unfortunate people that Louise de Marillac came like an angel from a better world, nursing their sick, feeding the old and helpless, and speaking to them of a Christ of Whom they had scarcely heard, and of a Heaven, the happiness of which He longed to share with them, and which He had purchased for them with His precious Blood.

There was more work waiting for Louise on her return to Paris during the autumn of the same year. The Association of the Ladies of Charity had been started some years previously in her parish of St. Nicholas, as well as in that of St. Sauveur in which she had previously

lived; but apparently, in spite of the encouragement given by the priests, it had not been a success. The rules, well adapted as they were found to be for country districts, were not equally suitable to the town dweller; hence arose first dissatisfaction, then a falling off in the numbers of the workers. M. Vincent put the matter in the hands of his coadjutor, who accordingly revised them and received the following letter of approval from him: "You have done an excellent work in thus adapting the rules of the *Charité*, and it has my full approval." She was soon afterwards elected as superior or president of the Association, when (as the rules prescribe) she took her turn on appointed days of visiting the poor in their own houses, taking them their food, rendering them all manner of service and attending to their spiritual requirements. A severe outbreak of plague made these services of the poor in their insalubrious homes one of heroic self-devotion. So great was the panic of infection that we read in the annals of French society that the ladies of the court refused to meet or even exchange letters without much parade of fumigation, and many other precautions. That Louise was constantly exposing herself to such risks in the heroism of her charity, we know from letters which have been preserved from M. Vincent, in which he warns her to use precautions against the contagion and above all to "avoid all imprudence."

"The disease goes on increasing here," he writes; "there are two houses stricken with it between your house and this one." And another time: "The plague has broken out in a house opposite, but our Lord keeps us all in good health."

In December of the same year Louise started for Asnières, a village in the neighbourhood of Paris; and her notes on the journey have been fortunately preserved.

"I started," she writes, "on Wednesday in the Advent Ember days for Asnières, with some anxiety about the journey on account of my bad health. But the thought that I was taking it under obedience fortified me, and at Holy Communion that day I felt interiorly pressed to make an act of faith, of which I retained all day the impression. It then appeared to me that God would give me health as long as I should have confidence, without possessing any ground for it, that He would give me this strength—recalling how He caused St. Peter to walk upon the waters. In short, during the whole of the journey it seemed to me I was acting without any personal volition; this I did with much consolation, thinking how God willed that I should help to make Him known to my neighbour, in spite of my unworthiness."

In February in the following year, after hearing M. Vincent's Mass and communicating, she made the visitation at his desire of the *Charité* of St. Cloud. She has left notes also of this journey: "I left Paris on the feast of St. Agatha, 1630, to go to St. Cloud. When receiving Communion it seemed to me that our Lord put the thought before me to receive Him as the Spouse of my soul, and even to make me look upon it as a manner of espousals. I felt myself so strongly united to Him by this consideration that the effect was indescribable, and I conceived a great longing to leave all in order to follow this divine Spouse, and to look upon Him thenceforward as such, and to endure all the difficulties I should meet with in the light of His giving me a community of goods with Him."¹

This being the anniversary of her marriage, she continues, she had wished to have had Mass said for her intention, but she had refrained from a spirit of poverty, and in order to make an act of entire dependence on

¹ Gobillon, vol. ii. p. 163.

God. "I said nothing about this to my confessor, who said the Mass at which I communicated; but on going up to the altar the thought came into his mind to offer it up for me as an alms-deed, and to say precisely the Mass of the espousals."

That this journey was successful in its objects we learn from a letter from M. Vincent dated 19th of February, in which he says: "I praise God, Mademoiselle, that you have had health to be of service to the sixty persons for whose salvation you have been working. But I pray you to tell me exactly whether your chest has not been troubling you in consequence of your having to speak so much, or your head from the effects of so much worry and noise?"

Louise found a very unsatisfactory state of things at Franconville; the rules had been altered beyond recognition. Instead of a *Charité* she found a pawnshop, where the poor, who should have been nursed for the love of God, pawned their clothes in order to pay for their nursing and attendance. Here all had to be remodelled on the original lines.

Louise's next visit to Herblay was full of consolation. The members of the Association had retained all their first fervour; she had nothing but words of praise for them.

At Villepreux, whither Louise was sent early in 1630, she made the mistake of not calling first on the parish priest. As this was on the de Gondi property, and she went there with the full approval of its reverend owner (now a humble priest of the Congregation of the Oratory), also of his chaplain, the omission is easily explained. Nevertheless M. Vincent administers the following quiet rebuke to his penitent: "I think," he writes, "that you would perform an act pleasing to God if you called on the parish priest, and excused yourself for having with-

out his advice spoken to the Ladies of Charity and to the women, thinking you were free to do so quite simply at Villepreux as you did at St. Cloud and elsewhere. This will teach you what you should do on future occasions. If *M. le curé* is not satisfied, you should, according to my advice, stop what you are doing. Our Lord will perhaps get more glory from your submission than from all the good you are likely to do there."

Louise obeyed, and thus secured the excellent priest's warm concurrence in her good work, and (as Abelly says) "he joyfully accepted her services for the good of his flock." The result of her exertions at Villepreux was that she had to take to her bed, but only for a short time, as we find *M. Vincent* writing soon after to congratulate her on her recovery:

"Thanks be to God, Mademoiselle, that you are in better health, and for the satisfaction it is to you to work for the salvation of souls. But I fear that you are undertaking too much, and to prove that I do not say this without cause, observe what *M. Belin* remarked to me on this subject. Pay special attention to this, I beg of you. He says 'Our Lord desires we should serve him with judgment, and what is opposed to this should go by the name of indiscreet zeal.'"

Louise's exertions brought on a second illness or relapse in a visit she made in the autumn to Villiers-le-Bel. On this occasion *M. Vincent* seems divided in his mind whether to condole with her or congratulate her on the share our Lord had given her of His sufferings. He writes thus on the 22nd of October: "Is not your heart rejoiced, Mademoiselle, at your finding yourself worthy of suffering in the service of God? Assuredly you owe Him a very special gratitude. Do your utmost to make good use of it, and ask for grace of Him to accomplish this object."

To Louise was confided the care on the occasion of her visits to the different Associations of seeing that the proper persons were appointed as office-bearers; for "Besides being servants of the poor they had to be servants of God." "The confraternities," M. Vincent wrote on one occasion to Louise, "should be composed of persons of known virtue and piety, whose perseverance can thus be trusted. Try to make them resolve on frequenting the Sacraments regularly as well as on visiting the sick as often as they can do so."

It was necessary, therefore, in order to keep the Association in its first fervour, for Louise to make enquiries into the character of these appointments; and on more than one occasion when these had failed in reaching the high standard she required she applied to M. Vincent for instructions. The saint most frequently showed a great tendency towards leniency. Thus at Montmirail, when information had reached Louise of the past shortcomings of one of the Associates, he intercedes for the delinquent: "Perhaps," he writes, "the bad report you have had about N. is false, or she may have corrected herself of those faults. Magdalen, directly after her conversion, was admitted into our Lady's companionship and followed our Lord. Being myself a great sinner I can never reject those who have sinned, as long as they show signs of good will."

One of Louise's principal avocations when visiting these country and village districts was catechising the children and preparing them for the Sacraments. At that time there were no diocesan catechisms. It is due to Vincent de Paul and the movement set on foot by him to evangelise the country districts of France that little by little the Bishops started these manuals of Christian doctrine for the use of their dioceses.

The catechism composed by Louise, and which she

used in teaching the great truths of religion, has been preserved, and is eminently suited to a child's intelligence, being full of practical illustrations.

"What does a Christian mean by making a sign of the cross?"—is one question. The child answers that he is making a profession of the mysteries of our faith. "If you saw a fire prepared would you be ready to be put into it rather than deny our holy Faith?" To this the answer is: "Yes, by the grace of God." "How should a Christian live?" "By following the example of our Lord whilst He was on earth," and then she follows this up with an explanation of our Lord's life and the sense in which it was imitable.

The catechism includes stories from the Bible and the lives of saints, also explanations of the ceremonies of the Mass. This is followed by an example of what should be a Christian's rule of life. The morning prayer, Mass, assisted at very devoutly, whenever it is possible; the examination of conscience, and then the thought from time to time in the course of the day: "God sees me."

"What is the use of saying to oneself frequently during the day: 'God sees me'?" the catechist asks. "Because, if we are tempted to commit sin, this thought would stop us." Again she insists on the simple devotion, easily practised, of pronouncing five times the name of Jesus in honour of the five wounds of our Lord.

Louise was not satisfied with instructing children herself, or with giving them a catechism; she never left a district without making provision for the future, either by finding some person capable of taking her place, or training a member of the *Charité* to undertake this duty. Her zeal was so indefatigable that we find her complaining to M. Vincent of the too numerous holidays given to the school children, to which he replies that she might represent to the parish priest the short time she had at

her disposal, and that what she was doing for the children should not be looked upon as giving them lessons, but as exercises of piety, and thus possibly gain his consent for their continuance. She had a breakdown of health soon afterwards, which produced the following remonstrance from him. "How can you expect, Mademoiselle, to get cured, when you are speaking so much as you must do (in catechising) with this sharp air, and a heavy cold on you! Undoubtedly if you recover your health you may say God has cured you." A few days later, having got better news, he thanks God that she is recovering, and adds: "This being the case, you may, if you please, go on till you have reaped all the benefit that you have done previously in other places. But should you show any symptoms of a relapse, do not stop till you are laid up but come away at once."

M. Vincent was never tired of warning his penitent against imprudence. "For the love of God, and His poor members," he wrote on one occasion, "take care to preserve your health, and do not do too much. It is a snare of the devil, which he uses to deceive good souls to cause them to undertake more than they can manage so that at last they can no longer do anything at all. The Spirit of God incites people sweetly to do all the good they can reasonably accomplish, in order that they may do it perseveringly, and for a considerable length of time."

In no diocese did the Associations of the Ladies of Charity reap greater fruit, or were more warmly welcomed than in that of Beauvais, the occupant of the see, Mgr. Pottier de Blancmenil, being a holy man and a friend of M. Vincent. He was, moreover, one of the first French bishops to bestir himself in the great cause of the reformation of the clergy, beginning with retreats and pious exercises, at which he assisted himself, for the seminarists and young priests of his diocese.

M. Vincent, in his letters to Louise, whilst she was engaged in a round of inspection to the *Charités* of this diocese (which included the villages of St. Sauveur, St. Etienne, St. Martin, St. Gilles, and of La Basse Œuvre), shows a minute acquaintance with the capabilities of each village and district—no detail being passed over by him, either of person or place, which could be made use of for the good of souls. In one village he names a M. Richard. “One of the best men I know, and married to a pious wife.” It is with this family he recommends Louise to lodge. At another village he wished her to appoint the excellent Madame de la Croix as treasurer to the Association. His letters to her, whilst she was visiting this diocese (as her biographer remarks), give the pleasing impression of a diocese governed by a holy prelate and peopled by a pious flock. In such a country we are not surprised to find that Louise’s mission of charity, supported as it was by her glowing words and touching example, produced the greatest fruits, besides winning many hearts; but (as Abelly tells us) she only availed herself of these successes in order to establish the Associations with greater love and zeal. When she first started these meetings the ladies who came in great numbers were delighted with the discourse she held with them. Their husbands, not being allowed to be present on these occasions, found their way into the houses where the conferences were held, and hid themselves in such a manner that they could hear her without being seen, and they also went away delighted and astonished with what they had heard. Before she left the diocese of Beauvais she had the joy of starting eighteen Associations; and so great was the impression she produced on a grateful people that when she left Beauvais to return to Paris they turned out in great numbers, and accompanied her a

part of her road, invoking God's blessing on her for what she had done for them and their children. It was on this occasion that it is related that a child who had approached too near her carriage fell under the wheels, and great fears were entertained for his life. Much moved by the painful incident Louise prayed to God and the child on recovering consciousness was found to be totally uninjured, to the astonishment of the bystanders.

CHAPTER IV

IN the previous chapter we have traced Louise de Marillac's course through her first experiences of what was henceforth to be her work in life. Later on, under the fostering eye of a saint, it was to attain unforeseen developments, but already, according to his own expression, she had found her *assiette*. She was to devote herself to honouring the hidden life of our Lord and working for the souls, and bodies, of the poor and the afflicted. That she had long had a strong attraction to this calling or vocation, even before the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to her on Whit Sunday had laid her doubts to rest, and lifted for a moment the curtain which hid her future from her, is clear from what we know of her early life. But though her joy must have been great at being at last allowed, and even encouraged, to follow this attraction, there were trials in store for her, which, even if they did not rob her of her peace, must have been pain and anguish to her affectionate nature. For she was to see her two nearest relations—her own flesh and blood—suffer disgrace and punishment, and the hitherto honoured name of de Marillac dragged through the mud.

The year 1626 saw the two brothers Michel and Louis at the height of their fortunes. Louis XIII had taken the privy seals from the Chancellor Aligre in order to bestow them on Michel de Marillac, and so highly did the youthful Sovereign value his rectitude and faithful

services that he is reported to have said that he would that his Council could be composed wholly of de Marillacs. "As for this one," he added, "the link between us is for life and death. If he was in the Indies I would send to have him fetched back."

Michel signalised his accession to power by passing a law in 1629 which was an honest attempt to grapple with the evil of the day—peculation in all departments of the State. This much-needed measure of reform (called the Code Michau by the wits of the Bar) was levelled at all abuses in high places such as military, civil, and even ecclesiastical courts. Michel was probably the last person to foresee how nearly this edict would attack his brother's fortunes, and through Louis his own. Their close connection with Marie de Medicis was the primary cause of their downfall. From the beginning of the differences between Louis XIII and his mother, which gradually spread to open warfare, the de Marillacs took the side of Marie de Medicis. The final encounter between the King and Richelieu on the one hand, and the Queen-Mother and the de Marillacs on the other, took place on the 10th of November, 1630. The *journée des dupes* is the name by which this day is known in contemporary history.

On this occasion Marie de Medicis challenged her son to choose between his minister and herself. It was a trial of strength, and Richelieu adroitly refusing to pit himself against the King's mother, withdrew from the contest; thus for the moment the ball seemed to be at her feet. The favourite was dismissed; Louis de Marillac was promised the command of the army, and Michel appointed Prime Minister. Their triumph, and that of the Queen-Mother, was shortlived. The following day Richelieu was recalled, Michel deprived of the seals of office, and exiled to the fortress of Châteaudun.

A more terrible fate still awaited the field-marshal. Richelieu was determined on the destruction of the family which stood between him and his ambitions. Their downfall must be complete. Accordingly he caused an inquiry to be made into the disbursements made in behalf of de Marillac from the royal exchequer for the army under his command in Champagne. The result was a foregone conclusion. His was no exception to the universal rule; one which permitted (or perhaps it would be more correct to say, winked at) the heads of departments enriching themselves at the expense of the State, and of their subordinates. The Commission sat for a year and a half, and finally gave a verdict of guilty, and by a majority of one condemned him to death; the minority having voted for banishment or perpetual imprisonment. That the verdict was a just one can scarcely be denied; for the evidence proved unmistakably that the Marshal's defalcations had been of a most serious nature, extending even to levying large sums on the pay of the army under his command, and on the bread and fodder supplied to the troops. He was also accused of appropriating money which should have been applied to the fortifications of Verdun.

Except for those who realised the relentlessness of the enmity of the great Cardinal, the sentence must have come as a thunderbolt; for de Marillac's code of honour and probity was neither better nor worse than that of the greater part of his contemporaries. The words which he is credited with when he heard it show what the misdemeanour was in his eyes. "Peculation! Embezzlement! A man of my quality condemned on such an accusation! There is nothing more than hay and oats in the whole of my indictment. There is not cause for the flogging of a flunkey in it!"

The sentence and its execution were indeed unheard-of

events, and stirred all the noble and influential classes of France to their depths. Nevertheless certain clauses of the "Code Michau" drawn up by his brother dealt with precisely the misdemeanours proved against Louis de Marillac, and their penalty was death. Every effort was made to have the sentence reversed or commuted, but Richelieu was inflexible, and the King was for the time wholly under his influence. He was decapitated on the 10th of May, 1632.

The words of condolence which M. Vincent addressed to Louise are as noble as they are touching. He utters no word of condemnation on the sentence, such as possibly would have been balm to a heart so cruelly wounded. He does not judge the judge or the culprit. The salvation of the unhappy man's soul is all that concerns him, or that he would have to be the chief concern of his penitent. "What you tell me about M. le Maréchal de Marillac," he writes, "seems to me worthy of deep compassion, and has much distressed me. Let us honour God's good pleasure in this as in all things, and the happiness of those who honour the torments of the Son of God by partaking of them. Provided our relations go to God the manner of their going is unimportant, and observe that this manner of death is one of the surest of any as regards eternal life, when made good use of. Let us not pity him therefore, but submit to the adorable Will of God."

Louis de Marillac left no widow to lament his tragic death. His wife, who had been Louise's intimate friend, died in September 1631, six months before the end of the trial, her death having doubtless been hastened by anguish and suspense. This loss was another link gone in the chain which bound Louise to the past, and there remained now only the uncle who had watched over her lonely youth and girlhood, perhaps the best beloved

of all. Though Michel's spotless reputation, justifying Condé's description of him, *Innocens manibus et mundo corde*, saved him from sharing in his brother's fate, it did not preserve him from disgrace and imprisonment. But "stone walls do not a prison make," and Richelieu, though he had power over the body of his victim, had none over his soul. Realising, as de Marillac probably did from the first, that release would never come to him on this side of the grave, he consecrated his captivity to "the affairs of the crown of Heaven, and the State which will last for all eternity."

Letters from M. Vincent which were carefully preserved by the penitent show that Louise in her affection for her uncle was disposed to go to lengths on his behalf that her director considered undesirable, for in his answer to her letter consulting him on some scheme (unknown) on M. de Marillac's behalf, he distinctly negatives it, saying that it would be a mistake for her to entangle herself in any political movement which might be hurtful to the sacred mission for which grace had been given her, and which had been providentially entrusted to her. In a second letter dated a little later, M. Vincent gently recalls to her the duty of abiding by advice which she herself had solicited, and then recommends her to ask counsel of the Eternal Wisdom. "As regards M. de Marillac, I am in favour of all that seems good to you, but beware of hampering yourself. It seems to me in such matters that it is best for a person having asked the opinion of another to abide by it, and not to return to the point when the advice is contrary to their wishes. Nevertheless do whatever our Lord suggests to you. He cannot advise you, of that I am very sure, anything but what is most perfect."

That Louise submitted on this, as on all other occasions, cannot be for a moment in doubt. The decision

may have cost her dear, as in a letter from M. Vincent which belongs to this year, though undated, he tells her : " Our Lord will see to it, especially if you are happy in finding yourself at the foot of the Cross, where you are at present, and which is the best place you could occupy in all the world. Love to be there and fear nothing."

There was a gathering at the country house of the Atticci family in the course of the summer of 1632, where the remaining members of the de Marillac party who had been expelled from Paris since the month of March 1631 had assembled. Amongst them, and (we are told) the most implacable of any was the beautiful Anna Doni de Atticci, who a little later became the wife of Henri de Rochecouart, Comte de Maure, and brother of the Duc de Mortemart. She had been one of the most determined and persevering in her efforts for the revision of her uncle's sentence, humbling herself even to the extent of seeking the intercession of Mlle. de Comballet, Riche-lieu's niece, in his favour. Her anger at her failure was in proportion to her efforts and her disappointment. We read that when Mlle. de Comballet expressed to a mutual friend her regrets at not meeting her on some occasion, Anna de Atticci's answer was that she " could not make up her mind to meet the niece of her uncle's murderer."

With sentiments such as these Louise could have little sympathy, but M. Vincent must have divined her longing to share the sorrows of her afflicted family, and accordingly he writes to encourage her to go on this mission of charity. " It is not (as you seem to think) to pay this visit (to Atticci) without sufficient cause to go at the desire of the lady of the position you mention,¹ and who perhaps has need of your counsel in order to

¹ Baunard thinks this was Marie de Medicis, who being a niece of Mme. de Marillac, was closely connected with the Atticci family.

make up her mind to do something really good. Go then, Mademoiselle, go in the name of our Saviour, and with His blessing."

Louise obeyed; and besides bringing the comfort of her sympathy to her own relations we find her seizing the opportunity of pursuing what she must now have felt to be her mission in life, namely, visiting the *Charité* in the neighbourhood, catechising the children, and visiting the sick. It was whilst staying at Atticci or soon after her return to Paris that she heard of the death of her uncle, Michel de Marillac, which took place on the 7th of August, 1632, after nearly two years' imprisonment in the fortress of Châteaudun. He had devoted these years to prayer and study; and a translation of the book of Job and the Psalms were some of the fruits of his captivity. Shortly before he died he wrote to his sorrowing children that he was "nearing the haven of blessed liberty," and his last words before he breathed forth his soul to God were: "I belong no more to this world. *Vado ad Patrem!* Yes, my God, Thou callest me. I go to Thee." A few days later the news of this last blow to his penitent's heart must have reached M. Vincent's ears, as he writes to her in the octave of the Assumption: "I pray the Blessed Virgin to raise your heart to Heaven and to put it in her own and in that of her beloved Son. Let tears of sadness drown your heart and the enemies of mankind thunder and grumble as they please, yet doubt not, my dear daughter, that you are none the less dear to our loving Saviour. Lately we have had great rains and thunder and lightning, but the weather now is no less beautiful on account of the storm."

Though the storm, as the saint so truly foretold, passed over the head of his penitent, leaving her, as sorrows in faithful hearts such as Louise's are wont to do, more

detached from the world and nearer to God, it did not divert her from the charitable works which now formed her principal occupation in life. The Associations of Ladies of Charity had spread with great rapidity during the years 1630 and 1631 throughout Paris and its environs, so that St. Vincent a little later could speak of them as having been established in every parish of the Archdiocese. The success of these organisations was great, but much care had to be exercised to ensure all the benefits to them required by their founder. At St. Sulpice, for instance, he writes to Louise: "You are much wanted at the *Charité* of St. Sulpice. Some beginning has been made, but from what I hear, everything is going on so badly that it is really pitiable. Perhaps God has reserved to you this occasion of doing good."

A little later we read the same story with regard to the parish of St. Benoît. "We have just started," he writes, "the *Charité* here. I cannot make out from what spirit it arises, but every parish in Paris wishes to take some line of its own, and will have no connection with any other. Or else they want to make a hotch-potch, taking something from St. Sauveur, St. Nicholas, something else from St. Eustache."

Of the many works of charity taken up by M. Vincent, none were nearer his heart than that which concerned the sick galley-slaves. From the time that he had received the appointment of almoner to the galleys from Mgr. de Gondi he had never ceased working for these unfortunate prisoners, and especially for the sick amongst them. With this object he had, as early as the year 1622, hired a house in the Faubourg St. Honoré, whither he contrived to have these outcasts of society conveyed who were expiating their crimes in the dungeons of the Conciergerie till such time as it was convenient to move them to the galleys. Ten years later (in 1632)

he obtained possession, by the King's warrant and that of the sheriffs of the city, of an ancient tower in the neighbourhood of the Seine; and this he converted into an infirmary which he or one of the priests of the Mission visited continually, exercising all the works of mercy in their regard and preparing for death such as were *in extremis*. It must have been in the same year in which the hospital patients were moved from the St. Honoré to their new abode that M. Vincent writes to Louise to interest her and the Ladies of Charity in behalf of his poor convicts.

"Mademoiselle," he writes, "charity towards these poor outlaws is incomparably meritorious in the sight of God. You have done well to assist them. Continue doing so in any way in your power until we meet, which I hope may be in two or three days. Think whether it is possible for your association to take charge of this good work, for a time at least. You could help them with the surplus money you may have. Still, I am not blind to the difficulty, and merely suggest the idea to you for what it is worth."

This suggestion, *jeté à l'aventure* as M. Vincent says, was taken up warmly by Louise and her friends, for (to quote Mgr. Baudard) "a great breath or inspiration of charity seems to have been brought to bear upon the appalling misery of Paris at this period. It could not be called in common justice a *fashion*, as the leaders amongst them, though they belonged to the so-called fashionable class, in embracing this new way of life abjured the world and all its pomp and vanities, and became in truth 'servants of the poor.'"

Such were Mlle. Pollalion (*née* Marie de Lumagne), always in the front rank where love and zeal for God's glory were concerned, *la bonne* Mlle. Sevin (as M. Vincent styles her in his letters), Mlle. Guérin, an indefatigable

pursuer of good works, Mlle. Dufray and Mlle. Dufresne. The last was the wife of Mgr. de Gondi's comptroller, and one of the saint's best friends. To these we must add the name of Mme. la Présidente Goussault, whose whole life was devoted to works of charity, and between whom and Louise de Marillac there existed a strong link of sympathy and affection.

The autumn of the year 1631 was spent by Louise, at M. Vincent's desire, in an extensive visitation of all the *Charités* on the de Gondi property. This time he took care Louise should be provided with letters addressed to the priest of each parish, stating that Mgr. the Rev. Père de Gondi having witnessed the great good done by Mlle. Le Gras at Villepreux and Montmirail for the instruction of youth, wishes that the curé to whom the missive is addressed should procure similar benefits for his parish. The letter ends by requesting that the curé should give out at the end of his sermon that the mothers are asked to bring their children to Mlle. Le Gras at the hour appointed by her, in order that she might instruct them in Christian doctrine. Also, that as she is well versed in the affairs of the Association of Ladies of Charity, it would be advisable for her to assemble these with the curé's sanction and approval.

It would be wearisome to give a list of the villages and townships visited by Louise on this occasion, but they were sufficient to employ her from early in September to the 10th of October, when we find M. Vincent begging her to go to St. Georges', where matters required her attention. So great was M. Vincent's confidence in Louise's knowledge and discretion, that he leaves all details to her, writing as follows: "I do not judge it necessary to send you a memorandum: our Lord will enlighten you and be your guide," and again in another letter he assures her, "God alone knows, Mademoiselle,

what He has done for me in giving you to me, and in heaven you will know."

Hitherto Louise had worked in the dioceses of Paris and Beauvais only, but in her last journey, though still on the de Gondi lands, she had passed over into the diocese of Châlons-sur-Marne. Here difficulties awaited her, and it was in answer to her inquiries as to her future steps that M. Vincent writes thus: "If Mgr. de Châlons should ask to see you, you had better wait upon him at once, and tell him frankly and simply the reasons for which the Rev. Père de Gondi requested you to take the trouble to go to Champagne, and what you are doing there. Offer to cut down whatever he sees fit of your programme, or give it all up if he prefers your doing so. I see no blessing to your work except in so doing. Mgr. de Châlons is a holy man; you should look upon him as the interpreter of the Will of God. . . . If he should wish you to leave, do so tranquilly and cheerfully, recognising in this the Will of God."

The bishop held to his objections, and M. de Gondi being consulted showed the humility and submission of a priest before his superior, and waived his seignorial rights, much as he must have regretted the loss to his people. Accordingly M. Vincent writes on the eve of All Saints that "All things considered, Mgr. Rev. Père de Gondi to his great regret is of the opinion you had better give in to the bishop's wishes. . . . Such being the case you had better come away; you will not derive less recompense than if you had instructed all the children in those districts. How happy you should be that you bear this resemblance to the Son of God, in that you have like Him been obliged to retire from that province, where, thank God, you were doing no harm. The Rev. Père de Gondi will thank you for the trouble you have taken, and manifest his sympathy with you,

and I must beg of you not for a moment to think that this has happened through any fault of yours. No! it is not that, but a simple disposition of God for His greater glory and for the greater good of your soul. Perhaps you may never have an occasion in which you could do more for God than on this one."

The winter of 1631-2 brought another trial to Louise, one which must have been the occasion of many prayers and heart-searchings, not only then but in the years that were to come. These were caused by her son Michel. The boy (we gather from the numerous allusions made to him in the letters of M. Vincent) was of the kind that can be aptly described as "nobody's enemy but his own." He seems to have been of an affectionate nature and agreeable manners, but having no particular bent or much powers of application, he was first drawn one way and then another, and persevered in nothing. At one time he was anxious to become a missionary priest at the *Bons Enfants*. But he soon tired of this, and having come under the influence of some youngster of his own age he insisted on giving up the cassock for the dress of the young men of the day. A compromise was effected, and it was arranged that Michel, who was now nineteen, was to continue his studies at the College of St. Nicholas, and board at the *Bons Enfants* in his mother's absences from home. Louise had, therefore, the consolation of knowing that her son was well looked after, and also of getting constant news about him in every letter written to her by M. Vincent. Sometimes it is only a word or two, just to assure her that he is in excellent health; on another occasion he mentions that Michel had told the Brother Robert that he is very cheerful and happy there; and again that she is to be quite happy about Michel, as only two or three days previously he had seen him at his studies and he was well and happy.

In the following year, Michel having expressed a wish to go in for a more advanced course of studies, his mother, under her director's advice, entered his name as a student at the Jesuits' College. Here also his career was constantly supervised by M. Vincent, and in September he must have greatly consoled the mother's heart by the following encouraging news of her son. "Yesterday," he writes, "your son returned to College in perfect health. He was studying here six hours a day by himself. The Fr. Principal shows much affection for him, and proposes giving him a room to himself, which is no small favour. He was so happy with us that when I bade him farewell yesterday he was greatly affected. This shows what a good nature he has. I feel sure you will receive consolation from him. We must pray to God to continue His grace and favour to him." Though Louise's anxieties must have been momentarily laid to rest by this reassuring letter, she could never have been entirely free from them. Apart from the religious side of the question, her straitened circumstances, of which M. Vincent's letters to her give convincing proof, made it a matter of considerable importance that Michel should show some wish to take up a profession in which he could support himself, and in due time settle down and marry; but this he showed little desire to do, nor did he for many years afterwards.

CHAPTER V

IF in chronicling the history of the foundation of the company of Sisters of Charity we should try to trace it to its earliest source in the minds of its holy founders, we should be inclined to find this in a brief memorandum made by Louise de Marillac soon after she had been sent on her first mission as visitor to the Association of Ladies of Charity.

This document lays down rules with regard to the helpers whom it had been found necessary to employ to supplement the services given to the sick and distressed by the Ladies of Charity, especially in Paris, when these were prevented from attending personally to the wants of the poor.

The paper is drawn up by Louise for her own guidance, and was submitted to M. Vincent for his approval. The contents are as follows:

(1) The superior will be free to admit into the company any village maidens whom she considers fit for the work to be set before them. It will be in her power to dismiss them if she finds them unsuitable, or to transfer them from one place to another; she will direct them in the ways of salvation; she will also train them in the service of the sick according to the objects and intentions of the confraternity, and in the instruction of poor children. She will likewise when necessary correct them.

(2) These girls are on their side to look upon the ladies

and widows as their mothers—honouring the person of the Blessed Virgin in them, and obeying their superior as they would our Lord and Saviour. They will go cheerfully wherever they are sent, whether to the town or to the country, and be equally satisfied to return when recalled by the said superior, and they will wait on the sick, and show the ladies of the Association to whom they are sent how to serve and assist them. They will only go out, as far as possible, two at a time, either to church, or to get their provisions, or when visiting the sick. They will never allow men to enter their rooms nor stop on the roads to speak to them. They will teach the little children in the villages, and try to train some one to take up their work in their absence; and all this they will do for the love of God without looking for recompense.

Great stress was laid, it may be observed, on peasant girls being employed in preference to others, and St. Vincent in one of his conferences gives his reason for this choice. "I speak very willingly," he said on this occasion, "of the virtues of good village girls, on account of the knowledge and experience I have of that class, being myself the son of a labouring man, and having lived in the country till I was fifteen. For many years we have worked in the village districts, and I can truly say that there are few people who have a greater knowledge of the ways and morals of the poor villagers than have the priests of the Mission." He then gives his reasons for his early preference of them as Sisters of Charity: "The true peasant girls are very simple. They use no subterfuges or cunning in their speech. They are not wedded to their own opinions, but are prepared to believe simply what they are told. One may observe a true humility in some of these women—that is, in the good ones, the result of which is, that they have no

worldly ambitions. They are satisfied with what God has given them, and ask only for food and clothing. Their speech is humble and truthful. They scarcely understand praise when they receive it, and pay no attention to it. The good village girl is very moderate in her food, the greater number being satisfied with bread and soup, though they work incessantly and their work is not light. They are also remarkable for their purity. They never remain alone in the company of men, do not listen to their flatteries, and never look them in the face. . . . They are extremely modest in their behaviour and in their dress, which is coarse in the extreme. They are satisfied with their poverty, confiding in the infinite goodness of God. Do you know any class of people who put more trust in the Divine Providence than the good country-folk? They sow their seed, and then expect their harvest of God; and if it fails they still never lose confidence in His power of giving them food for the rest of the year." Again he says later on: "Where can one see greater obedience than in these peasant girls? They come back from their work weary, muddy, exhausted, in order to partake of a meagre repast, and if the weather is favourable, and their father or mother sees fit to order them, they return to their labour without a word, paying no attention to their fatigue." And after describing thus the virtues of the model peasant girl, M. Vincent points out that these also have been the characteristics of the early members of the Sisters of Charity. "You know your first Sisters were simple village girls in whom the holy love of poverty shone brightly, and it is by this love that you will be recognised as true Sisters of Charity."

As early as the year 1627 a letter of Louise de Marillac makes allusion to a girl of this class in life who was being sent to her from Burgundy as a helper; also to

another, who had been working for four years under the supervision of the Fathers of the Oratory, and whose recommendation was that she was *tout à fait villageoise*, and for whom likewise Louise found a home. In February 1630 we find mention in M. Vincent's correspondence of a young girl from Suresne whom he describes as a real apostle, and who by her life of devotion (short though it was) deserves to be considered one of the foundation-stones of the new Company of Sisters of Charity. M. Vincent himself gives her simple life-history in one of his conferences. The impression left in reading it is that it was only a saint like him who could have done justice to the story.

"She was but a poor country girl," he says, "and she may be said to have had hardly any master but God. Her name was Marguerite Naseau. She had no idea of reading, and yet, having a strong inspiration from heaven to teach children, she bought an alphabet, and being unable to attend a school in order to be taught the letters she used to steal away to the parish priest or his curate to ask what the four first letters were, and so on till she had mastered them all. Then whilst herding the cattle she set to work to learn her lessons, and sometimes when a passer-by had the appearance of a person of education she used to ask: 'Could you tell me, sir, how to pronounce this word?' Thus little by little she learnt how to read, and then she began to teach the little girls of her village; and after a time she made up her mind to go from one village to another to teach children. She also persuaded two or three other girls whom she had taught to read to make the same resolution, and to carry it out in the same manner, going from one village to another. What is most striking about this is, that Marguerite Naseau undertook this work without money, and with no provision except

her dependence on Divine Providence, so that she was constantly without food, and had to sleep in shelters with nothing but bare walls. She worked night and day, not only at the instruction of little children, but also of grown-up girls; and this for the glory of God, without the slightest self-interest, never giving a thought to her own wants, and leaving everything to God. She herself told Mlle. Le Gras that having gone several days without bread, and having said nothing to any one after her return from Mass, she found a supply of food sufficient to last her for some time. The more she worked for the education of youth, the more she was laughed at, and slandered by people who could not understand her objects in the life she was leading. But this only increased her zeal and self-devotion. Her detachment was so great that she gave away all she possessed, drawing even on her bare necessities in order to succour her neighbour. She helped several youths to become priests who had not the means of education, giving them food and encouraging them to persevere in God's service, and these became eventually excellent priests. Whilst she was leading this life, hearing that there was a confraternity in Paris whose object was to nurse the sick poor, she was impelled to go and join it, in order to practise charity in a more perfect manner. She came to me, and I having proposed this life to her she accepted it. Thus she became the first Sister of Charity, and she attracted to the confraternity some of the girls whom she had helped, and put them under the charge of Mlle. Le Gras." Such is St. Vincent de Paul's account of the first recruit in this holy company. That it was not in God's designs to leave her long to be a source of edification to her sisters in religion only proves that God's ways are not our ways.

M. Vincent's letters between the years 1628 and 1633

contain frequent allusions to peasant girls who evinced a desire to give themselves up to good works and whom he recommends to Louise to examine in order to test their capabilities for service under the Ladies of Charity. As these increased in numbers (for, in spite of a falling-off of a minority, the greater number persevered), it became more and more necessary to give them a Rule of life of a more definite nature than the one already laid down for their guidance by Louise. The earliest of these developments was her introduction of the rule that the subjects should go through a trial of their spirit and capabilities before being admitted to the number of helpers of the Ladies of Charity. Later on, we find in a letter without date, but probably belonging to this period, M. Vincent corresponding with Louise on the subject of a retreat made by one of these postulants under her care. He prescribes her spiritual exercises, the books—Grenada, Busée, and lives of saints—which she is to read, and so forth.

A fresh outbreak of the plague in February 1631 renews M. Vincent's fears for his penitent and her now numerous charges. One of the first to be attacked by it was the heroic *fille des champs* Marguerite Naseau.

"You can well believe, Mademoiselle," he writes on the 24th of that month to Louise, "how my heart feels for what you are suffering. I believe that with the grace of God you are in no danger. As for Marguerite it would be well to get the parish doctor to visit her if your physician makes any difficulty about attending her. M. Cotti is easily alarmed, and it would be a good thing to see about this instantly."

A memoir of these early members of the Company records in a few lines Marguerite's life after she had been accepted by M. Vincent as a helper to the *Charités* in Paris:

“She was attached successively to three parishes; and all three regretted her deeply when she left them, as every one loved her, as indeed she had nothing in her which was not worthy of love. Her charity was so great up to the end, that she died in consequence of having taken a poor girl attacked with the plague to sleep with her. Then, having caught the complaint, she went off to the hospital of St. Louis in joyful conformity to the Will of God, having bid farewell to the Sister who was with her as if she knew that death awaited her.”

Mgr. Baunard truly describes this heroic soul as “Servant of children in their homes, servant of the poor, the sick, the plague-stricken; in turn teacher and hospital nurse, obedient, generous, loving, finally a victim to her devotion to the unhappy. God who puts the mighty oak in the acorn put the Sister of Charity whole and entire in this lowly ancestress of the company. Immolations of this kind may appear to delay the progress of a work in the course of nature; but such intercessions hasten the accomplishment of God’s designs.”¹

Though M. Vincent in the letter we have quoted above was satisfied that Louise was in no danger, he thought otherwise a day or two later:

“I have just heard an hour ago, Mademoiselle, of the accident which happened to the girl whom your nurse took away, of the doctor’s opinion about it, and how you went to visit her. I must own to you that my heart was so much touched by it that had it not been in the night I should have started off at once to see you. But the goodness of God towards those who have given themselves to Him for the service of the poor in the confraternity of the Charity, not one of whom up till now have suffered from the plague, gives me absolute

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 129.

confidence that you will not suffer from what you have done." After saying that neither he nor any of the priests of the Mission, who had been exposing their lives daily by ministering to the plague-stricken, had caught the disease, he adds these prophetic words: "No, do not be afraid! Our Saviour wishes to make use of you for something which will serve to give glory to Him, and I believe He will preserve you for this."

It was probably about a year later, according to Abelly, M. Vincent's biographer, that Louise in a letter (which like all written by her has been destroyed) proposed to devote her life to the charge of these servants of the poor, to whom already she gave most of her time and constantly sheltered under her roof.

"As for the proposition you make, Mademoiselle," he writes, "I beg you once for all not to think of it again until such time as our Lord should make it appear that He wishes it. At this moment He gives me no indication of this being His Will, rather the contrary. One may have many good desires, but all may not be according to God. Saul in seeking for an ass found a kingdom. St. Louis sought the conquest of the Holy Land, instead of which he gained a victory over himself, and a crown in heaven. You would wish to be the servant of these poor girls, and God wishes that you should be His servant, and perhaps that of others more perfectly than you could be in the manner you propose. And supposing even you were His only is it not sufficient for God that your heart should thus honour the tranquillity of our Saviour for you to be in the state He wishes to see you in order to serve Him? The Kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Ghost; it will reign in you if your heart is at peace."

"Again we may notice that if, as seems most probable, this letter had reference to the work in question, it was

Louise de Marillac first of all, and she alone, who took the initiative in this institution, because the Spirit of God not only inspired her with the light but also gave her the attraction. From which we may conclude that she was its Foundress from the first moment of its existence.”¹

Still, though M. Vincent discourages her from taking any immediate steps in the matter, he does not forbid her to contemplate possible changes in the future when God's designs upon her were more fully disclosed; and he ends his letter by saying: “Be assured that you will thus be in the state God asks of you, and whence you may pass into others, should He judge it expedient for His greater glory.”

The time was not, then, far distant for which M. Vincent waited, and which Louise foresaw as the consummation of her desires and sacrifices; but before it came to pass she was to go through another experience as trying as it was unexpected. We should know little of this strange episode were it not for M. Vincent's letter, which, with its mingled sympathy and expostulation, puts the matter in the clearest light to his penitent and to us:

“I am indeed grieved for your grief! But, after all, what actual harm do you apprehend from what has taken place? A gentleman goes about saying you have promised to marry him, and it is not true, and people are making false accusations about you, and you are afraid of being talked about! Well, so be it; rest assured that this is one of the best means you could have as long as you are in this world of being in a state of conformity to the Son of God; and that you will thus acquire a self-conquest to which you could not attain through any other means. Oh, how much vain

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 131.

self-satisfaction is crushed by such idle reports, and how many acts of humiliation are the result! Believe me, nothing but good can come of this, both for this world and for the next. Fortify yourself therefore by grace against these human sentiments, and the day will come when you will bless our Divine Saviour for the trials He is now sending you."

Perhaps the instinctive answer Louise made to these rumours was to give herself henceforth with even greater devotion to the service of God. M. Vincent, writing to her towards the end of the year 1633, after approving of her desire to teach some poor children, remarks: "You may employ yourself in this little undertaking whilst waiting for greater ones, should the Divine Goodness approve. He who is faithful in small things shall be given greater. Be faithful then in what you are now about, and perhaps our Lord will see fit to employ you in a more important work."

The work to which the saint alluded was then either just begun or about to be commenced, for it was on the 29th of November of that year that he had assembled together four or five peasant girls, tried helpers of the Ladies of Charity in Paris, and formed them into a company with Louise as their head and first superior.

Gobillon mentions this event in these words: "These peasant girls, who up to this time depended on nobody except the ladies of the parish, had no coherence, no link to bind them together, no superior in common to direct them; thus they were often found wanting in their service of the sick, and in their exercises of piety; and when it was necessary to change them from one place to another, or to send them to freshly-established Associations, it was not easy to find subjects who were properly trained. For this reason M. Vincent judged it necessary to unite these girls in a community under the

guidance of a superior in whom he had recognised for so many years consummate prudence, exemplary piety, and an ardent and indefatigable zeal. He committed to her the charge of these girls, who were to live in community under her roof. Louise de Marillac was living at this time close to the church of St. Nicolas du Char-donnet: she founded the community on the 29th of November, the vigil of St. Andrew, 1633."¹

The names of these four or five girls are unknown, and even the house under whose roof Louise first sheltered the little community is a matter of surmise. The probabilities are that it was a house in the ancient street "Rue des Fossés St. Victor," with two windows on to the street, and a low door, giving access into a long dark corridor. It has been renamed, and is now 43, Rue du Cardinal Lemoine.

The following prayer found amongst Louise de Marillac's papers shows something of what was passing through her soul on this memorable occasion:

"My God! I have had I know not what fresh light concerning a love, which should be no common one, which Thou askest of souls whom Thou hast chosen to show forth the purity of Thy love upon earth. Behold us! few in number, can we aim at these heights? It seems to me we have this idea strongly in our hearts; but the knowledge of our weakness, of our past infidelities, makes us fear that Thou wilt repel us. Nevertheless, the knowledge that Thou hast put no limit to the number of times that we should forgive makes us hope that Thou wilt treat us in the same manner; and since it is so we believe in Thy love for us. Since, O God, Thou hast given us Thy Son Thou must needs love us, and we also are persuaded that we love Thee. . . . Behold us then, O Saviour of mankind, at the foot of

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 43.

Thy Cross fulfilling those words of Thine: 'When I shall be lifted up I will draw all men to myself.'" The prayer ends with an ardent act of love of God.

Ten years later St. Vincent recalled these early beginnings in a conference to the Sisters of Charity.

"Make no mistake," he told them, "God alone formed your company. We never had a formal design of founding it. Who would ever have imagined that there would have been Sisters of Charity some day at the time when you first came to serve the poor in a few of the parishes in Paris? My daughters, I never thought of it! Your Sister superior never thought of it either. It was God then who thought of it for you. Accordingly He it is of Whom we can say that He was Founder of your company, as in truth we can discover no other."

Henceforth M. Vincent was unremitting in his devotion to the interests of the community of Sisters of Charity. Whenever he could spare the time he visited them in their little abode, or when summoned away to the affairs of the Missions he wrote to explain his absence, or to announce his return.

No record, unfortunately, has been preserved of the two first conferences given by him to the Sisters. Ever afterwards notes were taken which give us, almost verbatim, the words spoken by him on these occasions. The first of these opens with words of congratulation:

"Divine Providence, my daughters, has assembled you all here with the design, it appears to me, that you should honour the human life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. What advantages are there not in living in community! Each individual participates in the good done by the whole body, and by this means receives a more abundant grace. Observe, too, that our Lord Himself has promised you His grace in saying that where two or three are assembled in His Name He will

be in the midst of them. All the more reason is there for His being with you when you are all united with the object of serving Him. 'If you love me,' our Lord has said, 'My Father and I will come and abide in you.' This may be specially understood of those who are of one mind and in this one mind lead each other to love and honour God. Thus our Lord in the last prayer He made before His Passion said: 'Father, I pray that those whom Thou hast given me may be one, as you and I are One.' Let us love this Divine Saviour then, and love Him above all things; then will our souls be led by His holy Providence as a vessel is guided by its pilot."

Thus Louise's desires formed by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost were at last realised to the full. It was made possible to her, in a manner hitherto quite unforeseen, to live in community, and yet for there to be "coming and going"¹ with the object of succouring the poor, the ignorant, and the afflicted for the love of God. Even with regard to the manner that this was to be effected, her prayer was heard; for where could she have found less personal satisfaction, or humbled herself more, than in training peasant girls to nurse the sick, or teaching them their prayers or their alphabet? She had asked to know by some unmistakable indication what the Holy Ghost asked of her, and this she received in the advice and approval of her saintly director, who, after so long holding her back, at last consented to all she had asked of him. Gobillon, describing this crowning moment of Louise's life, says:

¹ It will be remembered that when Louise's uncertainty about her future was set at rest by a Divine revelation on Whit Sunday 1623, and she was given to understand that a day would come when she would be able to work for the poor and yet live in community, she wondered how this could be done "*à cause qu'il devait y en avoir allant et venant.*"

“ Having taken charge of this rising company, Mlle. Le Gras took such joy in the vocation that she wished to consecrate herself wholly to it. Thus on the feast of the Annunciation in the following year, 1634, she bound herself by an irrevocable vow to the work, renewing at the same time her vow of chastity. And ever afterwards, as long as her life lasted, she offered up Communion once a month in thanksgiving to God for having called her to this state.”¹

This day, the 25th of March, is still solemnised by the Sisters of Charity, by whom it has been chosen for the renewal of their vows.

Soon additions were made to the community, the Sisters being generally found by M. Vincent when occupied in his missions in the country, as he still adhered firmly to his opinion of the superior pliability and simplicity of the peasant class over the urban one. With this reservation, or predilection, excepted, he appears to have thrown his net very wide, and to have rejected none who were desirous of serving God in the person of His poor. For instance, he writes thus to Louise in favour of a member of the third Order of St. Francis who had presented herself, asking to continue to observe its rules after joining the community: “ Let us leave this good girl to follow the practices of the third Order since she belongs to it, and let her have a separate meal (meagre) on Wednesdays.” On another occasion he writes on the subject of a widow with two children, who was quite illiterate: “ I wish the widow of Colombe knew how to read, but send for her that we may see her. . . . What is to be done about her two children ? ” In spite of these obstacles she was received, went to school, and was a success. A number of these early postulants were boorish in manner, and ignorant even of

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 45.

the rudiments of education, but great fervour, humility, and the skilful training which they received from the hand of their *Sœur Servante*, as Louise styled herself, frequently transformed them into perfect Sisters of Charity. At times, apparently, Louise's courage gave way with regard to a few who appear to have been quite incorrigible, and it was on an occasion of that sort that M. Vincent wrote to her: "With reference to what you tell me of those Sisters, I do not question your description of them; but we must hope that something can be made of them, and that the practice of prayer will make them see their defects and encourage them to correct them." He then recommends the superior to seek to form in them habits of solid virtue such as "mortification of the judgment, of the will, of sight, hearing, and speaking, and of memory: all for the love of God. It would be a good thing for you to tell them that they should help themselves to acquire this virtue of mortification by exercising that of obedience." Such were Louise's instructions; and so diligently did she carry them out that he had to moderate her zeal, and he finishes his letter thus: "But as speaking so much is very injurious to your health, I beg you will only do so from time to time."

Some of the prudent letters of advice written by Louise to Sisters who had been sent on distant missions into country places have been preserved. Such is the following, addressed to one who was replacing another Sister: "I beg of you, my Sister, to practise the peace which our Saviour gave to His apostles, and to reflect more than you talk, do not speak to any one about what the ladies say to you regarding the good Sister who preceded you, but honour the zeal which she always manifested in the service of the poor."

As has been previously noticed, M. Vincent was always

on the side of mercy when it was a question of an undesirable subject, either as a member of the Association or as a Sister of Charity. It was of one of these doubtful cases that he writes thus to Louise: "As regards Nicole, it is much to be feared that she is too old to change her ways. On the other hand, I should be sorry to give my vote for her dismissal. Try if the privation of going to Communion has any effect upon her. If not, *in nomine Domini*.¹ After you have tried all means in your power, and she shows no signs of amendment, you had better send her away."

Of Marie Joly, another young girl who had lately joined, he writes: "Marie answered me very humbly and nicely that she was prepared to do anything you wished and in the manner you wished. Only she is distressed that she has not the power or the humility to be of much service; but if you tell her what you want of her she will follow all your instructions. She seems to me a very good girl, and I believe our Lord has given her to you that you may make use of her in His service."

During the early months, and even years, of its existence, the company of Sisters of Charity had no written Rule; and M. Vincent speaking about this on one occasion remarked that in this Providence had treated them as He had His chosen people, who had no law given to them for a thousand years; also that our Lord acted in the same way towards the primitive Church. In a letter written about the same time he said: "Our Lord gave the law of grace to His disciples without putting it in writing. Let us therefore leave it as it is for a time." This, of course, is not intended to signify that the house was left without rules or regulations for the first years of its existence. There existed from the commencement a time-table drawn up by Louise de

¹ M. Vincent uses these words frequently as a form of dismissal.

Marillac and approved of by M. Vincent, which has been handed down to us.

It begins with the hour of rising, which was 5 o'clock; this was afterwards altered, to suit the hospital, to 4 o'clock. After morning prayers, the Sisters whose day it was to visit the sick go to the lady of Charity's house, where food had to be prepared so that all should be in readiness to start for its distribution at 9.30. Others have to administer remedies ordered for the patients, and to return in time for Mass. After Mass the Sisters read or are taught; this is followed by needlework. A frugal dinner at 12 is preceded by a short recollection. After dinner the medicines prescribed by the doctors are made up, and notice given to the ladies of the food required for the sick on the following day. On returning home work is resumed and time given to study. Instructions also are given on the principal articles of belief, and a chapter is read from the gospels to excite the Sisters to work for their neighbours in imitation of the example of the Son of God. The care of the linen, and of provisions, such as cooling drinks and preserves, of wood, and of other necessaries is given to certain Sisters. Then the evening concludes with some simple exercises of piety.

M. Vincent, after reading the Rule, returned it to Louise with the written remark: "I have nothing to add, Mademoiselle, to the above, which is very good. Read it therefore at once, unless you think my presence necessary. In any case I promise you that on my return this will, God permitting, be one of the first things I shall do." In accordance with this promise M. Vincent assembled the Sisters on the 31st of July, 1634, to the number of twelve. Some of these lived in other parishes, as Louise's house was not large enough to accommodate so many.

M. Vincent, taking their horarium as his text, gave a

conference on the day's employment, point by point. The first thing they should do on rising is to offer their hearts to God, and adore Him on their knees. Then comes prayer in common. "Oh, my daughters!" he exclaims, "what a divine hour! There is the centre of your devotion. It is then that God inundates us with good thoughts. We are on our knees before our Lord as our Lady was, and St. Mary Magdalen. If you make good use of this time you will give joy to God, and the saints will take delight in you. It is not necessary to be a great scholar to pray well." And then he gives an instance of a poor peasant, "who by her perseverance has now become one of the holiest souls I know of." Then comes the service of the poor, and he tells them they must serve their bodies, and serve their souls. "What sweetness is necessary to comfort them, what gentleness in nursing them, what indulgence in reproving them, what clemency in forgiving them! Oh, my daughters, they have enough to do in suffering their diseases. Think of yourselves as their angel guardians, their mothers. Weep for them. God has given you to them to be their consolation."

M. Vincent insists on their giving time to reading and learning. "Apply yourselves to this work, not for your own particular profit or satisfaction, but so as to make yourselves capable of teaching little children in the villages whither you may be sent." This duty was one that he frequently recommended to the Sisters.

Again he impressed strongly on them the necessity of obedience. Those living in community life were under obedience to Mlle. Le Gras; and in places where they lived two or three together they were to take it in turn to obey and to command. Speaking of himself, M. Vincent told them that, having formerly been associated with Mme. de Gondi, he had obeyed her as he would have done the Blessed Virgin; and, he added, "God knows what

benefit I derived from this habit." Then, turning from the past to the future, he used these striking words:

"This is the commencement of a good work which may last for all time. Yes, my daughters, if you embrace it with the intention of fulfilling the holy will of God, there is reason to hope that your little community will last and will increase in numbers. . . . And what happiness to think that it will continue doing the same good after your deaths, and thus it will be the cause of your increase of glory in heaven." Then, reminding them of their own lowliness and the greatness of God Who, wishing to call His Church out of nothing, used as His instruments a few poor men, "So, say to yourselves, it is because I am nothing that God has chosen me to render Him a great service. May His goodness and mercy be for ever blessed." They should use the following means to ensure fidelity to the Rule: in the first place prayer, a firm purpose, union and mutual help, submission, detachment from self and fidelity to God, the annual retreat, and a monthly manifestation of conscience to the superior. This superior was M. Vincent himself; and he promises, "As for myself I shall, by the grace of God, conscientiously fulfil this obligation, either personally, or, if prevented, by one of my priests." Though his Daughters, whom he was addressing, had followed the evangelical counsels, and neither reaped nor sowed, he bade them have confidence in Him Who would never abandon them. "What have you to fear, my Daughters?" he exclaimed, "has not our Lord promised that those who have given up all things for His sake and for His poor shall never be in want? His promises should be dearer to you than all the treasures in the world."

He concluded by saying: "As you have been chosen as the first members of this Congregation, you should strive to excel in virtue, so as to be an example to those who

come after you. Did not Solomon, when building the Lord's Temple, put precious stones into its foundations? So you also, my Daughters, be holy, so that God may through you bestow His blessings on this commencement."

The Sisters, deeply touched by the saint's moving address, knelt at his feet, protesting their fidelity to their vocation and begging his blessing. He also knelt down, and then blessed them, saying: "May the goodness of God impress on your hearts what I, miserable sinner, have said to you in His Name. And thus by remembering what I have said, in order to practise it, you may become true Sisters of Charity. This is my wish for you; so be it."

With these few simple words the company of the Sisters of Charity was inaugurated; but it would be a mistake to think that in making this beginning the holy Founders had merely collected a few women together with a view of nursing the sick and teaching the poor of Paris and its suburbs. The occasion was a much more memorable one than its outward appearance denoted. It was in truth a fresh departure of a most memorable nature.

For St. Vincent had a great work before him: it was nothing less than to create a new tradition in the Church.

To the Venerable Louise de Marillac was granted the inspiration from on High that she had been chosen for active service of the poor, but in what way she knew not; and it was left to her director to carry out these designs with her concurrence. If we look to the state of public opinion at the time both in the Church and out of it we shall see that it required a man, and a strong man, one who leant utterly on God, and had the confidence of men, to carry it through. The most cursory glance at the history of the seventeenth century and those that had preceded it will be enough to explain his position. M. Vincent had to contend with a consensus of the unwritten

laws of the Church, unwritten, but none the less strong on that account, which insisted that consecrated virgins should be cloistered.

Undoubtedly the Church looked upon the "devotus feminus sexu" (as she styles religious women in her Liturgy) as a sacred deposit entrusted to her keeping. They had made their triple vow to God, but in her presence and with her sanction; she was their guardian. Is it astonishing therefore that in those lawless times she deemed it advisable, and necessary to their safety, that they should be securely protected by grille and cloister?

It is hardly necessary to point out that the idea of what is now known as an active Order did not originate with St. Vincent de Paul. It was in the mind of the holy Bishop of Geneva when he founded the Order of the Visitation in conjunction with St. Jane-Frances Chantal; and it was only on account of the opposition he met with, and in deference to the strongly expressed opinion of Cardinal Marquemont, the Archbishop of Lyons, that St. Francis gave up his original plan and instead of founding the first active Order in the Church he added another to the number of her enclosed Orders.

It is well to keep these facts in mind, whilst recording the steps taken by the holy Founders in forming the new Institute. In St. Vincent's mind, and equally in that of the Venerable Louise de Marillac, every appearance of a religious Order was to be avoided. On no account were the Sisters ever to be called religious. The house, which in the beginning was owned by Louise, was to the end the house (*la maison*), never a convent, seldom the Mother-house. In a word, there was only one thing the little company of Sisters of Charity were to have in common with religious, and that was their love of God and desire to accomplish His Holy Will. It is true that after the company had existed some years a certain number of

the Sisters were allowed to take the three vows common to all who devote themselves for life to the service of God. But these vows were only made for one year at a time, and neither the profession nor the clothing was invested in the company with any of the ceremonial with which such solemnities were observed by the great religious Orders.

But perhaps no summary of what the company of Sisters of Charity *is* or is *not* comes up to that given of it by Gobillon in the oft-quoted words in his life of the Venerable Louise de Marillac: "The Sisters of Charity shall have for monastery the houses of the sick, for a cell a hired room, for chapel the parish church, for cloisters obedience, for grille the fear of God, and for veil holy modesty."

CHAPTER VI

EARLY in the year 1634 a fresh field opened out for the company of Sisters of Charity ; it was one which in the future they were to make peculiarly their own—that of hospital nursing. But, as everything must have its beginning, it was not at first as trained nurses but as the humble helpers of the Ladies of Charity that they made their *début* in them. The history of the great hospital of Paris, the *Hôtel Dieu*, which was the first to which they were called, is one of the greatest interest. It was said to have owed its foundation to St. Landry, Bishop of Paris in the seventh century. It was here that St. Louis used to come to nurse and serve Christ in the person of the suffering poor. Both he and his successors greatly enlarged it and enriched it with repeated benefactions. Abelly speaks of it as accommodating in his own time a thousand to twelve hundred patients, and mentions that at least 20,000 to 25,000 sick passed annually through its wards. Needless to say, hygiene being little understood in the seventeenth century, it was terribly overcrowded ; over 250 people were frequently huddled together in one room, and it was no uncommon occurrence for six to sleep in one bed. Such sanitary crimes, however, were little considered at the period we are describing ; and the hospital passed for being in many respects a model one, and was probably superior to any other in the kingdom. It was governed by the Chapter

of Canons of Notre Dame, and the nurses consisted of a community of nuns following the Rule of St. Augustine. No complaint could be made against this nursing Order. At the time of which we are writing it was under the charge of Sister Geneviève Bouquet, an excellent and capable woman, between whom and Louise de Marillac there existed a holy friendship, born of mutual interests; and we are told that during her superiority many much-needed reforms were carried out in the nursing of the sick.

In spite, however, of the efforts to maintain a high standard in the Hôtel Dieu, a great deal remained to be done. The patients were so numerous that the staff of nurses found it impossible to grapple with their wants, even in ordinary times; and when the plague—which every third or fourth year ravaged the country—added to their numbers, little was attempted even of the most elementary description for their most pressing spiritual and temporal necessities.

Such was the state of matters when Louise de Marillac and a coterie of charitable women undertook to supplement the work of the Augustinians by visiting the patients on certain days in the week, supplying them with extras in the way of food, and preparing such as were in danger for the reception of the last rites.

Amongst the foremost in the exercise of these good works was a friend and associate of Louise's in all charitable enterprises, Mme. Goussault. This excellent woman belonged to the higher middle class, and possessed a property of her own in Anjou. She was the widow of Antoine Goussault, Sieur de Savigny and President of the Court of Finance; her position, her money, and her natural gifts made her a very important and useful recruit to the army of charitable workers.

Abelly says of her that, left a widow whilst still young, "she possessed all the qualities of nature and grace

which might have caused her to aspire to a brilliant worldly establishment. Rich, beautiful, excellently good, agreeable and attractive in character and manner, she renounced all in order to give herself to God and to God's children, the sick and the poor." Mme. Goussault had been long associated with Louise in her good works; we come across her name more than once in connection with various charities both in Paris and in the provinces, and it was due to her initiative that this admirable work was set on foot. To quote Abelly once more: "As Mme. Goussault in her frequent visits to the Hôtel Dieu of Paris had observed that many things were not done in the manner that she could have wished, or in such a way as it has since been established, she had recourse to M. Vincent, begging him to extend his charity to these poor people, and to devise some method of bringing assistance to this great hospital. M. Vincent, however, behaved in his usual prudent and discreet manner, and he did not at first see his way to putting his 'sickle into another man's harvest,' especially as he considered that the directors and administrators of the hospital were wise men, and were quite capable of making their own rules and regulations both with regard to temporal and spiritual matters."

Mme. la Présidente (as both Abelly and M. Vincent always style her) was not to be discouraged. She addressed herself next to the Archbishop, Mgr. de Gondi, who came over at once to her views, and proceeded to enforce her plea that a committee of ladies should be formed who would undertake to supplement what was wanting to the treatment of the patients at the Hôtel Dieu.

The first meeting was held in the month of July 1634, and M. Vincent presided at it. He writes to announce the proceedings to Louise, who was absent at the time

at Grigny: "The meeting was held yesterday at Mme. Goussault's house. Mmes. de Villesavin, de Balleul, du Mercq, de Saintot, and Pollalion were present."

The resolution that the ladies should form an association for visiting the Hôtel Dieu was proposed and carried. It was determined to hold another meeting on the following Monday. The members agreed to put the matter before God and to go to Communion with this intention, and "each one is to mention what was going on to the ladies of their acquaintance. You and your Daughters will be wanted. It is thought that four will be required, so you must take measures to provide good subjects. Observe how the work is always increasing. Do all that is possible, therefore, to keep in good health." M. Vincent concludes in his usual paternal manner, thanking God that she is restored to health, and telling her that she must travel in a shut carriage and neglect no means of keeping well.

The second meeting was an even more representative one. Ten ladies were present, a number which included, besides those mentioned on the previous occasion, Mme. Seguiet, whose husband had succeeded de Marillac as Keeper of the Privy Seals in 1634, Mme. de Traversay, a widow, who after her husband's death had been aggregated to the Order of the Sisters of the Cross, had built a convent for them, and been a second mother to the community. Another member of the Association was Charlotte de Ligny, "Présidente de Herse," who was a relation of M. Olier, the sainted founder of the Sulpician Seminary, and herself an ardent co-operator in all M. Vincent's good works, especially those that concerned the "Missions" and ecclesiastical seminaries. Lastly, there was the pious and excellent Mme. Fouquet, mother of the celebrated Superintendent of Finance, whose fall and disgrace in the following reign have been described so

inimitably by Mme. de Sevigné in her letters to her daughter.

Mme. Goussault was put at the head of the new Association, but she refused the title of superior and gave herself the one of "Sœur Servante," which passed to her successor, and was afterwards adopted by Louise for the superior of the company of Sisters of Charity. Mlle. Pollalion was made secretary and Mlle. Viole treasurer. M. Vincent, by order of the Archbishop, was instituted director, and he entered at once into his functions by explaining to the ladies the duties that lay before them.

Abelly gives us the following summary of his speech :

"Having represented the merit and importance of the work they were about to engage in, he prophesied that they might meet with difficulties from people who would possibly oppose their efforts under the impression that the exercise of their charity would bring to light the defects in the management of the hospital. They must therefore represent to themselves that whilst there was great good to be done there were also great obstacles to surmount, and that consequently it was necessary to be prepared, and take measures accordingly. Whereupon he did not fail to give them much good advice on the manner in which they should comport themselves. For his own part he judged it advisable to inform the Directors both spiritual and temporal of the hospital what they proposed to do, making known to them the good intentions of the charitable ladies, and the order that had been given by his Grace the Archbishop, so that they should accept the services which they designed giving : as in short they had agreed to do." M. Vincent then named those persons who should begin the work, and made various recommendations with regard to the understanding which should

exist between them and the Augustinian nuns. This, indeed, was a matter of considerable moment.

He then invited them (1) every time they entered the Hôtel Dieu, to invoke our Lord's assistance, as He is the true Father of the poor, also the intercession of our Lady and St. Louis, the founder of the hospital; (2) to present themselves to the nuns who have the care of the sick, offering their services to them in order to share in their good works; (3) to esteem and respect the said nuns as if they were angels, speaking gently and deferentially to them; (4) if it should happen that these good Sisters did not at all times take their offices in good part they should excuse themselves, and try to enter into their feelings without ever contradicting or annoying them, or wishing to carry things with a high hand. "We wish," he continued, "to contribute to the solace and salvation of the poor, and this it will be impossible to accomplish without the help and concurrence of the Sisterhood. It also belongs to the spirit of God to behave in this manner, and therefore to imitate His Divine action is to take the most certain method of succeeding."

The ladies took this advice so strongly to heart that they succeeded in gaining the affection of the nurses, so that (to quote Abelly once more) "they were allowed complete liberty to go from ward to ward, and from bed to bed, consoling the sick, speaking to them of God, and encouraging them to make good use of their sufferings."

The correspondence of M. Vincent at this time throws an interesting sidelight on the character of Louise de Marillac, and on the general opinion entertained of the new Association. Louise's tenderness of conscience, of which we have already received so many proofs, caused her to regret having spoken too frankly to her friend Mme. de Goussault with regard to some of the short-

comings she had observed in the hospital, and also of the incapacity of one of the doctors. M. Vincent reassures her on both points. In answer to her inquiry if she had done wrong he answers: "Certainly not; it was quite necessary in this case to recognise the evil in order to consider what remedies can be applied. I am going to see Mme. la Présidente, to whom it does not appear to me that you have spoken too freely. Be always quite simple and sincere, and pray to God that I may have a share of these two virtues. . . . As for the words you used in speaking of the doctor, you would do well, if you have said anything likely to damage his reputation, to say whatever you can in his favour to the same person and to two or three others."

Again he writes to Louise to tell her that the visiting ladies opined that her Sisters, being simple peasant girls, would be hardly equal to the work of visiting the Hôtel Dieu, and that Parisians would be more suited to it. After mentioning the fact he adds: "I think they are right."

Though M. Vincent's entire absence of prejudice, even in favour of his good peasant girls, enabled him to acquiesce cheerfully in their dismissal, the matter did not end there, as very soon afterwards we find the ladies had discovered that their first opinion had been too hastily formed, and were asking to have them back again.

The Association was a success from the very beginning. A month after the first meeting, M. Vincent, in a letter to M. du Coudray in Rome, mentions that 120 ladies of high position had enrolled themselves as members, and that material assistance had been given to between 800 and 900 poor patients in the Hôtel Dieu. Besides this, much good had been done by preparing the sick for the reception of Sacraments, and disposing the convalescents

to lead better lives in the future. He follows this up by a request to the Holy See to enrich it with special indulgences.

Mme. Goussault, having found that the administration supplied food which was often quite unsuited to the weak health and digestion of the patients, and also insufficient in quantity—they having nothing given to them before their dinners, or between their dinner and evening meal—decided with the concurrence of the meeting that the ladies should take it in turns to serve them with a light collation in the middle of the day. A room was therefore hired by the ladies in the neighbourhood of the hospital where they kept linen, provisions, utensils, and all that was necessary for the preparation of food. Four Sisters of Charity—Sisters Jacqueline, Genevieve, Germaine, and Nicole—assisted the ladies to prepare broths and jellies, and helped in their distribution. This distribution, which we are told was accompanied with gentle and friendly words “such as it was seemly to use towards the suffering members of Jesus Christ,” was preceded by a visit to the Blessed Sacrament to beg God’s blessing on the work, and followed by another in order to thank Him for the honour he had done them in allowing them to work in His service. M. Vincent lost no opportunity of pointing out that the souls of the patients should be the first object of these charitable ministrations. At one of their meetings (Abelly tells us) he recommended them to speak with great gentleness to the sick, showing sympathy with their sufferings, and exhorting them to endure them with patience for the love of God. And with regard to the women whom they found insufficiently instructed, they should teach them what was necessary for salvation in familiar language, conversationally as it were. They should then dispose them to make a good general con-

fession, and in short, prepare them to die well, or, if God saw fit to preserve them, to live well.

In order to facilitate this work of charity, M. Vincent had a little catechism printed for their use, containing the principal points of doctrine of the Catholic Church.

There were other subjects on which he touched. For instance, he recommended the ladies on the days they visited the Hôtel Dieu to dress very simply, in order that even if they did not appear poor amongst the poor they might not be a cause of pain to these sufferers by the contrast they presented, clad in costly garments, to the necessitous condition of their patients. He had also much to say about general confessions. It had been customary for the patients on entering the hospital to go to confession; but many had neither the inclination nor knowledge to approach the Sacraments properly, and some were incapacitated by pain from giving them due attention, so that their confessions were frequently sacrilegious, or at any rate invalid. This duty, therefore, of preparing the patients for a general confession was one which was set in the very forefront, and so urgent was it considered to be that M. Vincent put before his audience a minute account of the manner in which they should set to work, and the arguments they should use to effect their purpose.

Another weak point in the administration was the insufficient number of chaplains. Accordingly, the Committee agreed to engage the services of six more priests at a stipend of 40 crowns each, the authorities consenting to supply them with food and lodging. These priests were under the special charge of M. Vincent, who saw that they were men leading devout lives and that before entering into their functions they had made a retreat at St. Lazare, which was afterwards renewed yearly.

Abundant blessings attended this good work. Besides

those who were enabled through the grace of the Sacraments devoutly received to make a good end, or to return to life cured in soul as well as body, of whom no record is left, Abelly mentions more than 760 Turks, Lutherans, and Calvinists who, in the first few years of its inception, were gathered into the true fold. As the Association grew in numbers, it was found advisable to set apart some of the ladies who showed most aptitude for the spiritual works of mercy for that work, leaving to the others the bodily care of the patients. The suggestion having been made by M. Vincent and approved of by the Committee, fourteen members were appointed for three months at a time, the period coinciding with the Ember weeks. When the term was completed M. Vincent assembled the ladies who had finished their course, as well as those who were about to commence it, and inquired into what had been done in the past, and pointed out for the benefit of the new-comers what still remained to be done, and the best means of accomplishing their ends.

Louise was amongst those chosen for this work, and it was with a view to it that we find the following notes from her pen: "I proposed to myself, if I should be fortunate enough to have to go and visit the sick, to make them understand that in order to make a good use of their maladies they must receive them as if coming from the paternal hand of our merciful God, Whose only object is our greater good. That in order to make our sufferings pleasing in His sight we must offer all our pain to Him in union with those of His Divine Son. That we should be doing what is very agreeable in His sight if we often repeat our Saviour's words from the bottom of our hearts: 'Not my will but Thine be done.' I should also recommend them to dispose themselves to receive the grace of God by means of the Sacraments, in order to appease His wrath.

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 61.

which they have incurred by their sins, as well as to ensure their eternal salvation. If there was any likelihood of their illness leading to death, I should do my utmost to make them offer up acts of hope and confidence, and to induce them to put their trust in the mercy of God. . . . I would also try to give them some knowledge of the grandeur, beauty and love of God, of the joy of possessing Him eternally, of the glory of the Blessed. Should they become convalescent, I thought that I should lead them to thank God for the health that He was restoring to them, representing to them that His principal object in so doing was to give them time to work out their salvation, and that it was most necessary therefore to make good resolutions to love God above all, and never to offend Him by mortal sin."

Occasionally the lady visitors, led away by their fervour, had been known to fatigue and harass the dying by much talking in a way to defeat their object; and this having been repeated to Louise by the Augustinian Sister who had special charge of such cases, she passed on the information to M. Vincent in this little memorandum: "Please remember to warn the ladies to be careful not to speak at great length to those in grave danger. It would be wise in the case of those who had not made their general confessions to warn them of the necessity of accusing themselves of sins which they had either held back or forgotten in previous confessions, with the good will and intention of accusing themselves of all sins committed against God and their neighbour. Also if possible to encourage them to make short acts of faith, hope, and charity." This note is signed "your daughter and servant, Louise de Marillac."

Meanwhile Louise's great and special work went on increasing and bearing fruit. The villages and remote country districts were still the chief recruiting-grounds

of the new company. Very few of M. Vincent's letters to Louise in the years 1635 and 1636 do not bear some references to peasant girls whom he has come across in his missions or who have been recommended to him. He writes on one occasion: "Here is a good girl whom Mme. la Présidente recommended should be sent to you. I beg of you to be so good as to let her be seen by some one who will teach her." Another time it is a case of "three excellent peasant girls from Argenteuil who offer themselves as members of the *Charité*." Another girl comes from Liancourt, and is a lace-maker—a fact which meets with M. Vincent's approval. "I am glad to hear it," he writes; "she will be able to teach lace-making to poor people, which will be a source of attraction to them." Of another he says: "How I wish your Sisters would try and learn to read, and also that they should master thoroughly the catechism. Poor Germaine makes a great mistake in not remaining with you; it would comfort you to have her. But in the name of God get yourself cured before you undertake more work with them."

This work of training the Sisters, which, as we read between the lines, was incessant, increased in magnitude with the steady increase in their numbers. Not satisfied with instructing them in their religion, in their daily duties, and frequently in the elements of education, Louise sought to make them contribute to their own livelihood by the work of their hands. With this object she started them with a recipe for making jelly; not only for supplying it to the patients of the Hôtel Dieu but selling it in Paris, by which means she was able to raise the funds required for the subsistence of the community.

There was another subject which presently was brought under discussion. The Sisters had no special dress; accordingly some were slovenly in their attire, whilst

others showed a little too much desire to shine. Louise, when consulting M. Vincent (as she invariably did in every dilemma), as to what was proper to be done in the latter case, received this answer: "I think it certainly would be to the point to say something to the girl at the Hôtel Dieu about her love of dress. But how are you to do it? To make her give up her present dress seems to me neither advisable nor practicable. It would, however, be better if she could be made to get rid of this little weakness and to show a certain neglect in those matters. You will see."

This was an isolated case. More frequently we hear of the Sisters refusing to leave their life of poverty and toil for a more comfortable existence. Thus when Mlle. de Comballet, Richelieu's niece, had put some pressure upon M. Vincent to let one of the Sisters come to help her in her work, he found difficulty in getting one who would consent to do so. He writes thus to Louise on the subject: "Having been pressed by Mlle. de Comballet to send her a girl, I spoke to Marie Denise, who seemed suitable for the post. She made me an answer worthy of one who has a true vocation from God. She said that, having left father and mother to give herself to the service of the poor for the love of God, she must beg me to excuse her if she felt she could not change her intention in order to serve a great lady. After that I spoke to Barbe, and without giving her the reason told her to go and meet me at the said Mlle. de Comballet's house, and there I told her that that good lady proposed employing her partly in her service and partly in that of the poor of the parish. She set to work to cry, but at last agreeing, I put her in the hands of the lady. I was much surprised when, having gone opposite to M. l'Abbé de Loiacq, she came back and said that having been surprised to find what a grand court there was there she could not live in

it, and begged me to take her away ; and that our Lord having accepted her to work for the poor she begged me to send her back to them. It astonished the Abbé much to see such a contempt of the world's grandeur. This being the case, I told her to return to the said lady, and if she was not happy there in four or five days she might go back to St. Nicholas. What do you think of this, Mademoiselle? Are you not enchanted to see the power of the Holy Ghost in these two poor girls, and the contempt of the world and its pomps with which He has inspired them? You would hardly believe what courage this has given me about the future of the Sisters of Charity, nor the desire I have that you should return in good health so as to devote yourself to this work."

This was not the only nor the greatest proof these good Sisters were to give of their love and devotion to the service of God.

There was a ward in the Hôtel Dieu which was called the "Legate's ward," after the papal legate Cardinal du Prat, who had caused it to be built about the year 1530, and which was used for infectious cases. The question as to those who should attend the patients in this ward was one of much importance in M. Vincent's sight, as it was essential that no mothers of families should expose their lives, and those of their children, to the risk of contagion by visiting it. Thus he writes to Louise: "I beg of you to let me know if it is true, as Mme. Goussault tells me, that you know of some devoted women who are ready to give their services to help the female patients in the 'Legate' in the place of the fourteen ladies. It is much to be desired that this could be arranged, as otherwise there would always be the apprehension of the ladies taking the infection." The letter ends by saying: "I am told matters are going badly at the Hôtel Dieu; and there is a strong wish expressed that as soon as your

health is improved you should spend two or three days there."

These apprehensions were not without justification, as in consequence of an epidemic in the hospital several of the Ladies of Charity caught the fever, and two—Mme. de Ligne and Mme. Ménart—died from the results of their self-devotion. One of the Sisters of Charity also fell a victim, and M. Vincent writes thus of her to Louise: "Here then is the first victim that our Saviour has willed to take of your Sisters of Charity! May our Lord be for ever blessed. I trust she is enjoying the happiness of Heaven, since she died in the exercise of charity. I pray our Divine Saviour to be in the midst of you, and be your consolation as well as that of your dear Sisters." M. Vincent's letter, which enters into some detail as to what should be done for the remains of the defunct sister, shows in what complete poverty the Community lived. It was necessary, in the first place, to hasten the burial because of the risk of infection to the other Sisters—there being no empty room in the house in which the corpse could be isolated. In his thoughtful charity M. Vincent provides for all: he settles about the priests who were to sing the office for the dead; he also recommends that the mother of the deceased should be given a little pension of 10 sols a month and so forth. He ends by exhorting Louise to moderate her grief, telling her: "It is God's good pleasure—His whom you love so much. You would console me if you would give yourself a complete rest in your bed for two days."

A little later we find M. Vincent begging Louise to moderate her too great ardour in God's service. "As regards your visits to the Hôtel Dieu it is not expedient for you to be always there, though it is right that you should be there now and then. Do not be afraid of undertaking too much in doing the good that comes in

your way ; fear only to do more than you are doing, and that God gives you the means of doing. Give yourself wholly then to His Divine Majesty so as to do what at this moment you have got to do. The thought that you wish to go beyond this makes me tremble with fear, as it seems to me a crime in the children of Providence. I thank the Divine goodness that yesterday you relieved me of this fear on your account."

On the return of summer in the year 1635 Louise's duties called her to the country ; her health no doubt also made this change necessary. The question then arose as to what was to become of the community in its superior's absence. M. Vincent suggests that Mlle. Pollalion should occasionally visit it, and keep her informed of what was going on there. In any case, pressing affairs demanded her attention in the diocese of Beauvais, where difficulties had arisen of late. "Go then," he tells her, "'in nomine Domine,' and do what our adorable and loving Saviour asks of you. I pray with all my heart that He take you there and lead you back again ; that He is the light of your heart and its sweet warmth, that He will cause it to know and to love what He asks of you, and particularly that you should be the consolation of His dear Daughters and they of yours—in His perfect love."

Louise found much to do in this diocese, where previously all had been so prosperous in the outlook of the *Charités*. Jealousies had arisen in more than one parish. The Dominicans and Jacobite Fathers had wished to absorb them into their own confraternities, such as that of the Rosary. The secular priests also had interfered unduly. Fortunately Louise had a steady friend in the bishop of the diocese, Mgr. Pottier de Blancmenil, and his support and her own great prudence and charity brought matters to a favourable conclusion.

Before returning to Paris, Louise spent some days at Liancourt in order to make arrangements for a foundation of the Association in the neighbouring town. Louise's connection with the Duchesse de Liancourt dated some years back, and she found in her a sympathy on all points, second only (her biographer tells us) to that which bound her to Mme. Goussault.

The Duchess was a German by birth, her father being the Field-Marshal Schomberg. Married at twenty to a man only two years older than herself, she had for many years to endure the grief of seeing him prefer any society to her own. Gay and profligate, the friend of the poet Théophile de Viau, he was notorious, even in the society of the day, for his free-living, and still more for his partiality for duelling. Unceasing in her efforts to win back his affections, she was providentially helped by a severe illness into which he fell, which gave her an opportunity of showing her devotion to him. She nursed him at the risk of her own life, and paid for her devotion by catching the complaint and nearly dying herself. The fear of losing his wife achieved the husband's conquest. Thenceforth their lives were no longer divided, though the future had many troubles in store for both. It was in these years of estrangement that the deserted wife sought to find comfort in works of mercy when living on her husband's vast possessions in Champagne. Besides seeking assistance from Louise for the establishment of local Associations for the benefit of her people, she also applied to M. Vincent—who passed her on to M. Bourdoise—for priests to act as chaplains in the villages dependent on her. Though her intentions were always excellent, her views did not always coincide with those of M. Vincent, and he found himself obliged to oppose her when she wished to substitute what in these days would be called a cottage

hospital for the house-to-house visiting which he considered the true work of the Association; as it was to this work (M. Vincent considered) that the Sisters of Charity had been providentially called.

Accordingly he remarks: "It may be asked: Is not this the first work of this description of which mention has ever been made? My Daughters, there have been religious Orders who have dedicated themselves to God for the service of the hospitals, but till your time no company existed which gave itself up to the work of nursing the sick in their own homes. Hitherto when a member of a poor family fell ill he was sent to the hospital, hence wives were separated from their husbands, children from their parents. Why do you think God had waited to raise up succour to them? Is it not because He was reserving this service to you?"

Louise's health broke down whilst she was engaged in these inspections in country districts. The illness must have been serious, as it excited great uneasiness in the mind of M. Vincent. He begs her to inform him if she has a doctor. "If you have need of one let me know, and I will send you some one. There is a physician at Senlis who attends the King and often goes to Liancourt. Spare no expense in getting him, nor in getting all you require. Perhaps you have not taken enough money with you? If that is the case tell me, and I will send you some."

A short rest restored Louise to her usual state, which, if it did not represent *health*, consisted in the resumption of her usual occupations. She returned to Paris, and before she had been there long a change, which had been for some time impending, took place with regard to the instalment of herself and the community. They had outgrown the little house in the Rue St. Victor, and as M. Vincent had in the interval, since Louise had

established herself there, moved from the *Bons Enfants* to the College of St. Lazare, which was on the other side of Paris, it was a matter of convenience that the Sisters of Charity should occupy a house in his neighbourhood and that of the priests of the Mission. As St. Lazare was situated on the outskirts of Paris the choice of houses in the neighbourhood must have been limited. M. Vincent was, however, successful before long in finding a modest habitation in the adjoining suburb. He writes to invite Louise and her Sisters to examine it with him in the following terms: "If you and your Sisters will come on Tuesday we will go to La Chapelle. It is a village hard by, on the way to St. Denis." The house was inspected and approved of, and the contract, which was made out in favour of Mme. Goussault, was signed by her in the month of May 1636.

Though Louise and the community moved from the Rue St. Victor, the house there was retained, the Sisters who were left being employed in the good works of the parish of St. Nicholas as before. That it was not without a considerable pang that Louise gave up the house which had been her home since the early days of her widowhood, we learn from a prayer written on this occasion, and found amongst her notes: "May I have no will of my own, O Lord, but let Thine reign alone in me! Give me this grace by Thy love for me, and by the intercession of Thy Blessed Mother—whose love for that most tender Will was so perfect. I ask this of Thee with all my heart, begging of Thy goodness to pay no regard to the contrary dispositions Thou seest in me, desiring that the strength of Thy love should overpower with its sweet violence the resistance of all that is in me to its fulfilment. Thus I will go to this new habitation with the design of honouring the Divine Providence who leads me there, and try to put myself

in the disposition to accomplish what this same Providence permits me to find there to do. I will by this change of abode honour that of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin from Bethlehem to Egypt, and to so many other places, not wishing any more than they did to have any lasting abode on earth." ¹

This change removed Louise to a much greater distance from her son, who was still working at the Jesuit College at St. Nicholas, and for this cause alone must have cost her deep sorrow.

The poverty of the community was also great, and, notwithstanding her trust in God and love of the Divine Will, probably gave her many anxious moments. The house which had been found for her was situated in the fields, and, though M. Vincent rejoiced over the fact and told Louise that she would now breathe country air, this was not without its attendant inconveniences. The community in leaving St. Nicholas could have brought little with them, and all the property they had in common, we are told, was their common indigence. To such straits were they reduced that the Sisters gleaned occasionally a few turnips from the adjoining fields to eke out their scanty repasts. Humble as these commencements were, God was soon to bless them abundantly by a great increase in the company, and a corresponding harvest of souls.

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. ii. p. 165.

CHAPTER VII

THE year 1636, in which Louise de Marillac took possession of the house in La Chapelle St. Denis, was one of great peril for her country. France was threatened with foes on every side; and refugees were hurrying to take shelter within the walls of Paris and behind the protection of its guns within a month of the time when the Sisters of Charity settled in the outskirts of the city. The moment was a critical one in the history of the Thirty Years' War. The Imperialists, Spanish and Austrian, had forced the passage of the Somme and broken through the rich lands between that river and the Oise, ravaging and destroying all before them. A rumour was spread abroad that Jean de Werth with his savage band of Croats were advancing on Paris. The great northern high-roads were crowded with peasants fleeing from Champagne and Picardy. M. Vincent, writing to M. Portail, who was engaged at the time on a mission in Auvergne, gives the following account of what was happening at home: "Paris is expecting to be besieged by the Spanish, who have invaded Picardy, and are laying it waste with a powerful army whose vanguard reaches within thirty miles of the city. Thus the population of the surrounding districts is pouring into Paris, whilst the panic-stricken inhabitants of Paris are fleeing to other towns. The King is trying to collect a force to oppose the advancing army—his own being

either abroad or at the other extremity of the kingdom ; and this is the place where the regiments are being drawn up and trained. The stables, cloisters, squares, and corridors are full of weapons and of soldiers drilling. This tumult and disturbance continue in spite of to-day's feast. Though it is only seven o'clock in the morning the drum is already beating ; in eight days seventy-two companies of soldiers have been raised."

It was a trying situation for the young community, who had as much to fear from the undisciplined soldiers quartered in their immediate vicinity, to whom the country had to trust for its defence, as from the lawless bands with which they were threatened. Never was there greater opportunity, however, for the exercise of the pre-eminent virtue of the company, that of charity, than in these troubled days ; and Louise, ever ready to share all she had with the poor, opened the doors of La Chapelle willingly to the hapless women and children who fled before the advancing foe.

We gather from M. Vincent's letter quoted above that it was the time for the annual retreat, as he ends it by saying : " Notwithstanding this state of things the company have not, with the exception of three or four, given up their habitual retreat."

Another serious inconvenience threatened them : they were told that soldiers were to be billeted on them in the house in Rue St. Victor. Louise writes to M. Vincent to try what influence in high quarters would do to procure them exemption : " Ma Sœur Turgis is much troubled because the sergeant of M. de Castelnau's regiment has informed her that he is sending soldiers to lodge in the ground floor where the children sleep. They will make much noise. If you approve she might refuse by quoting the authority of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and Mme. la Chancelière, and thus gain time till

an application can be made to the Queen." He answers that he will do his best, but that Mme. la Chancelière was unable to move in the matter. In the next letter he remarks that failing the intervention of the Duchess it would be better, as a last resource, to hire a room for the soldiers in the neighbouring house—a suggestion which doubtless was adopted.

M. Vincent's next letters deal with the difficulty of starting a *Charité* (always the first work undertaken) in these poor suburbs: "You are here," he writes, "with few workers and much work! Well, our Saviour will work with you. The suggestion of each of you taking one sick person in turn at your own expense seems a good plan, and it has been adopted elsewhere." Alluding to the work she was engaged upon, he says: "I cannot tell you how consoled I am by what you have undertaken. I pray God to bless your labour, and to perpetuate this holy work." He has then some advice to give on the subject of the ladies' share in the personal attendance on the sick: "The care of getting the food prepared should not be paid for or given to others by the ladies of the confraternity, nor should the members be exempt from the duty of each one carrying her portion to the sick, or otherwise the *Charité* would fail in its chief objects."

The autumn of the year 1636 must have been one of special trial for the community, as it was for the whole of France, for though the worst of their fears were not realised in the menaced attack on the capital, it did not escape the epidemic which so often follows closely on the heels of war. So numerous were the cases of plague at the Hôtel Dieu that the ladies were forced to give up their visiting.

We find constant allusion to this deplorable state of things in M. Vincent's letters of this date. "I spoke

yesterday to the Chapter about the state of the Hôtel Dieu, and it was finally agreed to defer the re-opening of it (to the nursing association) for a few days. It is better to let the world talk than to expose so many people to danger when the death of one might be sufficient to destroy the whole work." Another letter written about the same time alludes to the subject in these words: "You would console me if you told me about the state of your health and that of your Daughters, and of the Hôtel Dieu. You have no doubt heard that M. L'Avocat was of the opinion that it should not be re-opened before the feast of St. Denis."

It was probably not till some weeks later—that is, on the 10th of December—that the diminution of plague-cases permitted the resumption of the work of visiting and feeding the patients, as in a letter of that date M. Vincent remarks: "May God bless you, Mademoiselle, for what you have done in putting your Daughters at work at the Hôtel Dieu, and for all the consequences of this; but for the love of God take care of yourself. You see what need they have of your guidance, and how lost the work would be without you. I thank God once more for the graces He has given your Daughters, and for their courage and generosity. He has indeed made it up to them for all that you tell me you have been wanting in with regard to your conduct to them." Thus did their holy Father congratulate the brave Sisters for having been first to return to the hospital, as they were the last to leave it.

From a conference in MS. of M. Vincent we learn that thanks to the untiring work of these Sisters the patients were only deprived of their mid-day collation for about twenty days.

The great work, however, which was slowly being built up under the direction of this master of the spiritual

life, and in which he was so ably seconded by Louise de Marillac, was the training of the community of Sisters of Charity in the knowledge of their holy vocation.

And here there was much to be done, as the only qualifications asked by M. Vincent or their *Sœur Servante* of a postulant were goodwill and a desire to serve God in the person of her neighbours. Thus it is clear from a perusal of the early annals of the Order that the Sisters had nearly everything to learn. A few doubtless had an elementary knowledge of reading and writing, and were acquainted with the chief doctrines of the Christian religion. But this was not enough in the eyes of the holy Founder; and we see by the continual reference to the subject in his letters that he attached much importance not only to their religious knowledge, but to their secular education being of such a character as to enable them to be of use to others. One of the first undertakings initiated by Louise de Marillac after settling at La Chapelle was the formation of a class for the education of the Sisters, so as to prepare them to teach the children of the neighbouring villages. We have a letter from M. Vincent dated at about this time suggesting to Louise the employment for the instruction of her Daughters of a girl who had been teacher for six years at an Ursuline Convent. "She knows all that good nuns are accustomed to teach, and she works beautifully in tapestry. It came into my mind that she might be usefully employed in teaching the Sisters at La Chapelle for two or three months, notably in order to put them in the way of teaching poor children. How does the idea strike you, Mademoiselle?"

Important as the subject of secular education was in the eyes of M. Vincent, it was secondary to that of the spiritual training of his Daughters in the ways of perfection. To this everything gave way, and here again, as we have said before, he was ably seconded by Louise.

In his conferences, which he seldom failed to give weekly, except during his absences on the affairs of the Missions, he put before his audience, in the exquisitely simple language of which he had the gift, the secret of sanctifying their own souls whilst labouring for the sanctification of others.

It fell to Louise's part to second these instructions, both in personal interviews which she gave to each one of the Sisters, as well as to the community in general. It was with the latter object no doubt that we find her making the following appeal to M. Vincent: "Will your charity please to remember the promise you made me to give me notes to help me in what I have to say to our Sisters two or three times a week in order to encourage them?" Her humility led her to think that any shortcomings on the part of the Sisters was due to her faults and incapacity, and we find her saying to him: "It appears to me that I deserve severe punishments for these defects of theirs. I wish you would ask of God some one who would be of service to them. So many years has God done me the favour of speaking to me through you, and yet I am what I am!"

Thus in addition to the wise precepts of M. Vincent the Sisters had the advantage of the ever-present example of humility, and of every other virtue, in their holy superior as well as of her instructions.

One imperfection of which Louise was deeply conscious, and which M. Vincent recognised in her (though only to speak of it as an exaggeration of a virtue), was a too great promptitude or hastiness in betaking herself to action. This (her biographer tells us) was opposed to the virtue of longanimity which was so strongly marked in the leading of her saintly director, who was ever preaching to her of the holy delays of our Saviour, of the patient abandonment to His Divine Will, and the

meritorious imitation of the inaction (*non-faire*) of Jesus Christ.

We find an instance of such a movement of emotion and agitation, and recourse to human means and assistance—one of which she was deeply conscious, and was ever struggling against—in a note which she left amongst her writings: “On the 2nd of March I was conscious of committing an infidelity to God by allowing myself to be carried away by the painful impression of news which I received of my Sisters at Nanteuil, and of hurrying to have recourse to those persons who were able to apply a remedy to it, instead of to God. I made resolutions contrary to this.”

Another weakness to which she pleaded guilty was that of not being sufficiently strict on occasions when strictness or severity was required. It was in allusion to some such self-accusation that M. Vincent wrote thus to her: “If the gentleness of your character requires an admixture of vinegar, borrow a little from the example of our Divine Saviour. Ah! Mademoiselle, how wisely He mixed the severe with the sweet when it was necessary.” Gentle and mild as Louise’s government of her Sisters was, she could at times show considerable firmness, as when she was of opinion that their just rights were infringed. Thus when on a certain occasion the superior of the Benedictines at Argenteuil had persuaded a member of the company to give up the life of a Sister of Charity for one of the cloister, Louise remonstrates with her in language which was equally grave and respectful: “I have refused to believe,” she writes, “that it was due to your intervention that she was turned away from her vocation. I could not believe that one who recognised the importance of following the designs of God should oppose herself to them, thus exposing a soul to the risk of imperilling her salvation. For such it would be to

deprive the poor and abandoned of their only means of succour by robbing them of the services of one of these Sisters who, despising all personal gain, give themselves to God for the spiritual and temporal good of these poor creatures, whom yet He is willing to look upon as members of His body. God grant that this girl whom you have already in your house may serve you well with a tranquil heart. I am willing to believe that she was not called to the state that she was in, otherwise she would indeed be blameworthy. But, Madame, I beg of you not to permit again that such persons should be put to this trial without your concurrence, for it might be a cause of temptation to many; nevertheless this would not prevent my remaining your very humble and obedient servant in the love of Jesus Christ, Louise de Marillac.”¹ Louise proved the sincerity of her forgiveness by bringing before the notice of the superior of Argenteuil “a girl from the same district who has some means and is full of good desires to fill a place as lay sister, which I am told is vacant in your monastery.”

Thus did Louise follow the Divine mandate of “heaping coals of fire” on the head of one who had certainly proved herself no friend to the young institute. Trials were never wanting to this true follower of Christ crucified, and during the winter and spring of the year 1636-7 they seem to have been specially numerous. One cross she was never without, and it must have been one of peculiar intensity; it arose from the unsatisfactory character of her son. We have a constant guide to Michel’s movements and frame of mind in the letters carefully preserved by Louise from M. Vincent. We have seen his frequent vacillations about his career in life, and though he had now attained the age of twenty-three they still continued. Apparently he had no inclination for the army, so there

¹ *Louise de Marillac* (Lettres), t. iii, p. 7.

remained (M. Vincent writes) the ecclesiastical state or "*le Palais*," which of course meant a post in the Royal Household. The priesthood once more carried the day, but before he had been long engaged on a course of theology he begged of his mother to send him to some foreign universities, as he was sick of Paris and wished to travel. This the sensible director set his face against.

"No," he writes to Louise, "this proposition should not be entertained. It is inconceivable how many contract evil habits of all sorts from such a procedure; it is only advisable when parents are themselves in favour of it in order that their sons may study under some special Jesuit or learned Doctor abroad." We have already seen how ready Louise was to take blame upon herself for any troubles or shortcomings which she perceived in those for whom she held herself accountable. Once more M. Vincent seeks to reassure her: "Never have I seen any one, Mademoiselle, who takes the faults of others on your shoulders as you do. I have begged of you often before not to speak in this manner. In the name of God correct yourself of the habit and remember the defects of children are not always imputed to the parents, especially in cases when their parents have instructed them and given them good example, as thank God you have done; remember also that in God's providence it has happened before that holy fathers and mothers should have suffered deeply in their offspring"; and after giving instances in the Old and New Testament he adds consolingly, "After all, by the grace of God matters are not so serious as that: on the contrary you have reason to praise God."

Another solution of the difficulty of providing a berth for the young man seems to have come from his cousin, Louis Doni de Atticci, Bishop of Riez. What the post was, and whether the idea emanated from Michel or the

Bishop, is not clear, but when the plan was broached to M. Vincent he appears to have approved of it, and as later on we hear of Michel as belonging to the household of Mgr. de Riez, it was evidently adopted. "I know," he writes, "that you submit patiently to the trial of your son's uncertainty of mind, waiting for our Lord, to show in some definite manner the course of life it would be advisable for him to adopt. Who indeed would be indulgent with a child if not its mother . . . ? Since, however, he will not study, and can make up his mind to nothing, I do not see the objection you appear to have to Mgr. de Riez. It is not so much to improve him, but in order to keep him occupied, and to diminish the risk of sloth which is the mother of all the vices getting hold of him." Possibly Louise's objection was that it would remove Michel to a distance from her, as he ends by remarking: "Alas! Mademoiselle, if all who are separated by great distances from their parents were in danger of losing their souls, where should I be! Remember all things work to the good of the predestined."

Louise's health again troubled her during the winter of 1636-7 and was a cause of anxiety to her holy director. He writes in the following terms to her: "I am much grieved to hear of your nightly recurrence of fever, and yet it appears to me that you have been less ill this winter than in preceding ones, particularly in those you spent in town, which consoles me somewhat." He was still under the impression that the country air was favourable to her, though as the years wore on he was disabused of this idea. Later on he returns to the subject thus: "I cannot express to you the grief I feel at hearing that you have had a return of your headaches. Is it possible, Mademoiselle, that it is the air of La Chapelle which causes you these pains? I beg of you to take advice of a doctor, and if it should be the case to leave at once."

One of the consequences of her ill-health, and probably by no means the least painful to her, was the privation of Holy Communion, as her weakness was such as to make it impossible for her to walk to the church—which was at some distance from La Chapelle—whilst fasting. M. Vincent's advice to her under these circumstances was as beautiful as it was consoling: "Take," he said, "what your health requires, Mademoiselle. Our Saviour is a perpetual Communion to all who are united to what He wills, or He does not will."

Another sacrifice forced upon her by the state of her health was her inability to go and visit her friend Mme. Goussault, who was confined to her bed by a severe illness about this time. She was prepared to go at any risk on this mission of charity, but M. Vincent hearing of it stopped her with these words: "I have told her [Mme. Goussault] that you are in bed. I beg you will remain there and not think of going to see her." Apparently the prohibition only held good for a day or two, as in his next letter M. Vincent remarks: "I was afraid that in returning to Mme. Goussault you would have another relapse as you had after the former visit."

In reading this constantly recurrent expression of anxiety in M. Vincent's correspondence about the health of his holy coadjutor, one does not know which excites most one's admiration—the heroic efforts of Louise to live up to God's inspirations to devote herself body and soul to the good of her neighbour, in spite of weak health and a body scarcely ever free from suffering, or the paternal solicitude of M. Vincent that she should not, by attempting the impossible, frustrate God's designs upon her, and by means of her. Is it too much to say that in all his great works of philanthropy—dictated as they were by a heart in which all thought of self was dead, and which saw only Jesus Christ and the souls for which

He died—Vincent de Paul depended (humanly speaking) on a woman, and that woman the Venerable Louise de Marillac, to help him to bring his great enterprises to fruition? We have seen this in almost every step he has taken in the past; but we are now approaching a fresh departure in which, though as before the initiative was partly from him, he had to depend wholly on a woman to carry it out.

This work is that which was known to his countrymen as that of the *Enfants-trouvés* or care of foundlings. The Catholic Church has always manifested the strongest concern in the fate of the hapless infants, for the most part illegitimate, who have been deserted by their parents. In France, severe edicts had been issued at different times against the unnatural mothers who exposed, or tried to get rid of, their offspring; and in the Middle Ages laws were passed that such children should be provided for by the parish to which they belonged, or sent to charitable institutions which had been endowed with a view of providing for their support. The Order of the Holy Ghost, established by Guy de Montpellier in the twelfth century, included this obligation in its statutes. The Chapter of Notre Dame in Paris, besides having charge of the Hôtel Dieu, had also the duty of providing for these poor little derelicts; and we find that at the commencement of the seventeenth century the care of this department was deputed to a widow with two assistants under the superintendence of the administrators of the hospital.

The salary of these officials appears to have been a somewhat precarious one, as it consisted chiefly of the offerings given at the church door. "In the porch on the left side, as you go in, stood a kind of bedstead on which on feast days two or three of these abandoned infants were exhibited in order to appeal to the com-

passion of the congregation. Their nurses, who stood by them, pointed them out to those who passed in and out of the church, repeating the words: 'Be good, kind people, to these unfortunate infants!'"¹

A contemporary writer gives us some idea of the condition of these truly unfortunate children in the following picture, which there is no reason to suppose was overdrawn:²

"The city of Paris being of great extent, and its inhabitants almost innumerable, great lawlessness existed amongst the submerged class, one of the most pernicious manifestations of which being the abandonment of newborn children. It has been calculated that no less than three or four hundred foundlings have been yearly forsaken in the city and suburbs, and from orders received by the police these children were handed over to the Commissioners of Châtelet, who made out a warrant, with particulars as to the spot and the state in which they were found. They were first taken to the *Couche*; but as this refuge was much too small to accommodate the numbers that were brought there, and the revenue was equally insufficient to support them, many died. It was said that the nurses, to relieve themselves of the importunate cries of the infants, were accustomed to drug them, and that numbers died from this cause alone. Those who survived were given to any one who was willing to take charge of them, or sold for some wretched fee such as twenty pence. They were bought for every kind of nefarious purpose, and even it is said (horrible to contemplate!) for magical and diabolical purposes. In short, it seemed as if these poor innocents were condemned to death, or something worse, from their very birth. And what is most deplorable is that many died unbaptized, as the widow who was in charge of them

¹ *Vénéralé Louise de Marillac*, p. 150.

² *Ibid.*, p. 203.

owned that she had never baptized, or caused to be baptized, any of the infants under her care."

The Porte St. Landry, where the *Couche* was situated, was in the near neighbourhood of the parish of St. Nicholas, and it can hardly be doubted that the compassion of Louise must have been frequently excited by the sight of these hapless infants. It was not, however, till the end of the year 1636, before she and the community had moved from that parish to La Chapelle, that we find the subject mentioned in M. Vincent's correspondence.

As usual, this letter is an answer to one from Louise, and as usual, the proposal to undertake a fresh work comes from her, and M. Vincent postpones the adoption of it till he considers that God's time had come: in other words, till some manifestations of the Divine Will had shown itself to him.

"This, Mademoiselle," he writes, "is my answer to your last letter. Something must be done with regard to the abandoned children. A meeting is to be held to-day at Mme. Goussault's house; I should be very glad if you could assist at it, and that you would write to that lady to ask her to send her carriage for you. It would be to the purpose if you let me know your opinion regarding the proposal of M. Dieu and M. Foucault to the Canons of the Chapter."

The matter on this occasion evidently made a step forward, as we find a letter dated the 1st of January, 1636, in which M. Vincent acquaints this mother of the unfortunate that her wishes had been heard. It had been agreed at the meeting to make an attempt to grapple with this growing evil.

"Mademoiselle," he writes, "it was resolved at the last Ladies' meeting that you should be asked to undertake this work of the foundlings, if means can be found of bringing two or three of them up on cows' milk. It

is a consolation to me that Providence should make use of you in this undertaking. There are several things to be discussed on the subject, of which we will treat later." This was a work after M. Vincent's own heart, for it was in aid of the most afflicted and neglected of God's creatures; and accordingly he cannot drop the subject without this touching exordium: "I wish you a new heart and an entirely fresh love for Him who loves us unceasingly and yet as tenderly as if He had only begun at this moment to love us, for all God's delights are always fresh and always new, though there is no change in Him."

As far as we are able to judge from M. Vincent's correspondence, the letters being frequently without date, Louise had not waited for the approval of the Association to begin a tentative effort to assist these unfortunate children. That she had given asylum to three or four in the Rue St. Victor before removing to La Chapelle is clear from more than one reference to them. We also learn from M. Vincent's conferences, as well as his letters, that the Chapter and several people of influence had pressed the urgent claims of the foundlings on him before he had seen his way to taking up this new work.

In a letter dated the 15th of February, 1638, he speaks of it in these terms: "With regard to the foundlings, I have received a great and pressing appeal on the subject from M. Hardy. He makes me answerable for all the delays. What inconvenience would there be in your buying a goat, and continuing the experiment on a larger scale?" Another letter, written a few days later, mentions that Mlle. Hardy (a relation doubtless of the above) presses for an assembly of ladies being convened in order that the contributions promised by them might be collected for the benefit of the *Couche*.

M. Vincent, however, was opposed to this scheme, as we gather from the following: "If I refuse to summon the meeting she will look upon it as a grievance; if I do, it will be contrary to my better judgment. I doubt, considering all things, that this is desirable, as her object is that the ladies should visit the foundling hospital, and that all should proceed there according to the order already established. My belief is, that it would be better to give up the funds derived from the house rather than subject oneself to so many rules and regulations, with the prospect also of having many obstacles to overcome, and thus to found a new establishment, leaving the present one for the moment as it now is. What do you think of this? It would suffice if she was willing to acquiesce in the trial you are prepared to make at your house with a nurse and some goats."

There can be no question about the answer given by Louise to the above letter, as it was in full agreement with her own views. It was followed very shortly afterwards by a meeting of the ladies of the Association, at which M. Vincent explained his views at length. The prayer which he read on this occasion still exists in his handwriting.

After a few preliminary words in which he invoked the love of the Redeemer and lover of little children, he described the hapless fate of foundlings: "What extremity of misery could be greater than that of these little creatures, abandoned by father and mother, and at the mercy of the first comer who takes them and then allows them to die of hunger or disease! What a disgrace to Paris, which reproaches the Turk with selling men like beasts, and allows these little ones to be sold to the first comer for thirty pence! It is treason to the Church, the mother of these little creatures to whom the same fate is allotted as that to which the Holy

Innocents were condemned by Herod, as they are rented out to monsters who let some of them die of hunger and to others who mutilate them by breaking their arms and legs. We are bound to come to their assistance under risk of damnation, for to neglect them means leaving them to perish. *Si non pavisti occidisti*. But, it may be objected, this is an affair of the higher powers, not of private individuals, especially is it no business of women's. This is true: but who in high places is likely to take it up? Who in Paris will undertake it? And meanwhile these poor little creatures die! But, it may be replied, it is the curse of their birth which weighs them down, and perhaps it is for that reason that God permits these difficulties in dealing with such cases. Ah! Is it not on account of the sin of Adam that our Saviour became incarnate and died, and is it not therefore Christ's work to take these little children, outcasts though they may be? Is it not possible that future saints and even men of note may be amongst these very foundlings?" M. Vincent then mentioned many great characters in history such as that of Moses, Melchisedech—of whom St. Paul says that he had no father or mother, in short, was a foundling—and many more.

But the chief difficulty (M. Vincent admitted) was the greatness of the cost. "It would require," he told his hearers, "550 livres¹ to bring up six or seven children, so as there are at the least 200 or 300 children deserted every year, think how many times that sum would have to be multiplied to meet the outlay! Supposing we began with fifty, we should require a revenue of 4,000 livres a year; without taking the rent of a house into consideration; and this sum would always go on

¹ A livre was equal in value to a franc. Accordingly 550 livres would be equivalent to about £80 in these days—allowing for money having quadrupled in value.

doubling itself, so that in the tenth year it would amount to 40,000 a year!" He summed up by saying that it was impossible to do everything, but something might be done, and that by this beginning they should "seek to honour our blessed Saviour persecuted by Herod, and help these children to grow up in the fear of the Lord."

The next step taken was to discuss the various measures proposed. At first the ladies did not commit themselves to more than an undertaking to visit the foundling hospital, two at a time every day, in the same way as they had been accustomed to visit at the Hôtel Dieu. This measure, as we have already learnt from M. Vincent, was quite inefficacious in his eyes.

"Will these ladies," he asked, "go there and allow matters to continue as before? And would they have the power, not being at home there, to make any changes should they judge them necessary? And would they be provided with funds sufficient to maintain the establishment should they take it over?"

As these objections were obviously unanswerable, it was finally resolved that a house should be taken with a view of starting an orphanage for twelve foundlings, and that this number should be increased as soon as funds for the work were forthcoming, the ladies (according to Gobillon) protesting that it was with deep sorrow, and only on account of their inability to do more, that they did not take all the infants at the present time. M. Vincent then proposed a resolution that a Committee of ladies should be formed to look after the foundlings, and that this Committee should be distinct from that of the Hôtel Dieu, though united to it and recruited from the same sources. He also said that it should be open to the Association to appoint the same office-holders for both works, in order doubtless to secure the services of Mme. Goussault and Louise for the new undertaking.

As far as we can learn from M. Vincent's correspondence, the plan of hiring a house to serve as an orphanage was not carried into execution till about a year later, and meanwhile the twelve children were given hospitality by Louise at her house at La Chapelle. More than one letter of M. Vincent mentions them, principally in order to inquire after their healths and on more than one occasion in order to lament over their deaths. In an undated letter in the course of the year 1639, he says: "I am astonished to hear of the death of so many of these little creatures. . . . We must seriously consider what can be done about the matter." Again, a little later: "I wrote this morning to Mme. de Traversay that she should replace to the number of seven the vacant places, partly from the foundling hospital, and partly from the Hôtel Dieu, until such time as you can procure another nurse, a goat and a cow"—the children mentioned as coming from the Hôtel Dieu being those who, having lost their parents there, had been taken charge of by the hospital authorities.

This housing of the foundlings at La Chapelle, which was from the first considered only a temporary measure, became more and more inconvenient as time advanced; and finally the ladies who had charge of the work found a house for them in the Faubourg St. Victor, in proximity to the hospital and not far from Louise's former abode.

In an undated letter belonging to this time, M. Vincent makes over to Louise the duty of regulating the ways and means of the new establishment: "Here is occupation for you with regard to the change of abode of the foundlings, and of the arrangements to be made in consequence of it. I must beg of you to work at this tomorrow, and to send me the paper you have drawn up on Saturday."

A member of the Association of the Ladies of Charity,

Mlle. Pelletier by name, was placed at the head of this house, and we find M. Vincent regulating her position and that of Louise de Marillac in the following letter :

"It appears to me," he writes to Louise, "that the establishment should in matters temporal be conducted by the good ladies, but with regard to spiritual affairs, such as the direction of the Sisters, of the nurses and of the little children as they grow older, they should be left in your hands. Thus it would be necessary for you to be kept informed on all these points every week, or at least every fortnight."

The memorandum prepared by Louise was submitted to the ladies at the next meeting and approved of by them. M. Vincent writes as follows after the meeting had been held: "We have passed your budget for the foundlings in two meetings, the office-holders of the Association of the Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel Dieu assisting. We shall communicate the resolutions, which I am going to draw up in the form of Regulations, to Mlle. Pelletier and see if she is willing to abide by them. This will be done at Mme. Goussault's house in the presence of the office-holders. All the committee agreed that it was necessary that the house should be under the superintendence of the Superior of the Sisters of Charity, as I have already told you; also that you should spend seven or eight days there should your health permit."

Louise's large experience stood her in good stead, and she was able to let the Ladies of Charity see what they had committed themselves to in this preliminary venture. The calculation of expenses is not without interest even in these days, though the purchasing power of money was so much greater three centuries ago that it is difficult to translate it into modern values.

House-rent is put at 300 livres a year; heating (40 cart-loads of wood) at 400; food (3 sols, 6 deniers of

meat being allowed per day) amounts to 268 livres a year. Three sols are allotted to the nurses for their board; 2 sols, and as much more for meat, for the Sisters; and 42 livres for wine. The board of the nurses is fixed at 8 écus per annum.

In a letter from M. Vincent which follows almost immediately afterwards, he announced to Louise that the contract is signed, and that he is sending it to her with the keys of the house. This holy work took from its earliest beginnings a foremost position in Louise's interest. She dedicated the house to the Holy Family, and adorned it with a painting on the subject which earned the praise of M. Vincent, as we find him writing to her that "the picture of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph holding the infant Jesus by the hand is good and appropriate for the little foundlings." We are told by her biographer that she greatly loved these poor little forsaken mortals, and felt deeply the continual deaths that thinned their ranks. More than once we find her holy director consoling her for their loss, and reminding her that God was taking them in order that they might be happy for ever in Heaven, and escaping a fate—we may be tempted to add—which did not offer much joy on earth.

This prudent venture on a small scale was of short duration. "The excellent ladies (Abelly tells us), urged by their charitable instincts, would not restrict themselves to the small number of twelve, and desired to adopt all the other foundlings, and to take upon their shoulders their bringing up and education. At last, having prayed much to God about it, and concerted together on the subject, they held a general meeting in the commencement of the year 1640, in which M. Vincent put before them in glowing words the necessity and importance of this good work. They then took the generous

resolution of undertaking the care of feeding and bringing up these little ones. So as not to entangle themselves inconsiderately in what undoubtedly was an enterprise of great magnitude, by the advice of their wise director they began it only by way of a trial, without binding themselves to the obligation of keeping it up permanently—to have done so, considering that they had only an assured revenue of twelve or fourteen hundred livres a year, would have been, to say the least of it, exceedingly rash.”

The letter, dated 11th of January, 1640, in which M. Vincent acquaints Louise of the decision of the Association of the Ladies of Charity, runs as follows :

“How necessary your presence is here, Mademoiselle ! not only on your Daughters’ account but for the general affairs of the *Charités*. The general meeting of the ladies belonging to the Hôtel Dieu took place on Thursday last. Her Highness the Princess, and the Duchesse d’Aiguillon were present. I have never seen a larger company, nor greater modesty displayed. It was resolved to take all the foundlings. You were not forgotten on the occasion.”

Probably of all the brilliant company (Royal Highnesses included) who assembled in conclave that day there was only one present, M. Vincent himself—and perhaps we may add Louise de Marillac, who was there in spirit—who realised what they were taking on themselves in adopting the output of the misery and degradation of a great city, the children of the most degraded part of its population. But to the eyes of a saint like M. Vincent all things were possible where God’s interests were involved. As for Louise, she asked for nothing better than to co-operate with him in whatever concerned God’s glory and the salvation of souls.

The immediate result of the measure was that the

ladies found that the house in the Faubourg St. Victor was quite insufficient to shelter its inmates. This fact, and an equally striking one of the great mortality of the foundlings, even when rescued from the ruffians of the *Couche* and under the care of the Sisters at La Chapelle, obliged the Association (always under the direction of M. Vincent) to try if better results could not be obtained by placing them under country nurses. Louise's intimate knowledge of the small villages in the outlying districts of Paris must have been of great use to her here. Many members of the community also must have contributed information derived from their friends and relations, all of the honest peasant or lower middle class, on the same subject. Not satisfied with taking every precaution that the horrors perpetrated at the *Couche* should not be renewed in remote country districts, by careful inquiries into the character of the nurses employed, we find that from the first year of the fresh departure mention is made of a Mme. du Mercy who offers to visit all the foundlings in the province of Normandy. M. Vincent asks for a Sister of Charity to accompany her on this visit of inspection. Louise's letters allude more than once to similar domiciliary visits. M. Vincent's correspondence contains frequent references to these children: however engrossed his time was with the affairs of his Missions, with his ecclesiastical retreats, or of the many vast organisations which depended on him, he always finds leisure to inquire after, or record his interest in these little waifs, whom he loved because he knew how dear they were to the Heart of his Master.

CHAPTER VIII

THE words of the inspired writer : " Behold I will allure her and will lead her into solitude, and there I will speak to her soul," have ever found an echo in the Christian heart, enforced as they were by our Divine Saviour's example. It was the devout contemplation of the forty days spent by Him in the wilds of the Quarantana in preparation for His public life, His nights spent in the mountains " in the prayer of God," or under the olive trees of Gethsemane, which was the cause of the exodus of the early Christians from the cities into the desert places. The same thought or leading principle lies at the root of all the contemplative Orders, and while it has had this powerful effect on these great religious families as a whole, it has been no less an inspiration and a lode-star to the individual soul.

To retire from the world, for a period at any rate; to shut eyes and ears to worldly sights and sounds in order to open them to the Spirit of God; in short, to have " one's conversation in Heaven," has been the aim at all times of souls aspiring to perfection.

The Venerable Louise de Marillac was no exception to this rule. In her early youth she was prepared to turn her back on a world which had not treated her too well, and join the austere Order of Franciscans or Poor Clares; and though she was dissuaded from taking this step by her prudent director, who saw that she was unfitted for it, she manifested all through her life the attraction and

love of solitude and prayer common to all holy souls. Before following up her career of active charity, it would be well to pause for a moment, and give a little time to the consideration of the inner side of her life, the animating principle of all her labours, and the cause of their astounding fruitfulness.

Father Faber remarks in one of his spiritual writings that a hasty perusal of the lives of some of the saints, such as St. Francis Xavier, St. Bernardine of Siena or others, would lead one to imagine that their time, considering the marvels they accomplished in a short space, was wholly taken up in their divine mission of saving souls. But were we to check the chapters relating to their missionary work by the chapter on prayer we should see that the time they spent in work was short in comparison to the hours they spent in drawing down God's blessing on it by prayer.

We possess several guides to Louise's interior life: one being a collection of her own notes on various leading events in her life; her "thoughts and reflections"; and the life written of her by her contemporary Gobillon, as well as that of her latest biographer, Mgr. Baunard.

To the latter we owe a summary of Louise's spiritual gifts. Louise had always possessed an insatiable thirst for prayer, and as this writer tells us: "Her meditations which have come down to us are such as we should have been led to expect from one of her sound judgment, formed on the basis of deep study, a heart utterly united to God and a singularly elevated mind. She practised prayer and contemplation with the greatest fidelity, redoubling her hours of prayer on the Fridays of Lent, during which days she shut herself up in her room from twelve till three in the afternoon in order to meditate on the Passion and death of our Saviour. Besides these regular exercises, she took three or four days several

times a year for a spiritual retreat, including one of ten days from the feast of the Ascension to that of Pentecost Sunday. Her attraction to prayer and the interior life was such that she appeared to be always recollected, and her attention never wandered from God in spite of the diversity and multifariousness of her actions. . . . The spirituality of Louise de Marillac bears strongly the imprint of the great mystic writers of her time. She was of the school of MM. de Berulle and Olier, even more than that of St. Francis de Sales. We see a reflection of their dissertations on the inner life of Jesus Christ—the incomprehensible annihilations of the Word made Flesh, the mysterious operations of the soul to which He was hypostatically united, and those hidden depths of which St. John speaks—in the theology of the first half of the seventeenth century. It need not surprise us if her speech fails her, and her pen falters to a certain extent, under the weight of these great subjects. But plunge as she may in these Divine abysses she never loses her foothold. Her grasp of solid doctrine is un-failing, and neither in thought nor in word does she ever lose sight of the most exact truth. . . . Her heart was wholly penetrated by the love of Him to Whom it was dedicated. To know Him better in order to love Him better, and above all to imitate His Divine example more successfully, was her final end and object : in other words, her aim was perfect conformity with the Will of her Divine Spouse. Louise's spiritual life, like that of all the saints, consisted of the triple operation : the first by which the soul empties itself entirely of self-love, which then is filled with God, and finally gives God to the world. I have sometimes compared this process to that which science teaches us about extinct volcanoes ; first they cast forth their scorixæ, then are filled with water from the skies, and these in turn give

birth to streams, which flowing from these sources fertilise all the surrounding valleys.

“Humility, self-abnegation, obedience, penance, self-sacrifice: these are the acts by which the soul empties itself out, and at the same time enlarges itself to make room for God. No heart could be more humble than was that of Louise de Marillac, nor one which desired more to acquire that virtue. We have seen how in the renewal of her baptismal vows she recognises in herself sins more criminal than those of Satan. The saints have all had these moments of crushing self-examination after deep contemplation of God's perfections. Louise, therefore, in her jealousy for God, the sole object of her affections, is seized with a kind of hatred of herself. She wages a warfare unto death against pride which is His enemy. She will give herself no rest till she has conquered those impatiences of which she is conscious, and has obtained the grace that all the vivacities of her inner soul were laid to rest. She would fain get rid of every vestige of self-love in union with the sublime surrender which the Son of God made of His glory in His Incarnation. The humility of her submission to her director, as we have already seen, was such that she had no will of her own, seeing only God's Will in his. She was prepared to accept beforehand ‘all trials, privations, abandonments which it would please God to send her, and thus to live or die according to His Divine Will.’ She offered Him her body in sickness or in health, and willingly immolated it in unceasing labour in His service. Poverty, chastity, and obedience were to her as three sisters, to which she was irrevocably bound by the closest and most loving ties. ‘Let us live,’ she cries, ‘as dead to all that is not Christ. Let there be no resistance to Him, no thought, no action out of Him, in short, no life except in Jesus and in our neighbour.’

Union with God: this is the life of grace, the way of holiness, such as Louise understood and practised it, besides teaching it to others.

“ ‘We must leave the earth—our sensual nature,’ she writes on the day of the Ascension, ‘in order to unite ourselves to the essence of the Divinity.’ Her resolution in one of her earlier retreats had been to imprint on her soul the likeness of Jesus, His virtues, His life, His soul; and in order to accomplish this, her prayer was a continual meditation on the Divine mysteries as set forth in the holy gospels. By gazing on His countenance she was wholly penetrated by the rays which coming from Him engraved His features on her heart. ‘My prayer,’ she said on one occasion, ‘is more that of sight’ (in other words contemplation) ‘than that of the intellect.’ Love even more than prayer united her to her Lord. She is astounded, and cannot sufficiently rejoice that Jesus Christ has said that if we love Him, He and His Father will take up their abode in us. But this perfect love, which she longs to possess, she can only prove by perfect conformity to the Will of God. Therefore she welcomes crosses, trials of all sorts, for Jesus always comes to us bearing His cross. ‘O crosses! O sufferings, how dear you are to me!’ she exclaimed, ‘because you confer on our souls the power of praising and serving God! How beautiful you are, because God having loaded His Son with you, to carry you is to find the sure road to that Paradise from which those who put their pleasure in worldly joys are excluded.’ No words can express the joy that Louise experienced in partaking of the holy Eucharist. We have seen how at times her humility caused her to hesitate to approach the banquet of the Body and Blood of her Lord, and how her holy director told her to overcome her fears; and we read in her ‘Notes’ that this

reassurance came to her also from her Divine Spouse Himself. 'It appeared to me,' she writes, 'that in response to my fears my soul was made to understand that my God willed to come and abide in it, not as a place wherein to take delight, but as His property and possession, so that, in a sense, I had no right to deny Him entrance. Therefore I was to receive Him as its sovereign owner, and implore Him to make my heart the seat of His divine Majesty.' 'The holy Communion of the Body of Jesus Christ,' she writes, 'causes us to enter into possession of the Communion of Saints and the joys of Paradise.'

"Louise's love of souls was a natural consequence of her love of God; and to her love of all suffering and sinful humanity she joined a special love for her country. A child of the diocese of St. Denis, patron saint of France, living at the foot of the hill¹ where the holy Bishop had suffered a martyr's death for France, she recalled it thus in one of her prayers, in order to animate herself in the service of Christian France: 'O great St. Denis,' she exclaimed, "your country is beginning to realise the obligations she is under to you for having drawn her from the ignorance of Paganism to the knowledge of the truth, and to the glory of the Son of God. Blessed for ever be he who bore the torch of these holy truths of religion! And yet, O great Saint of Heaven, thou seest the ingratitude of so many of thy nation, who, though God has revealed himself to them by so many means, do not recognise nor serve Him as they should!' Then, after asking the saint's intercession for all labourers in the evangelical field in that beloved country, she turns to Montmartre, the summit of which was crowned by the Benedictine monastery, and joining her prayers to those of the holy religious there, she inter-

¹ Montmartre.

cedes with them for the French nation, saying: 'O blessed saint, obtain the grace for this people which the sacrifice of your life has purchased through the merits of Jesus Christ, that this holy mountain still smoking with heavenly fire may attract all hearts to God, and that all Christians may participate in its blessings to the honour and glory of His name.'"¹

It is impossible to give a study to Louise de Marillac's life without perceiving that her chief characteristic was her profound humility. In nothing did she show more her desire to imitate the example of our Divine Saviour, who, though He was a model of every virtue, taught His disciples that meekness and humility were those which He specially desired they should learn of Him. Her submission to her director is a proof of this, though others are not wanting. The extent to which she carried this submission may provoke a smile in some who would yield to no man in their admiration for her life of devotion to the poor and suffering; but let them reflect that Louise de Marillac's humility sinks to insignificance beside that of the Son of God, and that her life was deliberately modelled on that of the heavenly Carpenter of Nazareth, Who for thirty years was subject to Joseph and Mary. Her attraction to this Hidden Life it was that sustained her through years of suffering and toil, and was the unsuspected cause of the benediction on them; unsuspected indeed by the world, which judges only by outward show, but visible to all versed in the science of the saints, for they realise that men's works prosper only in proportion to the piety, holiness, and the grace of God which is put into their foundations.

This desire to remain hidden, to give to others the credit due to work she had accomplished, was so strong in Louise as to draw down on one occasion a reproof

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, pp. 225-30.

from her director. She had asked to have her name left out in the list which was going to be made of those engaged in an undertaking in which she had been largely concerned. "What reason have you," he wrote to her, "for asking that this should be done? One should be ever on one's guard against the vice of singularity, which generally has its roots in pride, which is the father of all vices."

One is tempted to associate this somewhat crushing rejoinder with a letter of M. Vincent's belonging to this period (undated) in answer to one of Louise's in which she begs of him never to pass over any fault he sees in her. "Right willingly," he says, "I will take care to acquaint you with all your defects, and I will not pass over a single one."

Of such sterling stuff was M. Vincent's direction made. He saw that God called his penitent to great heights of perfection, and that his work was to second it, and that he did, as he declared, very willingly. But this perfect candour and honesty of purpose which characterised all his dealings with Louise in no way derogated from the high opinion he had of her sanctity and prudence, virtues which he was preparing at the very time he wrote these letters to put to fresh proof.

The spiritual works of mercy ever went hand in hand under M. Vincent's guidance with the corporal works of mercy. To help the body, in his sight, was only to accomplish half the task imposed by the virtue of charity, of love of God and man. To assist the soul in its journey through life, or its passage to eternity, was even more essential. And this rule applied to the workers as well as to their patients and *protégés*. Did M. Vincent detect in some of these coadjutors—ladies of fashion, as we know—desires in which the mundane competed with the supernatural, and in whom love of change, of a

fresh sensation predominated, even when they had (nominally) dedicated themselves to good works under his direction? We have seen how he insisted on practices of piety, Mass, the frequentation of the Sacraments at stated intervals, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, keeping pace with the outward duties; but this was not enough. He had begun ever since he came to St. Lazare giving retreats to men living in the world; this practice, from which much good had resulted, he now proposed to establish in connection with the various Associations of Ladies of Charity. Such were his methods; and they were equally applicable to the needs of saints and sinners.

The saints, needless to say, led the way in the new venture; and so M. Vincent writes to Louise to announce: "Mme. la Présidente Goussault and Mlle. Lamy are going to stay with you in order to make their little retreat. I beg of you to do all you can for them with this object. Give them the horarium which I made out for you, and put down the subjects of meditation which they should make. They should also give an account of the good thoughts which these have suggested to them. Let them have a spiritual lecture during their meals, after which they should take a little récreation. . . . If it is fine weather they may take a walk after their dinner, but they should observe silence excepting on those two occasions. It would be well that they should write down the principal lights they may have received in prayer. They had better prepare for a general confession on Wednesday, The spiritual reading might be taken from the *Following of Christ*, or from L. de Granada's works bearing on the subject of their meditation. They should also read some chapters of the New Testament. It would be advisable on the day they make their general confession to give them the prayer contained in Granada's Memorial to excite

them to contrition. As regards the rest, you will doubtless be careful that they should not break the rule of discretion during these holy exercises. I pray that the Holy Spirit may be your guide in the matter."

Mme. Goussault persevered in this annual retreat during the remainder of her life, which was prematurely cut short a few years later. Already she had begun to show signs of delicate health; M. Vincent, whose charity was of the kind that not only compassionated suffering but was ever ready to devise remedies against it, writes on her behalf to Louise: "I fear that Mme. la Présidente may be incommoded from sleeping in the room which looks upon the street. It appears to me I have heard her say that she suffers from sleeplessness in such a situation" and so forth. Truly "charity thinks of everything."

Many notes have come down to us on the subject of these retreats—extending as they did over a great number of years, and given to penitents of M. Vincent or members of the Association and drawn from all classes of life. The retreats were directed by the saint; but his time was too much taken up for him to do more than choose the subjects of meditation of the exercitants and hear their confessions; he left all minor details to Louise. Occasionally he gives her special directions, such as the following, for a young girl engaged to be married: "It would be well that you should give this good child an exhortation in particular, besides the customary ones, in preparation for her marriage. First of all you might put before her the reasons why a wife should live on good terms with her husband, supporting yourself on the authority of St. Paul. . . . Secondly, explain in what the life of a woman consists in her relations with her husband; to wit that she should love him above all things except God, and should please and

obey him in everything short of sin. Thirdly, the means a wife should use to live happily with her husband ; which are to ask God's grace ; never to give entrance into her heart of the smallest feeling of disparagement of him ; never to say or do anything to cause him displeasure ; to take some holy married woman as a model, and to honour with special devotion the wedded life of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph." A letter which belongs to this period shows M. Vincent's confidence in Louise, and the manner in which she supplemented his work in all matters excepting those which had to do with his priestly character : " It is true," he writes, " that Mme. Careyre has expressed a wish to see me sometimes, but this does not mean that you should not treat with her as you do with other persons. Briefly : give her the exercises just as you are accustomed to do, and as if I was not going to see her at all. She has complete confidence in you."

The confidence reposed in Louise was not restricted to persons of her own class, or to the Ladies of Charity. We hear of an actress—a successful one, who had made money, and wished to retire from the stage—being guided to the solitude of the little house in La Chapelle. M. Vincent writes to recommend her to Louise in these words : " Madame de Chaumont has just left me. She has been speaking to me about an actress who wishes to give up her way of life in order to return to her own country where she intends buying a property, having made enough money to enable her to do so. The good Mme. de Chaumont is very anxious that before doing this she should make a retreat of seven or eight days. I have encouraged her to expect this act of charity of you. You are willing to take her, Mademoiselle, are you not ? " These and many others, above all, women in affliction, mourning the loss of husband or child, came

to seek under the humble roof of the *Sœur Servante* a few days of peace and intercourse with God to strengthen them for the combat of life. Such was the following case, upon which Louise asks the saint's advice: "Last week a lady of good family came to tell me that she would like to try the life here and serve God with us. She is the widow of a gentleman named M. Sigongue, and has only been nine months widowed. She is still in profound affliction for her loss, which has detached her from all earthly things. She has no children. I know not if God has sent her here. She moved me to great compassion, seeing the affliction she was in. If she returns, do you think it would be well that we should take her in to make a short retreat, which might serve to distract her thoughts from her troubles?"

Occasionally a husband and wife would make their retreat at the same time; the husband at St. Lazare under the direction of M. Vincent, whilst his wife put herself under the care of Louise, either at La Chapelle or, later on, at the Mother-house at St. Laurent. Some who had profited by Louise's experience and knowledge of spiritual things asked her guidance in the regulation of their lives.

It was in answer to such an appeal that she wrote: "This, Madame, is a way of life such as I spoke to you about, and which seems to me suitable to you from the knowledge you gave me of what is passing in your dear soul. Live ever united to God, my dear lady, by a most loving sweet concord in all things between your will and that of our good God. . . . Attach much importance to humility and cordiality, and treat with our Lord in prayer with great simplicity and familiarity. Take no heed whether you have fine sentiments or not; God only asks for our hearts, He has put our free-will alone in our power: that is what He looks to, not the actions

which result from it. Reflect as little as possible on self, and live joyfully in the service of our Sovereign Lord and Master. This, Madame, is what your humility asks of my poverty. I give it to you in all simplicity, as our Lord shows it to me. I beg of His infinite goodness that He will raise your soul to the perfection in which He wishes to see it. Recommend to His mercy, I beg of you, the desires you have expressed to me, and believe me, neither you nor your husband, nor all those beloved beings who are so dear to you, shall be forgotten in my poor prayers."

Many ladies whose names we shall come across later in the history of Louise's life were amongst those who stole a few days from the world, in order to spend them in silence and recollection under her roof. Such were the Duchesses of Mirepoix and de Bouillon, Mme. de Miramion, Mlle. Marie Delpech de Lestang. Of the last-named we read that her life had for many years been given to good works, and that under the direction of M. Vincent she had gathered together fifty orphans, whom she had brought up under her own roof in the Rue Vieux Colombier. Marie de la Guiche, Duchesse de Ventadour, and the Baronne de Guise were also amongst the number of those who made their retreats in the little house of La Chapelle St. Denis. It is interesting to note that notwithstanding the exceeding poverty of the community and of their holy superior, no payment was ever taken from those who made their retreats. The hospitality which was so freely asked of Louise was as freely given. M. Vincent observed the same rule at St. Lazare, where all his retreats to men of the world were given gratuitously; and in the case of Louise (her biographer adds) he would have deemed that it was not fit for a woman of her birth to receive money for services rendered. A letter to M. Vincent has

been preserved which shows how strictly this precept was adhered to. Louise remarks that she had great difficulty in defending herself from the importunity of Mme. de Mirepoix: "I once more refused the alms of ten crowns which she offered for her retreat. She forced it on one of the Sisters, who put it in the clothes of her waiting woman. Finally she deposited it on the doorstep. I was not at home at the time. Does your charity think it would be well that I should return her the money with a copy of our rules?"

One cannot but admire this noble disinterestedness, which is as rare as it is admirable, and perhaps rarer in these days than it was then.

It was in the first years of the removal to La Chapelle that an Association of Charity was formed consisting of ladies belonging to the Court. M. Vincent was invited to draw up the rules; in reading them one cannot but be struck by the holy simplicity and zeal for souls which caused him to try and introduce the precepts of a devout life into that focus of worldliness, the Court of Anne of Austria. "The confraternity of Ladies of Charity shall be composed of the Queen's majesty, and of a certain number of ladies chosen by her to belong to it. The Queen will direct the said Company. They will assemble wherever the Queen shall direct on the first Friday of the month. . . . They will have for a maxim never to treat of affairs, particular or general, notably with matters regarding the State; nor shall they make use of the occasion in order to advance their own interests." On the other hand the saint enjoins them "to study to acquire Christian perfections, and the knowledge of the duties of their state of life: also to make at least half an hour's mental prayer in the day, to hear Mass, and read a chapter of the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, or *The Love of God*, to make a daily examination of

conscience, to confess and communicate at least once a week, and during their assembly on the first Friday in the month to entertain their minds humbly and devoutly for half an hour on the thoughts with which our Lord should have inspired them during their morning's meditation." In conclusion he asks them to honour in a special manner the silence of Jesus Christ, by keeping it with regard to the affairs of the Association, because the "prince of this world" brings to ridicule holy matters which are divulged to the impious.

That these maxims were not without fruit M. Vincent himself testifies, as in one of his conferences he speaks of the edification he had received from the widow of Henry II, mother of Condé: "On one occasion," he says, "I saw the Princess going in and out of more than twenty-five houses, visiting the poor on foot, conversing with them and consoling them. When she came back I cannot describe the state she was in—her robes were covered with mud up to her knees. . . . Thus it is that these good ladies laboured for the poor, and it was thus also that St. Louis worked."

It was whilst addressing one of these Assemblies that M. Vincent uttered these golden words, which should be imprinted on the minds of all those who work for God in the person of His poor: "Your first duty, ladies, is to work at your own spiritual advancement, and to live in the state of perfection to which you are called, to keep the lamp burning within you ever alight; I mean by this to cherish an ardent, sweet, and persevering desire to please and obey God: in other words, to live as true servants of God. Those who live in this manner draw down the grace of God and Jesus Christ Himself in their hearts and in their actions. You will thus obtain the virtue of persevering in your good works, because the God of mercy will take up His abode within you."

M. Vincent made no secret of his efforts to turn aside the souls of his hearers—members of the Court as they were—from what he termed the pomp and luxuries of the world. Speaking to the Assembly of the early beginnings of the Association of Ladies of Charity, he said: "Formerly those were chosen from the number who presented themselves who did not go to plays, who did not gamble nor frequent dangerous places of amusement, as well as those who did not play the part of devotee out of vanity alone. We must have this belief rooted in us that God only bestows His graces on those who separate themselves from the great world, who approach Him with recollected hearts in order to unite themselves to Him by desire, by prayer, and by holy occupations, in such a manner as to manifest to the world that they have given themselves up to God's service."

CHAPTER IX

THE field which the Sisters of Charity, under the guidance of their holy founders, had already worked so assiduously was, if possible, even more fruitful of good works than before in the years 1638-9. One of these was a great extension of the Associations of Charity. Hitherto these had been restricted to the immediate neighbourhood of Paris. Only on one occasion had they gone beyond the confines of the diocese of Beauvais in the north, and on this occasion the reception of the Confraternity by the Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne had not been of a nature to encourage further efforts in those parts. The establishment of a *Charité* at Richelieu, therefore, which was strongly pressed on M. Vincent by the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, and backed up by her all-powerful uncle, Cardinal Richelieu, was a matter of serious consideration between him and the Superior of the Sisters of Charity. M. Vincent brings the subject before her in the following letter: "M. Lambert writes to Mme. de Comballet¹ from Richelieu to say that it is necessary to start the Association there of Ladies of Charity; that two women have died there this very week without any one to look after them. What do you think about it, Mademoiselle? Would it be well to send Barbe and another Sister? Oh, what an amount of good is there to be done in that country! And if you were equal to it you could go there in the spring: by

¹ At that time Duchesse d'Aiguillon.

coach to Orleans, and then by water as far as Saumur, which is only eight miles off." Richelieu, from which town the Cardinal took his name, was situated at a distance of about seventy miles from Paris. M. Vincent in a later epistle reiterates his request for Barbe "on account of the number of sick who would have to be visited." He had his way, and wrote to announce to M. Lambert "I hope to send you an excellent Sister of Charity. She not only nurses the sick but can compound the medicines. It was she who, as I told you, preferred the service of the poor to that of a great lady."

Barbe, accompanied by a Sister Louise, set out on the journey on the 1st of October, 1638, supplied with the itinerary of their journey and fifty livres. Louise as usual asks for M. Vincent's instructions as well as his blessing on the travellers. "I pray very gladly," he answers, "to our Saviour that He bestow His benediction on our dear Sisters, and that He will give them a share of the Holy Spirit with which He endowed the pious women who accompanied Him and co-operated with His good works. Oh, Mademoiselle, what a happiness for these good Sisters to go where they can carry on the work of charity which our Lord exercised when He was on earth! Who would imagine it possible, seeing these two peasant girls in the coach, that they were bound on an errand which was so admirable in the sight of God and His angels, and which the Man-God found worthy of His dignity and of that of His Blessed Mother. How heaven will rejoice over it! How great will be the praise they will receive in another life! With what erect heads they will stand on the day of judgment! Of a truth it appears to me that the crowns of empires will be as mud in comparison with those with which they will be crowned!" He then proceeds to give the Sisters some practical advice which is as useful now as it was

then: "It remains for me to say that they should conduct themselves after the example of the Blessed Virgin in their journey and in their actions. They should look upon her frequently as if before their eyes; they should imitate her, and picture to themselves what she would have been likely to do in their place. They should consider her charity and her humility, and they should be very humble before God and very cordial with each other, charitable and kind to all the world, and giving disedification to none. They should perform their pious exercises every morning, either before the coach starts or on the road. Let them take some little book from which they can occasionally read, and at other times they can say their beads. They should join in any conversation on devout subjects, but take no part in any on worldly matters; still less on ribald subjects, and let them be as firm as a rock against familiarities which men might be inclined to take with them. . . . Arrived at Richelieu, they should at once proceed to visit the Blessed Sacrament, after which they will go to see M. Lambert, and receive his orders and seek to carry them out with regard to the sick and the school-children. They should persevere with great exactitude in their little daily exercises of piety. They shall go to confession every week, and do their utmost to benefit the souls whilst they are ministering to the bodies of the poor. They will also obey and treat with due respect the heads of the Association."

M. Vincent followed up these instructions with a visit to Richelieu, shortly after the Sisters were installed there, which he describes in a letter to one of his missionaries. The letter is dated the 18th of October: "Here I am just returned from Richelieu. The Association is doing very well there. They have nursed sixty sick people, and only had one death amongst them, and up to that

time few recovered. The two Sisters, servants of the poor whom we sent them from here, have done wonders: one in nursing the sick and the other in teaching the poor children." Two other Associations were founded almost contemporaneously with that of Richelieu: one at Ruel, at the invitation of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, and again under the patronage of Richelieu (whose country residence was there), and another at Nanteuil. The latter was founded and endowed by Mme. de Maignelay, a holy widow, who, having lost her husband at the age of twenty under the most tragic circumstances, devoted the rest of her life to piety and good works. Henri IV, who had done his best to attract her to his court, where she might—with her beauty and wealth—have gratified all her tastes and ambitions, showed his appreciation of the sacrifices she was making by giving her the name of the "good Marchioness."

The Duchesse de Bouillon, who had been one of the first ladies to become a member of the Assembly, clamoured for the Association to be established at distant Sedan. It was getting late in the year (1638), and though M. Vincent could not refuse the importunities of one of the best friends of the poor in Paris, he hesitated at sending the Sisters to what in these days of difficult travelling must have appeared incredibly remote.

Thus he writes to Louise: "How I wish you were in good health! But it is out of the question. Here is the winter—it is not to be thought of." We see a little later how he had not only continued to think of it, but had got as far as considering ways and means: "Whom do you destine for Sedan?" he asks Louise. "They are pressing me to send a Sister. I have written that it is possible that you might go, but to expose you to such a risk at this season of the year is too much."

Louise's biographer gives a long list of great people

who in the course of this and the following year opened negotiations with her or M. Vincent, in order to secure the great benefit for their dependents of Sisters who would devote themselves to nursing the sick and instructing the children in the country parishes. Whenever it was possible these petitions were granted; but it was not without misgivings that Louise parted with her Daughters for these distant missions. They were for the most part young and untried. They were strong in good will and good intentions, but had they the requisite stability to enable them to withstand the difficulties and temptations to which they would be exposed without the stand-by of example and regular community life? Would their liberty lead to negligence in their spiritual life, and then to tepidity? We can read between the lines of Louise's motherly letters and anxious instructions that she was at this period, when her Daughters were bound by no vows, not without fear for their holy vocation. Letters to the two Sisters who had been sent to Richelieu show that though, at first, all had gone smoothly these favourable conditions had not been maintained. M. Lambert had written to complain of them, and Louise was forced, though in the gentlest, most tactful manner possible, to administer a reproof. The letter begins by addressing both :

“ MY DEAR SISTERS,

“ I learn what I had already feared, that your work, which had been so successful as regards the poor whom you have nursed, and the children you have taught, has not succeeded equally in causing you to advance in perfection. It seems rather to have done you harm, for you are losing the fervour with which you started in your present life. Reflect, my Sisters, that God has been offended on account of you, your

neighbour scandalised, and that you are the cause of the exercise of holy charity being held in less esteem than formerly." Louise then addresses them separately; to the elder she says: "Barbe, by her want of cordiality to the Sister whom Providence has given her, by her little contemptuous ways, her small consideration for her Sister's infirmities, has forgotten that being her superior she was bound to take the place of a mother beside her, which should have made her behave to her with that sweetness and charity which the Son of God Himself recommended and practised in His life on earth. How also," she asks, "had not *sœur* Barbe seen to what humility she was pledged in this charge in which her only right to command was given her by obedience? Still, dear Sister, the evil is not one which is incapable of remedy: put your faults strongly before you, making no excuse for them; own them before God. Excite in your heart a warm affection for your Sister Louise, ask pardon on your knees before her for your previous unkindness, and for the pain you have caused her, promising to love her in future as Jesus Christ Himself has loved her, and to show her all consideration due to her, and embrace her with these feelings truly stamped on your heart." The holy Mother has then a word for Sister Louise: "She also, I fear, has fallen into her former bad habits. She goes in and out, makes visits and pilgrimages, without permission of the Sister whom she had accepted as superior, and to whom she ought to have looked up exactly as if she was her mother. Then she loves money, and wishes to have the free disposal of it. My child, is it possible that you have so little love of God, and are moved so little by fear of your own salvation that you neglect your duties in this manner? Do violence, I beseech you, to your nature, and excite yourself to love of obedience and poverty in order to

honour that of the Son of God, and become a true Sister of Charity. I beg of you, my dear Sister, not to despise my little warnings, and receive them in good part, for it is the love God gives me for you all which obliges me to speak to you as I have done. Recognise how much God deserves to be loved and served, more especially in a place where He has blessed your holy labour so abundantly. Make a still stronger resolution than you have done in the past, and throwing yourself at Sister Barbe's feet ask her to forgive you."

Then in conclusion she delivers this touching address to both Sisters :

"Do you know what I look for from your reconciliation and renewal of affection? It is that you should henceforth be absolutely open-hearted with each other, that you should never be seen alone, but that you should always accompany each other in your visits in the town, that you should be on your guard against particular friendships with the ladies of the Association, never paying them visits, and preferring each other's company, and your own rooms to anything else. A little true humility will make all this possible." Louise then proceeds to give herself an example of the virtue which she inculcates: "Warning you of your faults, my dear Sisters, brings my own before my eyes, which causes me to say to you that the one of which I am most conscious is the bad example I have given you in the practice of those virtues which I have recommended to you. I beg of you, my good Sisters, to forget this, and to ask pardon of God for me, and the grace to correct myself of them so that we may henceforth all live united in the love of Jesus Crucified."¹

Louise had the consolation of learning that these words—the result, we feel sure, of much anxious thought

¹ *Lettres de Louise de Marillac*, t. iii. pp. 20-3.

and prayer—fell on good soil. No further complaint was made of her Sisters, and Barbe became afterwards one of her most trusted helpers, and a foundation stone of the company.

Before entering into the subject of the new undertakings on which M. Vincent embarked in the middle of the year 1638, we cannot do better than give his own summary of them in a retrospect many years later.

Speaking of their beginning, he reminds the Sisters: "You had given yourselves to God as faithful followers of Christ in order to help the sick whenever they were to be found; and like Jesus Christ you went to look for them in their own houses. And our good God seeing this, and being pleased with you on account of your having acquitted yourself well of this duty, gave you a second. This was the charge of the poor foundlings, who had no one to look after them. I thank God that He deigned to make use of the company for this object. Again, as He saw that you had embraced this work with so much charity He said: 'I will give them yet another.' Yes, my daughters! And what was it—this new task? It was the care of the poor galley-slaves. Oh, my daughters, what a happiness for you to assist them! these unfortunate beings who were at the mercy of persons with no mercy or compassion. I have seen these wretched men treated like beasts. God at last had compassion on them, and He caused two things to happen: one that a house should be bought for them, and the other that matters should be disposed in such a way that His daughters should be given the charge of them. I say His daughters, for to be a Daughter of Charity is the same as to be a daughter of God."

This adoption of the galley-slaves in addition to all the other undertakings which depended on the young

congregation, though it must have come upon Louise as a very serious addition to her anxieties respecting it, could hardly have been a surprise. M. Vincent dated his connection with them from the year when he himself had been chained to the bench on the coast of Barbary. Named Royal Almoner to the galley-slaves in 1619, he had never ceased working and inciting others to work for the alleviation of their ghastly lives. In 1622 he had obtained permission from the Sheriff and Council of Paris to withdraw the sick and dying from the Conciergerie where they all lay huddled together waiting to be transferred to the hulks, to a house in the Faubourg St. Honoré. Ten years later they were transferred to another house in the parish of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet, and here Louise as superior of the local *Charité* had earned M. Vincent's thanks (as the reader will doubtless remember) for her services to them.

Such was the state of things in the year 1638, when a good burgher of Paris of the name of Cornuel died, leaving in his will a sum producing a yearly interest of 6,000 livres in perpetuity to be applied to the relief of the more pressing wants of these unfortunate criminals. In a letter belonging to this period M. Vincent informs Louise of the fact, and that he is expecting the daughter of M. Cornuel in order to confer with her on the best manner of laying out the money. The outcome of these negotiations or consultations, was, that it was agreed that the Sisters of Charity should be given the charge of those amongst the number of the convicts who were in hospital and required their services, and should be maintained on the funds of the said legacy.

A letter from M. Vincent (undated) invites Louise to trace out a way of life for her Daughters who should be given this not very enviable duty,

The paper drawn up by her shows her grave sense of the dangers involved in it.

“As the employment of the Sisters to nurse convicts must be looked upon as one of the most difficult and dangerous of those in which the Sisters of Charity are engaged, on account of the character of these men, yet is it one of those most agreeable to God and most meritorious in His sight, since both the corporal and spiritual works are exercised in the highest degree in it, for nothing more miserable than the state of body and soul of these unfortunate criminals could be imagined. Thus the Sisters who are called by God to this holy work should encourage themselves to have great confidence in our Blessed Lord, seeing that in helping these poor souls they are rendering Him a service which is as pleasing to Him as if done to Himself. Thus He will not fail to give them the necessary graces to surmount all the obstacles they may encounter, in addition to the crown which He reserves for them in Heaven.” She then prepares them for some of the trials that await them, as well as for the duties they will have to perform.

“The Sisters will have to buy and prepare the food for the prisoners. They will take it to them once a day at the same hour precisely, and the food will serve for two meals, that is for dinner and supper. If the pot is too heavy for them to carry they must get help from the warders. It would be necessary also for the Sisters to render other assistance, as for example the bandaging of wounds and treatment of the sick and the renewal of their linen.” On all these subjects the anxious Mother, trembling for the trials which awaited her Daughters, has a word of caution and wise instruction. “They will have to remember,” she tells them, “to renew in their hearts a spirit of modesty and purity which will render them proof against the shamelessness of the class

of persons with whom they will be brought in contact." Again she repeats: "Though at all times it will be necessary for them to show the greatest restraint and modesty in their actions, they shall be more particularly on their guard in this respect when they are in the convicts' rooms rendering them some personal service; and they should behave as if they had not heard any obscene remarks addressed to them. And if these words were of an insolent character, they should either reply seriously to them or leave the room. Though it may be impossible for the Sisters to put a stop to this unworthy treatment, even when they are conferring great benefits on the patients, they should not cease to strive for it, and this by means of great patience, praying at the same time for their persecutors in the same way that St. Stephen prayed for those who stoned him."

Louise goes on to mention other precautions to be used with the warders, and to lay down rules as regards the introduction of suspicious persons or correspondence. She also recommends occasional visits from the Ladies of Charity as a means of ensuring the respect of the convicts and officials to the Sisters who represented them; this habit having already been introduced there. She then resumes: "But their best defence will be charity; they will never, therefore, give the smallest occasion to these unfortunate beings to complain of them. Thus they will never speak harshly to them, or reproach them with the causes of complaint they have against them. Nor will they ever dispute on any point with them, but study never to find fault with them except under the greatest necessity, and to gain them over by kindness and compassion, seeing in what misery they are plunged of both body and soul, and yet recognising that in spite of all they are members of Him who made Himself a servant to rescue us from the power of Satan."

This is followed by instructions for the care of the sick, and for the administration of the fund for the benefit of the convicts by daily disbursements; also on the means they should use to prepare them for the exercises of piety which they were given before being sent to the galleys. The superior then finishes by recommending the Sisters to have constant recourse to prayer in their dangers and difficulties.

“In order that the Sisters may the better practise these counsels they should invoke the Holy Ghost several times during the day, begging Him to purify their thoughts, words, and actions; let them be particularly on their guard against impure thoughts should such be a cause of temptation to them; and reflect that they ought to be like the sun whose rays fall upon a dunghheap without suffering any damage from it. After so doing they should have great confidence in God that He will save them in the same way that He delivered the three children from the fiery furnace, since they undertook this charge from charity and obedience only.”

An enterprise embarked upon in this spirit could not fail to carry the blessing of God with it, and we shall see later on the great graces which attended this holy and Christian work.

The Company of Sisters of Charity and their Foundress lost one of their best friends in the autumn of the year 1639 in the person of Mme. Goussault. We know from M. Vincent's letters (Louise's not having been preserved) of the intimate friendship which existed between her and Louise. He encourages the latter to take a little holiday on one occasion with her friends Mlle. Pollalion and Mme. Goussault; and again, recognising that Louise's many trials had saddened her life and weighed down her spirits, he recommends Mme. la Présidente's society as a salutary tonic—at least it is in this light

that we read the following note (written *circa* 1635). The occasion was a visit to the country which the two friends had agreed to make together.

“ I beg that our Lord will bless your journey and yourself, and multiply His graces on your soul and that of Mme. la Présidente Goussault, with whom I beg of you to be very gay, even though it should be at the cost of that little inclination to melancholy which nature has given you, which is tempered, however, by the grace of God.”

Mme. Goussault had also had her trials, many and severe; as we are told that of her eleven children born to her in thirteen years, less than half survived. But though these events told on her health, she was blessed with a happy nature, an elasticity of spirits which never failed her, and which she communicated to those around her. She had been a warm and constant friend of the Company of Sisters of Charity; and, as M. Vincent told them at one of his conferences, she had such a strong admiration for their rules that she had herself adopted some of those which were compatible with a life in the world. In her last moments her thoughts constantly turned to them, and when dying she recommended the Congregation as a sacred legacy to the care of her friend, Mme. Segurier.

M. Vincent, describing her last moments to his spiritual Daughters, says: “ Mme. la Présidente Goussault died in the fervent wish you should be worthy Sisters of Charity. Yes, my children, she died with you present in her thoughts, for the day before her death she said to me: ‘ Oh! my Father, if you only knew how much my mind was occupied with the thought of your Daughters last night! If I could only describe the good of which I believe they will be the cause! God showed me great things with regard to them.’ ” In another conference

M. Vincent went into greater details as to the vision vouchsafed to this holy soul on the night before her death. "I remember," he told the Sisters, "what Mme. Goussault said to me before she died: 'I have seen the Sisters of Charity all night before the throne of God. Ah, how greatly they will be multiplied in numbers, what good they will do, and what happiness will be theirs!'"

She died on the 20th of September, 1639, and was buried in her chapel in the Church of St. Gervais. The Company of Sisters of Charity have never ceased venerating her memory as that of a second Mother. She left a considerable sum of money to the Company, which was afterwards used in the purchase of the Mother-house when the house in La Chapelle had become too small for its occupants.

This legacy was not the only one which Mme. Goussault left to her friends, and more especially to Louise. She had constantly expressed a desire that they should undertake the management of the hospital of her native city of Angers, a town from which she derived her fortune, and to which she was bound by many ties. Louise, therefore, looked upon the fulfilment of this last wish of her friend and benefactress as a sacred duty, and lost no time in redeeming the promises she had made with regard to it; and the authorities of Angers, being dissatisfied with the manner in which the hospital had been hitherto conducted, were ready to meet her halfway.

The history of the hospital of Angers is of considerable interest, especially to English people, as it was founded by Henry II in 1160 in expiation of the crime of the murder of St. Thomas à Becket. It was dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, and had been for centuries previous to the epoch of which we are writing served by the Canons of St. Augustine. Unfortunately great

irregularities had crept in ; and, as a petition addressed to the King and his council from the leading magistrates and sheriffs of Angers in November 1639 testifies, drastic reforms were required. The petition more especially concerned itself with the reform of ecclesiastical shortcomings, such as in the administration of the Sacraments to the dying, and the facilities for Divine service and confession to the inmates, but the physical care of the patients appears to have been equally neglected. In one of Mme. Goussault's last visits to her native town, where these abuses were doubtless universally recognised, she had paved the way for the introduction of the Sisters of Charity by bringing them before the notice of the administrators. Thus very shortly after Mme. Goussault's death Louise received a letter from M. Guy Lasnier, Vicar-general of Angers and a man remarkable for the zeal and piety of his life, inviting her to take up this much-needed work of providing nurses for the hospital.

This foundation was one of considerable importance, and involved some serious consequences. In the first place it was more than seventy-five miles distant from the Mother-house in Paris ; and, as we have already seen, such removals to what in those days were looked upon as great distances were attended with many risks. It would, moreover, require Sisters with special aptitudes and a certain amount of training, which probably not all possessed in an equal degree.

Accordingly, though the season was advanced and her health no better than usual, the Superior made up her mind to undertake the long and wearisome journey by public coach and canal-boat, in order to see her Daughters through their difficulties.

M. Vincent encouraged her departure with the following words : " Since our Blessed Lord has inspired you

with the resolution to start for Angers, go—*in nomine Domini*. What He takes under His care is well cared for." He then traces the route for her. She will go by Chartres, where she will pay her devotions to our Lady's shrine. She will change from the coach at Orleans, and take the boat thence and finally arrive at Tours and Angers. "When you get there you will let it be known that you have come to carry out Mme. Goussault's intentions, which she insisted on so strongly in her last moments. . . . I will write on the subject to M. l'Abbé de Vaux, who has the management of the affair. I beg of our Saviour Himself to lead you by the hand and to bring you back in good health."

Louise accordingly started early in November, accompanied by two Sisters, leaving more to follow. On her way she made a pilgrimage to our Lady des Ardelliers, and on getting to Saumur a letter from M. Vincent dated the 10th of November reached her, again reiterating precautions and good advice for the journey, and imploring her to be careful of her own and her daughters' health—a rumour having transpired that the plague had broken out at Angers. He also advises her to refuse the indemnity which the administrators are likely to offer her for the expenses of the journey, saying: "Our Lord will provide." Then, to calm her fears for those she had left behind, he adds: "I promise, God helping, to go and visit your daughters at La Chapelle, and if I possibly can, the foundlings as well. As to your son I will see him on the first opportunity."

A letter bearing the date of the 6th of December from Louise announces that she has arrived at Angers, and is lodged at a house belonging to the Abbé de Vaux, where she is well cared for. The long journey has had its usual result, and she is laid up, but in a few days we hear of her going about again as usual.

M. Vincent, writing a little later to the Abbé de Vaux, is full of gratitude for his friend's efforts to smooth difficulties from the path of the superior and her Daughters, and his kind reception of the former; he also announces the arrival of three more Sisters of Charity. It was not long before Louise left the comfortable quarters provided for her by the Abbé to join the Sisters at the hospital. Much had to be done there, and a good deal of negotiation passed between the administrators and the superior before matters were settled. Like her holy director, Louise was never in a hurry, and in a letter which he wrote to her soon after her arrival at Angers he tells Louise not to sign a proposal made to her by the board of administrators till she has had time to look about her. "In a little while we shall be able to judge, meanwhile let us make a trial of it in order to ascertain the Will of God. You had better speak of it in these terms to M. de Vaux and to as many of the others as he will judge fitting, and show them the little rule of life of the Sisters, and you will do well to impress firmly on the Sisters the resolve to keep it strictly. You will inculcate on these gentlemen as well as upon the Sisters the importance of changing nothing."

One of the first actions of the Sisters on being installed in the hospital was to take stock of its contents. The inventory of the linen at the disposal of the nurses shows how great was the neglect in this as well as in every other department. To mention only one item, though there were at the moment between thirty and forty patients there were only three dozen shirts in all: "consequently the poor of the town, aware of these discomforts, shunned it as much as possible, and those who were forced to go brought linen with them, or persuaded their friends to supply them with what they required." The little memorandum concludes with the remark: "It

is sad to see such disorder and waste at the cost of the poor."

The rule of life of the Sisters, which (as desired by M. Vincent) Louise submitted to M. de Vaux, is still preserved in the National Archives, and consisted of two parts, one which concerned the religious exercises of the community and the other their duties as nurses.

It begins as follows:—"The Daughters of Charity have come to Angers to honour our Saviour, Father of the poor, and His Holy Mother, and to assist the poor patients in the Hôtel Dieu corporally and spiritually. . . . The first thing our Lord asks of them is that they should love Him above all things, and should perform all their actions out of love for Him; and the second that they should cherish each other whom He has linked together with the link of their love of Him; and treat the poor sick patients as if they were Lord and Master, since our Lord is in them and they in Him." Then follows a list of the maxims they should cherish: a contempt of the things the world esteems; the observance of the rule of life laid down for the little company; the pure intention of pleasing God in all things; exact poverty, and care of the goods of the poor as if they were God's own; chastity and a strict guard over the senses, whether exterior or interior; obedience to the superior and the administrators; the duty of daily Mass, and Communion every Sunday; the half-hour's prayer morning and evening, with some other devout exercises during the day. These were so many links of the chain which bound the Sisters of Charity to their religious duties, and were the safeguard of their perseverance in their holy vocation. After providing for the service of God the document lays down rules for the services the Sister shall be prepared to render to the sick. "The Sisters shall rise at four o'clock; at six they shall go and attend

to the patients, make their beds, give them their medicines, prepare their food," and so forth. The Sisters are warned that they should give their vigilant and undivided attention to the patients all day, that they are to be careful to give medicines at the prescribed hours; regularity of meals is also strictly enjoined, and the relief of those suffering from thirst. The spiritual care of the sick is likewise insisted upon. Such as require instruction in Christian doctrine are to be taught, but with great gentleness so as not to weary them, and the dying are in like manner to be prepared for the reception of the last rites, whilst the convalescents are to be encouraged to persevere in their good resolutions. At seven in the evening the patients are to be put to bed with provision of a little wine or whatever they require during the night. Before the Sisters leave the wards, they should recite the litanies with the patients, and make the examination of conscience, and the superior should give the patients and the Sisters holy water." At eight o'clock the Sisters, with the exception of the one who shall be left in each of the wards for that night in charge of the sick, shall withdraw; the Sister on night duty may engage in prayer, but she must be ever ready to interrupt her prayer for the service of the sick, for to serve them is to pray.

In order to penetrate their minds with their Rule the Sisters were bound to read it every Friday at their principal meal.

M. Vincent records his approval of the paper drawn up by Louise in a letter dated the 11th of January. He writes thus: "You will proceed with the work *in Nomine Domini*. You will conclude the agreement in your own name as directress of the Daughters of Charity, servants of the poor sick in hospitals, and in parishes, with the approval of the Superior-General of the Congregation of

the Priests of the Mission, director of the said Daughters of Charity.”

The contract was passed and signed on the 1st of February, 1640. The articles stipulated that the Company should always be under the jurisdiction of the Superior-General of the Missions, and that it should not be in the power of any one to prevent their following their rule, or make them change their habits; also that they should have the sole charge of the patients of the hospital, without any other nurses being associated with them.

Though lodged and boarded by the hospital authorities, they shall yet be treated in all ways as daughters of the house, and not as paid servants. In matters which concern temporalities they shall consider themselves under the authority of the administrators, and shall obey them exactly, giving an account of their services to these gentlemen alone. The latter on their part, conscious that the Sisters cannot fulfil their duties towards the poor or the servants without their support, will sustain the Sisters with their authority, never acquainting them with their shortcomings in public, but taking them aside in order to do so. Thus they shall with the grace of God correct themselves of their defects.

The Superior-General shall have the power of changing the Sisters when he judges it necessary. The administrators likewise are free to ask to have any Sisters with whom they are dissatisfied replaced by others, but not without giving them a trial of a year or two. Such is the gist of the document. The Sisters were installed in the hospital on the same day that the contract was signed. It was drawn up in the name of the King's Councillor, Lieutenant-General of the S^{én}échaussée of Anjou and occupant of the Presidential Chair of Anjou,

and signed (on behalf of the company) by Louise de Marillac and six Sisters.

Louise remained about three weeks longer at Angers. The countenance lent to the little company by her presence amongst them must have been of the utmost importance to the Sisters at this date, as they had the difficult task before them of cleaning out what was a veritable Augean stable. Abuses of every kind abounded in the hospital, and the ejection of parasites who lived on the funds which should have been devoted to the service of the patients, and the maintenance of their rights in the presence of conflicting interests all required firmness and tact.

They had, however, a staunch friend and supporter in the Abbé de Vaux, and the sympathy and good wishes of all whose opinion was worth conciliating amongst the townspeople. Before long they had the satisfaction of noting improvement in every department of the hospital. "The number of sick," writes a Sister a little later, "has increased greatly, and the wards are properly ventilated. The beds, which before had been much too few for the requirements of the patients, are now in the proportion of 110 for the men and 90 for the women, besides those which are used for special occasions."

Louise de Marillac at her departure left a very capable Sister, Sœur Turgis, at the head of the community. This latest recruit was made use of by the superior in many of her foundations where knowledge of the world and tact were required. Mme. Turgis was a widow of good family; she came therefore from a higher class than the majority of the Sisters; but the time had come when the restrictions laid down for the Company in its early beginnings by M. Vincent were practically withdrawn, and the test of vocation to the life of Sister of

Charity was the desire which its holy founders set above all others—irrespective of class—to work for Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. Louise de Marillac left Angers on the 24th of February, after taking leave of the Abbé de Vaux in terms of warm and profound gratitude. These friendly relations were kept up in a series of letters in which the superior confides her hopes and fears regarding the community which she had placed under his paternal care. Two months later the plague broke out with great virulence in the town, and claimed a victim in one of the nursing Sisters, whose death M. de Vaux announced to the superior in the following lines :

“ It has pleased God to call our good Sister Margaret to Himself after about fifteen days’ illness. . . . The poor Sister died in the simplicity in which she lived, making all the pious acts which God suggested to her. The good dispositions she was in were exemplified in many ways. She did not fail to ask pardon of you, Mademoiselle. Mme. Turgis is sending you all particulars.” The scourge of the plague and the fears to which it gave rise passed away in time ; and later on, Louise received much consolation from this good work. In a letter of hers bearing the date of the 6th of May, 1640, to M. de Vaux she says : “ You console me greatly by the news you give of our poor Sister. I cannot doubt that God will bless His work as long as we act with confidence in Him and dependence on His Divine Will.” Later on she remarks in one of her letters, “ The Sisters at Angers have been blessed very specially for the service of the sick at the hospital.”

CHAPTER X

LOUISE'S return to Paris was hastened by the letters she received during the last days of her stay at Angers from M. Vincent. He, who was never in a hurry, recommended haste on her part in a manner that shows the strong necessity he felt for her presence in Paris at that juncture. "As to your return, let it be as soon as possible," he wrote, "and if necessary hire a litter with two good strong horses. I implore of you to spare no expense in getting whatever conveyance you will find most comfortable, whatever the cost may be."

Louise on this occasion did not take his advice, as we learn from her grateful acknowledgment to the Abbé de Vaux that that kind and thoughtful friend sent her in his own carriage to Tours, from whence a hired conveyance took her to Orleans. She then took the public coach to Paris.

M. Vincent used the words "Your presence is much required for the general affairs of the *Charités*" in pressing Louise's departure, and to appreciate their urgency we must turn to the history of those troubled times.

The Thirty Years' War was in 1639 still disturbing the peace of Europe, though it was then approaching its termination. In the summer of that year Turenne at the head of the French army, passing from Alsace into Lorraine, treated the latter province (Baunard tells us) more in the character of an incendiary than of a soldier.

Twenty-five towns and numberless villages felt the weight of his hand; Metz, Verdun, Nancy, Bar-le-Duc, St. Mihiel and Lunéville were sacked, the chief houses destroyed, and the unfortunate inhabitants turned out to starve. It was destitution on the largest scale, for half the people of that province were houseless and starving. Only M. Vincent with his boundless faith in God and in his fellow creatures could have attempted to cope with the distress, and he did so practically single-handed.

His first undertaking was to assemble a large meeting of ladies of Charity, and put the deplorable state of things before them. He had the power of reaching the heart as no other had—at any rate in his generation—and in answer to his appeal money poured in. Amongst the incidents of that terrible time, we are told that M. Vincent employed a lay brother of the name of Mathieu Rénard belonging to the Missions to carry the alms collected on these occasions; Brother Rénard made fifty-three journeys to Lorraine bearing large sums of money (sometimes as much as twenty-five or thirty thousand francs at a time) to the relief of the people, and though the country was infested with bad characters of every description on no single occasion was he robbed or stopped on his errand of mercy. Such was the universal misery that besides food, medicine, clothing, agricultural implements, everything had to be supplied to a population bereft of all means of subsistence. M. Vincent's compassion for the sufferings of the people led him yet further. Knowing, as all France did, that the all-powerful minister supported the war policy, he sought an interview with him and implored him in moving terms to give the country peace. It is said that Richelieu received him kindly, but sheltering himself behind the plea of "La Politique," he gave him no assurance of using his influence in favour of a cessation of the war.

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The saint was more successful in another appeal he made ; this time it was to the King. He asked of him a term of respite for the payment of debts on behalf of religious communities who had suffered equally with the rest of their countrymen from the widespread destitution. A decree to give effect to this moratorium was passed on 14th December, 1639. The state of the enclosed Orders of women, who depended chiefly on the alms of the faithful, was especially pitiable. In some cases they were reduced to the last extremity, and saw themselves confronted with the alternative between breaking their enclosure and returning to their families, or undergoing death by starvation.

Numbers of women and children and young girls fleeing from the dangers to which they were exposed from a brutal soldiery sought refuge in Paris. A history of the period mentions that one missionary alone led parties of a hundred at a time of these refugees to the comparative security of the capital. But the question of housing and feeding these bands was not less urgent on their arrival there, and it was here that the organising power of Louise de Marillac was in such urgent request.

“ Thus,” Abelly tells us, “ M. Vincent’s Mission priests having informed him that the extreme poverty of this province exposed the virtue of the young girls to the greatest risks, he caused a certain number of them to come to Paris, where he placed them in the hands of Mlle. Le Gras. That charitable superior received them into her house with all the tenderness of a mother, and exerted herself to the utmost to find situations for them. Some she placed in respectable positions, for others she found means of gaining an honest livelihood ; there were others who profited so much by her words and example that they were found worthy of entering the Congregation of Sisters of Charity.”

A letter received by Louise from M. Vincent bearing the date of 1640 shows that this idea of finding recruits for the Company from the distressed classes of Lorraine was one which found favour with him. "I am going to write to M. de Coudray¹ to ask him if he knows of any girls in Lorraine who would be suitable for such work as ours, and to spread information about it. This is an idea which has come to me lately." He writes again, on the 16th of February of the same year, that he had to start at a moment's notice to assist at a Mass which was going to be said at the Church of Notre Dame for the *Charité* of Lorraine. Another day he writes: "I am sending you three poor women from Lorraine; one is bringing a child with her. When you have seen them please send them to Mme. de Herse, and inquire from her whether she approves of their being sent in the meantime to the Orphanage or the Faubourg St. Victor." We find from the annals of the Company that not less than two hundred persons were first sheltered and then placed in situations by Louise de Marillac.

Amongst this number were comprised many members of religious houses who had lost their all in the general wreckage. In one of his conferences, M. Vincent referred to a letter he had received from his trusty lay brother Mathieu Rénard, in which he mentions that 600 nuns in Lorraine had been reduced to destitution.

"Sir," he wrote, "the grief I feel is such that I cannot speak of it without tears for the overwhelming necessities of these nuns who have been succoured by your charity. Their habits are scarcely recognisable from the patches of every colour, grey, red, and green, with which they have mended them. As for bread they have nothing like what they require for their subsistence." "And do you know, my Daughters" (was M. Vincent's comment on this letter)

¹ M. Vincent's second in command,

“all these nuns were persons of good family, who had been well off.”

We read in a letter dated the 29th of August, 1641, that two poor Benedictine nuns presented themselves at a late hour at the Convent at La Chapelle and begged for admittance. They had fled from the insecurity of their abode at St. Mihiel, and were worn out by the fatigues and dangers of the journey. They were on their way to their Benedictine Sisters at Montmartre. This is how one of them described their reception: “We arrived in Paris so late that we could not find our way to Montmartre that night; Brother Mathieu accordingly led us to the house of Mlle. Le Gras, the foundress and first superior of the Sisters of Charity. We spent the night with her.” The nun who wrote these lines was Sister Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament, who many years later founded the Order of Perpetual Adoration in Paris, and was well known to her contemporaries as a woman of great holiness of life and spiritual attainments.

August of the year 1641 was made memorable to Louise by another meeting which, we know by her letters, left an indelible impression upon her.

St. Jane Frances Chantal had occasion to leave her Convent of Ancecy to visit that of Paris, and it was there that the two foundresses met—one of advanced age and nearing her end, the other younger, by twenty years, but already worn out with labour and infirmities—and derived consolation from each other’s fervour and piety.

Louise mentions the fact in the following simple words in the postscript of a letter to her director: “I had the happiness yesterday of meeting Mme. de Chantal. I cannot think what our good God will do with me, who am so sinful and who have been so unfaithful to Him.”

This was the touching impression, so in accordance with her profound humility, left upon Louise by her interview

with the holy foundress of the Order of the Visitation. Doubtless the meeting was as full of consolation and edification to St. Jane Frances as to the foundress of the company of Sisters of Charity, for she saw in Louise one who had succeeded in a design—that of establishing an Order to visit the sick—in which she and St. Francis de Sales had not so much failed as, in the Providence of God, been over-ruled, for His glory and the good of souls.

Three months later, on the 13th of November, St. Jane Frances Chantal died at her convent at Moulin. The same day St. Vincent whilst celebrating Mass saw her beautiful soul in the form of a globe of fire joining that of St. Francis de Sales, and the two ascending to Heaven where they were gathered into the realms of eternal bliss.

The years 1640 and 1641 were to witness a great expansion of the company of the Sisters of Charity as well as the establishment of it on a secure footing.

It was on the 28th of November (though whether in the year 1640 or earlier is uncertain) that Louise de Marillac addressed the following remarks to her holy director: "To-morrow will be the anniversary of the day six or seven years ago when the first members came to live together very humbly in community. I was much consoled by this thought which occurred to me to-day: that by the grace of God they have made great progress since they began this way of life, and that, when the few years I have still to live are over, I trust that they will draw down still greater benedictions on the company through their example. This is what I desire and ask of our good God with all my heart." M. Vincent annotated this letter (as he had the habit of doing) with the following remark: "Never have I had a stronger feeling that your Daughters are under God's special guidance than I have had of late."

It was in the course of the year 1641 that the house in

La Chapelle having become manifestly too small for the requirements of the community was exchanged for a considerably larger one in the Faubourg St. Denis. This house was almost opposite the Priory of St. Lazare, and belonged to M. Vincent. It was at first rented by the community, but later on (in 1653) it was bought for the sum of nine thousand livres; the money bequeathed to the community by Mme. Goussault being employed for the purchase of the ground and buildings. Here Louise de Marillac took up her abode, never to leave it again.

“And here,” as Gobillon remarks, “it may be said she built a home and sanctuary where charity took up its residence. Up to that time she could only give it a passing refuge subject to frequent changes, but on this spot she may be said to have built a temple on a new foundation in making it the refuge of the poor and forsaken, who, attracted by her reputation, collected from all quarters round her whose recognised rôle was that of the dispenser of the alms of Paris.”¹

Another change in Louise's history which synchronises with the change of residence of the Mother-house of the Sisters of Charity, and was the outcome of it, was the partial cessation of St. Vincent's letters, which hitherto have been the chief source of our knowledge of her and of her spiritual family. If, however, the proximity of the community to St. Lazare and the consequent facility for verbal communication between the superiors interfered with correspondence—or rather made it unnecessary—the conferences begun early in the year 1640 and continuing till St. Vincent's death more than counterbalance the loss. For in these conferences the holy founder bequeathed an inestimable treasure to his spiritual Daughters; one which will serve to explain the spirit and illustrate the inner meaning of the Rules of the

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 85.

Institute of the Sisters of Charity to all succeeding generations.

This close neighbourhood of the two communities necessitated a certain reserve in their communications with each other, and M. Vincent with characteristic prudence laid down strict rules with regard to his intercourse with Louise and her Daughters. One of these was that he never visited her except for reasons connected with his priestly ministry. We know, however, such reserves did not interfere with a kindness of heart and neighbourliness which was equally characteristic of this great saint—the example *par excellence* of charity and brotherly love.

We are given the following instance of it in his Life. A Sister of the name of Marie de la Ruelle having gone to draw water at the public fountain, was driven away from it by the insolence and ribald talk of some idlers. She had no alternative but to fall back on the Priory, there to beg for some water of the well in the court-yard, and, finding M. Vincent in the porch, she had recourse to him in her distress. The holy man at once offered his assistance, and with his own hands filled her jars from the well and handed them to her.

This inconvenience of having to fetch water from a public fountain was not the only one under which the community laboured in their new abode. An even more pronounced one was a deficiency of space and accommodation which increased as the company grew in numbers. But this also Louise submitted to, possessing her soul in patience, as was her wont, till in the year 1556 she saw her way to an addition, then urgently required, to the size of the building.

It was in the parlour of this house that M. Vincent gave the greater number of his conferences. In the later years of his life, after he had reached the age of eighty and

his increasing infirmities confined him to his room, he assembled the Sisters in a guest-room at St. Lazare and spoke to them there. On all these occasions he was accompanied by one of his missionary priests; at first by M. Almeras; but latterly, being obliged to delegate much of the affairs and direction of the company to M. Portail—a priest renowned even amongst the holy members of that congregation for his sanctity—the latter was more often M. Vincent's companion in his visits to the community.

In their scrupulous avoidance of anything that savoured of monastic phraseology the headquarters at St. Laurent was generally known to the holy founders as the house, *la maison*. Yet in the hearts of the Sisters of Charity, if not at once on their lips, it became the Mother-house. It was the *foyer*—to use a beautiful French word, as expressive in its way as our “home”—of the company; the centre of warmth, and family love, and union from whence radiated a heat which spread to all its members, scattered as they were in all parts of the country, and even beyond the confines of France. And the centre, and focus, as well as the moving spirit of the company was the holy superior, Louise de Marillac. It is interesting to trace in her letters and in the writings of M. Vincent the gradual building up of that body of doctrine (immaterial and yet how real!) to which we give the name of the spirit of an Order or a Congregation. A remark made on one occasion by M. Vincent is an example of this. He told the Sisters that the only aim or pretension they ought to have should be to live as good Christians; “And,” he asked, “what do you think I mean by the term good Christians? I mean to say more than if I said good Religious: for why have Orders been instituted and why are there Religious? For no other reason than that there should be good Christians.”

At first the company had been given the name of

Daughters of Charity, but we read in one of M. Vincent's letters some years after its foundation that he wished this altered to that of Sisters. "I think there would be more humility," he wrote, "in giving them the title of Sisters instead of Daughters; it is this name which is in use in the convents of Ste. Marie (Visitation)." In the same spirit of lowliness Louise de Marillac objected to the title of Reverend Mother which her Daughters would have liked to have given her. No doubt she must have appreciated the cause of their wishing to address her by this term of respect, but on one occasion, when writing in answer to two Sisters who had used this word, she unhesitatingly waives it. "M. Vincent has read your letters," she tells them, "but he does not approve of your use of the expression Reverend Mother." This decision was final, and the question was never re-opened. Commenting one day on the words of our Lady in response to the angelical salutation: "Behold the hand-maid of the Lord," M. Vincent told the community: "These words have made me think that in future you should no longer call your superior by that name, but give them the title of *Sœur Servante* in its place. What do you say to this?" All the Sisters present agreed to the suggestion. He then went on to say: "It is thus the Sovereign Pontiffs designate themselves; all the papal mandates bear the heading 'Clement (or whoever he is), Servant of Jesus Christ.'" In the same way the superiors of the Association of ladies of the Hôtel Dieu took the name of *Sœurs Servantes* in compliance with the wishes of Mme. la Présidente Goussault." It was in this simple manner—M. Vincent as it were consulting his spiritual Daughters, and they agreeing to his suggestions—that the knotty point of the names by which the heads of the communities should be called was settled.

Another subject that cropped up more than once before

it was finally decided was that of the dress, or rather the head-gear of the little company ; for the dress (or habit) was, and still is, that worn by the lower class of the period in which the company was instituted. The head-covering, which was also the one worn by the women of the middle and lower class of the seventeenth century in France, was a little white linen cap which covered the hair and went by the name of a *toquois*, and it was this tight-fitting cap, without veil (or the cornette which they afterwards adopted), to which M. Vincent alluded when on more than one occasion he addressed them as "poor girls in skull-caps."¹ That there should be uniformity on this point, and above all that no veil should be surreptitiously introduced on any plea whatever, was a subject on which M. Vincent and Louise were firm. Thus in a letter addressed to Louise in the course of the year 1638 M. Vincent remarks : "I hardly know what to say about that good girl of the name of Augustine except that she will not do for you if she objects to the uniformity of dress, which is so important."

On the testimony of one of the Sisters, Barbe Bailly by name, we know that Louise de Marillac adopted this habit in Pentecost week of the year 1639, when "she appeared in church wearing a cap and a cornette over it, and a collar like ours." A letter from M. Vincent dated on the eve of the feast (1639) encourages her to make this trial : "I will offer up Mass for you to-morrow, Mademoiselle, in the new state, both exterior and interior, to which the Divine love has called you. . . . We shall behold the work of our Lord in you, and Heaven will look down upon you to-morrow in that garb of penance with which your soul has been habited inwardly for so long by His holy Spirit."

This experiment, however, did not answer. "Her in-

¹ *Pauvres filles du couvre-chef.*

firmities" (Barbe goes on to say) "rendered it impossible for her to uncover her head in this manner; she was laid up by illness in consequence of it and had to return to her ordinary head-dress. But she always manifested a great desire to be dressed like the other Sisters, and as she was prevented by her bad health she looked upon herself as unworthy of the name of Sister of Charity." This was not the only attempt Louise made to adopt the habit of the company. In order to show her absolute uniformity with them, and consequently with the humble station to which they belonged, she discarded the gloves and mask (or veil) worn by ladies of her rank in life, for the journey she made with them to Angers; but on this occasion also she paid for the exposure, to which she was utterly unaccustomed, with a severe illness.

On another occasion we note an allusion in Louise's correspondence to this crux of the head-dress. In 1646 she writes in answer to a question of M. Portail:¹ "I should not dare to say anything to you with regard to the suggestion of the little veil except that M. Vincent objects to it strongly and with reason; I have several times proposed to him that the Sisters should wear, not a veil which would be quite objectionable, but something which would screen the face in great cold, or great heat, and for this the Sisters who had been recently clothed have been allowed to wear a white linen cornette on their heads for a protection; but as for black, no, that seems to me out of the question."

It was thus, little by little, that the rules and customs of the latest offspring of the ever-fruitful Mother of Churches began to take form, and live and grow. If we turn from these exterior manifestations to the spiritual ones we shall see that this house in St. Laurent without bearing the name of a convent lacked none of the charac-

¹ *Louise de Marillac* t. iii. p. 165.

teristics of one. These were the rules of the office-holders: "The one whose duty it is to wake the Sisters shall have recourse to her angel guardian in order that she may wake in time to call her Sisters at four o'clock precisely, remembering that God will call her to account should she neglect this duty through her own fault. The portress shall never allow herself to be rung for a second time, exciting herself to diligence out of charity, and with the thought that if God should give her the grace of letting her out of purgatory to go to heaven she would be much grieved to be kept waiting at the door. The Sister who is in the kitchen should think of the joy Martha had in preparing our Saviour's meals, and remembering that she is serving her Divine Master when cooking for His poor servants. The Sister infirmarian who has the care of the sick should work in union with, and after the example of Him Who was full of compassion for all who were in suffering and who healed them of their diseases."

Three or four times a day we are told the little bell of the house summoned the community to their different exercises. Mass was not said in their oratory; the Sisters assisted at it daily in all weathers at the Church at St. Lazare, and those who were too infirm to go on foot were carried thither.

Louise in one of her letters to her director asks for permission to ring for Angelus three times a day; the mystery of the Incarnation being one specially dear to the company. This privilege was at once accorded to them.

To these outward rules and observances the holy superior added, or rather infused, a spirit of charity which made a true bond of union between herself and the community. Some words instinct with love of God and man, which she addressed to her crucified Saviour on one

occasion in a conference, show the feelings with which she was inspired, and with which equally she wished to inspire her Daughters :

“O my Jesus, Thou teachest me from Thy cross the feelings of love and forbearance which I should have for my neighbour, and the service that Thou wouldst have me to render them. My Sisters ! listen to the explanation of the meaning of your name—which is one of great honour. - And Thou my only Love speak ! Thy servants listen to Thee. What were Thy first words after the torments of the night and of the day of Thy bitter Passion ? They were words of deepest forbearance. ‘ Father, forgive them, they know not what they do ! ’ My Jesus, infinite goodness, Thou didst perceive that the passions of Thy enemies clouded their judgments and was the cause of their ignorance. What a lesson to us to teach us the forbearance with which we should forgive those who have injured us ! ”¹

So important was it in the eyes of M. Vincent that the Sisters, who were scattered in such numbers in the parishes of Paris and its environs, should return to the Mother-house to renew there the spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice with which their holy superior endeavoured to inspire them, that it was a subject to which he constantly returned in his conferences. “ It is very necessary,” he said on one occasion, “ that you should be exact in your attendance at least once a month at the Mother-house. On what account ? In order that you may have a little talk with your superior about the state of your soul, and this should be done with all the cordiality of a child who comes to its mother in order to receive comfort from her ; thus you will tell her about your troubles little and great, ask her advice according to your wants, and give her an account of your difficulties,

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. ii, p. 31.

and of your differences should you have had any ; and all this with great sincerity and absence of dissimulation. You will find that the little trials of life vanish, my Daughters, under this soothing treatment ; or if some remain in spite of all, God will give you the grace of loving them out of love for Him."

CHAPTER XI

THE first of a series of conferences given by St. Vincent to his spiritual Daughters took place on July 5th, 1640. In laying down rules for the guidance of the Sisters of Charity, and putting before them the heights to which they were to aspire in the accomplishment of the objects of their vocation, he may be said to have broken entirely fresh ground. And if we look at the material he had to work upon, and the work he put before them—arduous, self-sacrificing and unceasing—one less high than St. Vincent in God's counsels might well have quailed before the undertaking. That he never lost heart about the ultimate success of the company, however, is very obvious to any one who has studied his correspondence. It was his profound faith in God's designs with regard to it which enabled him to accept with tranquillity the disappointments which attended its early developments. For it cannot be denied that at first, whilst the little company were bound by no vows and their rule hardly formulated, desertions were frequent—so frequent as to distress deeply the maternal heart of Louise de Marillac, who could hardly bring herself to bear the constant defections from the ranks of her Daughters. Even so late as in the year 1641 she wrote thus to her director: "I feel that my little knowledge and capacity prevents my being able to support your charity in your efforts to ward off the dangers which menace the company, and in which I see it (instead

of taking root) perish, little by little. I am reminded constantly of Hagar, who when she feared her son was about to die would not witness his death ; but I deserve punishment more justly than she did, as I feel that my sins have been the cause of these disorders." At another time returning to the subject she says : " I see so much trouble in all quarters that I feel utterly weighed down by it. I hope, however, in Divine Providence in spite of all, and in the intercession of Martha and Mary."

It was in these dispositions of confidence in God, and mistrust of self, that the holy founders went to work. Need we therefore be surprised that the result was the triumph of Divine grace—of the supernatural over the natural ?

To realise what the work was which lay before them, let us analyse for a moment the situation. In the first place we have to consider the subjects whom M. Vincent singled out by preference as the foundation stones of the new Institute. They were peasant girls, whose strongest recommendations were their simplicity, their subjection to authority, and the life of hardship to which they were inured. We also learn that ignorance was no bar to their reception into the company ; and that a large proportion could neither read nor write, and had to be instructed in the truths of the Christian religion. They were also untrained. It requires no effort of the imagination to conjecture what the character and manners of these recruits from the sheep-fold, and the plough-tail, must have been when they first came under the influence of Louise de Marillac. That her gentle guidance and mild authority, added to the example of her life, was a powerful factor in the situation is undeniable,—but what a task was hers ! And, it must be borne in mind, she was *alone*, for during the twenty-one years of her superiority she found no one with whom she could share her counsels

or divide her responsibilities. And from these rustics, these imperfectly trained women, what marvels of self-devotion, what zeal, what self-control were expected!

Humanly speaking, what could come of such a venture but failure? Or, if not failure, the lowering of an impossibly high standard, on a gradually descending scale, till at last something compatible with human nature, and its weaknesses, was reached? We know, however, how far this was from being the case; high as were the expectations formed by St. Vincent and his holy coadjutor, they lived to see as perfect a realisation of them (with few and quite insignificant exceptions) as is possible in this imperfect world.

The problem—for such it appears to the modern mind—has a simple solution; it is one which confronts one in every page of the saint's letters, and conferences, as well as in every incident in the annals of his life. The Voice which spoke to the great Apostle spoke also to him through the pages of Scripture, and the lesson conveyed in them formed the very basis of his life: "My grace is sufficient for thee. For power is made perfect in infirmity." M. Vincent's own humble origin was ever before him, and as God had made use of him, so he never ceased reminding his spiritual Daughters He would make use of them, if they never ceased keeping their littleness, their misery before them, relying upon His Divine grace and attributing to Him the glory, to themselves the failures.

Whilst relying entirely on Divine grace for the success of the work, M. Vincent left no human means untried to effect his purpose: which was that of training these young souls in the service of God, and their neighbour. How untiring he was we can judge by the mass of correspondence he left behind him treating of the affairs of the company; as well as the conferences (160 in number)

which, beginning in the year 1640, continued till within a few weeks of his death in 1660. In his conferences this master of spirituality covered the whole ground of the Christian life. He laid before his hearers in language such as the most illiterate of his hearers could understand, and assimilate, the doctrines of the Catholic Church, and the bearing of these teachings on their lives. With his wonderful knowledge of human nature, and, it may be noted, of their nature—that of the people of rural France—a knowledge which has perhaps never been surpassed, he laid bare their utmost thoughts, their weaknesses, their trials. Though he used the surgeon's scalpel at times to probe the wounds, it was the hand of a father that held it, of a father whose care and devotedness were without bounds. Far from standing aloof from them it may be said that his constant effort was to bring himself down to their level, and there was not one of these humble Daughters of Charity who did not realise that they had in M. Vincent the kindest of friends and the most merciful of judges.

In one of his earlier conferences of the date of the 6th of August, 1640, after a beautiful and humble preamble, in which he tells the little company of Sisters assembled to hear him that he had come “the most miserable sinner on earth” to speak to them on the part of God, he explains to them the light in which they should view their religious vocation.

“Though the Sisters of Charity have not up to this time pronounced any vows,” he told them, “none the less if they are true Daughters of Charity they are living in a state of perfection. . . . What—you may ask me—is it to be a Daughter of Charity? It is to be a Daughter of God, for God and all that belongs to Him is Charity, so to be in charity is to be in God and God in you.” Then going on to speak to them of God's designs upon them

he says: "Poor peasant women as you are, do you know this great grace that has been done to you? Are you not consoled and astonished by it? In this world you do not realise it, but one day you will be made aware of it. Honour the designs God has had from all eternity about you; and though up to the present time they seem to be quite small, and even insignificant, know that they are very great since they are in order to make you love Him in a sovereign manner and that you should imitate, and by this means honour, the life of Jesus Christ on earth. . . . Oh, how happy you are, my Daughters, to be called to a way of life that is so pleasing to God! You are the first chosen for these holy undertakings; for since the time of the Apostles when devout women followed our Lord, and ministered to Him, and His disciples, there has been no company formed for the practice of works of charity. And behold the children of workmen, poor peasant girls, are called to the work!"¹

On the feast of St. Roch, when proposing to them the example of that saint who was a martyr to his devotion to the service of the plague stricken, he exclaimed: "And amongst you there have been found some who have nursed the poor with such devotion that they have been glad to expose themselves to the same risks as did that saint of God." Then, citing the instance of the Sisters at the hospital at Angers, he continues: "Oh my dear Daughters, what a holy way of life is yours, for is it not true that the greatest happiness we can possess in life is to make ourselves pleasing to God? Can anything make us more sure of this than for us to give our lives for the love and service of our neighbour, since our Lord said greater love than this there could not be? And is it not this that you do each day in your daily work. . . . I have known a girl come a distance of eighty or a hundred

¹ *Conférences de St. Vincent de Paul*, t. i. pp. 11-12.

miles in order to consecrate herself to God in the service of the most abandoned of His creatures. Is that not to run to martyrdom? Do you think that martyrs went through greater sufferings than a Daughter of Charity who acquits herself perfectly of her obligations? No, most certainly they did not." If the holy man enlarged on the greatness of the vocation to which the Sisters of Charity were called it was not to raise vain-glorious thoughts, but rather to point out the obligations it involved; and so he would have them ask themselves "What! Is it possible that God has called *me*, a poor peasant girl, to so holy a task! He has passed over a number of persons even in my own village and He has chosen me and not Jeanne, or Marie, to be a foundation stone of the company. Oh, marvellous grace! O merciful Providence of God, be Thou for ever blessed! Reflect a little on this, my dear Sisters, and conceive a great desire to make progress in perfection."¹

As prayer is one of the great means of acquiring Divine grace, he never ceased recommending this duty to the Sisters. Many of his conferences are devoted to the subject, both with the object of instructing them on its practice and inculcating its necessity.

Thus on one occasion, after inviting the Sisters to give their opinion on prayer, he sums up what they have said with his own view as follows:²

"One of the reasons which oblige us never to give up the practice of prayer is because of the immense good we derive from it. Also because our blessed Saviour recommended this holy exercise so strongly to His apostles, exhorting them to ask all that they should want of His holy Father in His name and it would be granted to them. Now these words were not addressed solely to the apostles,

¹ *Conférences spirituelles de St. Vincent de Paul*, t. i. p. 181.

² *Ibid.* t. i. p. 173.

but to all Christians ; let us then form a high esteem for this holy practice, and make the strongest resolution never to renounce it, and to avoid carefully all the obstacles that might interfere with the time we give to prayer. . . . It has been wisely said that what food is with regard to the body, prayer is to the soul ; and thus as persons only taking food every two or three days would certainly fall into bad health, and lose their strength and the vigour of their limbs, in the same way the soul who does not watch in prayer, or rarely prays, will soon become tepid and languishing, without courage and virtue, trying to others and insupportable to itself. . . . It has also been said that prayer is the soul of our souls. It is the soul as you all know which gives life to the body, which makes it act, speak, and move, and as a body is only a corpse without the soul, so the soul without prayer is without feeling or desire for the service of God, and is animated with low and earthly sentiments. Prayer is like the mirror of the soul in which it sees all its blots, its disfigurements, and all that makes it displeasing to God. . . . Again it is principally in prayer that God makes known to us what He wishes us to do or to avoid. . . . It is in prayer that a soul which has become blind recovers her sight ; one that has been deaf to God's voice becomes attentive to His Divine inspirations, and from being slothful in the service of God by reason of bad habits returns with courage and fervour to her duties. Whence is it that we sometimes see a simple peasant girl coming among us and in a short time we perceive a complete change in her—that she is recollected, modest in her demeanour, and filled with the love of God. What is this but the effect of prayer ? . . . Prayer is the elevation of the soul to God. The soul by means of prayer goes out of itself, as it were, in order to seek God in Himself. Prayer is the soul holding converse with God. It is a mutual

communication in which God tells the soul interiorly what He wills that she should know, or accomplish, and the soul speaks to God and begs of Him the graces which He has inspired her to ask for." After explaining that there are two kinds of prayer, vocal and mental, he says :

" It should be observed that although by vocal prayer a set form of words is understood, it is necessary when saying them to be attentive to the words we use, and to have the soul raised to God."

Having shown the great importance of prayer, M. Vincent continues thus: " But, you may say to me, we quite see that prayer is an excellent thing: that it unites us to God, strengthens us in our vocation, causes us to make progress in virtue, detaches us from self and unites us to God, but we are ignorant how we should pray unless you teach us; we are ignorant girls, some of us can scarcely read, what do we know about prayer? I answer you that when the disciples asked our Saviour to teach them to pray he gave them the Paternoster which we say every day. Again I would say to you that you should not give up the practice of prayer even if it should appear to you that you are doing nothing, and throwing away your time. St. Teresa was twenty years trying to pray without succeeding, and at the end of that time she was given a great gift of prayer. How do you know, my Daughters, that God will not reward your perseverance as He did St. Teresa? You imagine because you have not the gift of prayer you are doing nothing. Know that if you are faithful to prayer you practise a number of virtues: first the virtue of obedience in going to prayer at the prescribed hour, or, if you are not able to go then, whenever you are able to spare the time for it. Again, you will practise the virtue of humility; for thinking you can make nothing of it will give you a low opinion of yourselves; you will also exercise yourselves in the virtues of

faith, hope, and charity. In short, all the most necessary virtues are contained in the practice of prayer, if you do it in a spirit of humility, and obedience, and persevere in it with fidelity. . . . Oh, my Daughters, it is easy to recognise a Sister of Charity who prays from one who does not; a sister who prays is modest, recollected, prudent in her words and actions, and animated with a holy cheerfulness. Whereas one who frequently omits her prayer, observe how trying she is to her Sisters in temper; she has no affability with them or towards the sick, she is incorrigible in her defects, and never gets rid of her bad habits. Take care never to relax in this holy habit, for if you find an excuse to-day for not making it, to-morrow you will find one again, and the result is that you will run the risk of losing everything—for your life is a very trying one, flesh and blood have no part in it, and if you do not gather strength from prayer it will be very difficult, nay impossible, for you to persevere.”

The holy Father was accustomed to invite the Sisters assembled at these conferences to give their views of the subject under discussion, following in this respect the example of St. Francis of Sales, who had acted in the same way with the nuns of the Visitation. He used specially to single out Louise in order to ask her opinion, and when she had given it he never failed to express his approval. Thus when proposing to them the consideration of the subject of holy indifference¹ he turned to Louise de Marillac and begged her to tell them her thoughts on this subject.

“ My Father,” she replied, “ I have reflected that God having called us to His service, it is in order that we may give Him all the glory of which we are capable, desiring that we should make a sacrifice of our liberty, and accept indifferently the employment, whatever it may be, to

¹ *Conférences spirituelles*, t. i. pp. 269-73.

which our superior may appoint us. Moreover, being members of the Church it would be impossible for us to perform the duties of our state of life without it, for it would be useless for the superiors to give their orders if they were to be resisted by those subject to their authority. A Sister who is wanting in holy indifference does much injury to her own soul, because she is not in a state to accept the Will of God, and therefore what she does fails to please Him ; she is also giving bad example to her Sisters, who may be led astray by her. In a word, she brings disorder into the company. . . . The most powerful means of acquiring this virtue is to propose to ourselves the example of Jesus Christ, who came into the world in order to do the Will of His Heavenly Father, and Who was subject to the Blessed Virgin, and St. Joseph, as we are told by the holy Gospels."

M. Vincent agreed heartily with these words saying : " May God reward you, Mademoiselle ; what you have said is beautiful. Now, my dear Daughters, I will tell you my thoughts on the subject. The state of indifference is that of the angels who are always ready to execute the Will of God at the smallest manifestations of it, whether it is in Heaven or on earth, without looking into it, having no desire to do anything but what He desires. Thus a Sister would resemble an angel if she was prepared to submit to whatever is asked of her, whether it is to work in the parish, or to look after the foundlings, or wherever she is sent ; in behaving in this manner she is in the disposition of the angels. Again, I repeat it, that she resembles an angel in that they are ready at all times to will what God wills. And a Sister does so who says : ' Do you wish me to have the care of the children ? I am quite satisfied that it should be so ' ; ' Do you wish me to start for a place a hundred miles hence ? ' ' I am ready to go.' There is another point in which she resem-

bles the angels; and that is that they never lose sight of the Presence of God—whatever they may be doing, and wherever they are, they contemplate Him. Thus a Sister of Charity who is established in this virtue sees the Will of God in all the offices to which she is appointed. She is equally satisfied wherever she is sent, like the angels who are as joyful when they are appointed guardians of the bad as of the good, because they place their sole happiness in the accomplishment of the Will of God.”

In another conference on the mutual respect and cordiality which should exist between the Sisters M. Vincent points out some of the rocks ahead which threatened the safety of the little company which was putting out so bravely to sea, and shows them the means of steering clear of them :¹

“ The sure way of never being wanting in cordial respect for each other is to have a low estimate of ourselves and a good opinion of our Sisters. . . . First of all this will lead to a great equality between the Sisters. Those who are of good birth and condition will not pride themselves on these advantages, but will humble themselves below the others by the true knowledge that they are what they are, in the sight of God only—Who will raise them up in proportion as they humble themselves. So that seeing some of their Sisters who are of lower rank they will never think of putting themselves in any way above them, it will rather animate their hearts with gratitude to God for the benefits which they, personally, have received from His hands. If we accustom ourselves to this practice of treating each other with respect and cordiality in the beginning of this Institute we have reason to hope that it will maintain itself in this habit, without which there would be nothing but disunion and bad example. . . . Oh, my Sisters, how much I desire you

¹ *Conférences spirituelles*, pp. 294-6.

should love one another ! St. John the Evangelist, who had been brought up in the school of Jesus Christ, who reposed on His breast at the Last Supper, when he was worn out with age never said anything to his disciples in his latter days but these few words : ' My little children, love one another.' And as some one asked him why he never ceased repeating the same thing, he answered in words worthy of that great apostle : ' My children, because it is the law of our Saviour, and if you accomplish it you will be saved.' And so, my Sisters, in the same way I say it to you : Love one another, and bear a mutual respect and cordiality towards each other, and then you will take in good part whatever your Sisters say to you. And whatever is said, or done to you, you will never believe it was done to cause you annoyance, for certainly when you love a person you are not likely to take offence at anything she says or does. For observe this, sisterly charity is the true mark of the children of God. ' Prevent one another with honour,' says St. Paul. Oh, how sweet is this teaching ! It is not for us then to wait till our neighbour has greeted us, we must be the first to do it ; even less should you wait for your Sisters to show you this courtesy, you should ' prevent one another ' in honour and charity. Now this meeting each other half-way in the matter of courtesy which St. Paul requires of all Christians is not founded on fine qualities, nor on our neighbour's position, but should have true charity as its motive. Thus, it is to you in a special manner that St. Paul addresses himself ; to you, I say, because by a dispensation of Divine Providence you bear the name of Sisters of Charity, which should mean good, and affable, and sincere Sisters. I would add that as long as this cordial respect exists between you it may be said of you that you are leading a true religious life ; for in doing so every Sister serves as a cloister by her good example,

by her respect and cordiality to all those who accost her. Is it not true that if you conducted yourselves in this manner, if you never annoyed each other, but were full of sympathy and consideration for each other, you would live like angels? I can assure you it requires nothing else in order to be perfect religious."

The life of the Sister of Charity, such as its holy founders saw it, was a hidden and laborious one. It was a life led in company with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the holy house of Nazareth; one of daily toil consecrated to the Divine Master by prayer and union of hearts. Such was the ideal which both M. Vincent and their holy superior never ceased putting before the little company both by pen and word of mouth.

"I repeat," he said at one of his conferences, "that the spirit of your Company should consist in love of our Saviour Jesus Christ, in love for the poor, and in love and union with each other. It would be better that there should be no Sisters of Charity than that the company should exist without these virtues."

It need not surprise us, therefore, that on one occasion when M. Vincent had been putting before his little congregation, in his simple but fervent language, the beauty of giving up all to serve Him, that they with one accord protested that they had no wish but to go wherever they should be sent in His Divine service.

It was on an occasion of this sort, when he had been giving them an account of an Order in the service of hospitals who had been allowed to make the three-fold vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the words used by the holy man were so fervent and persuasive that when he ended by saying, "See, my dear Sisters, how pleasing it is to God that we should serve Him in the person of His dear members," some Sisters deeply touched rose from their places, and entreated that such

an act of love and devotion should be permitted to members of their company. Perhaps M. Vincent himself may have anticipated such a request; he may also have felt that without this consecration the work, in which he saw so much good resulting, and such large possibilities for the future, would never possess the stability necessary for its continuance, for he made no objection to the appeal. "If such is your desire, my Daughters," he answered, "you have it in your power to lay it before your superior and then to remain in peace on the subject, waiting to see whether it should be refused or accorded."

This little scene proves unmistakably that the desire to bind themselves by vows emanated from the Sisters of Charity themselves.

At a later date M. Vincent, returning to the subject of vows at one of the monthly conferences,¹ explained to his audience that it was not in their power to aspire to the title of religious in the ordinary sense of the word, for the word nun stood for cloisters, a grille, and Office recited in common: all things incompatible with their calling in life.

He then took the opportunity of explaining the difference between solemn and simple vows, and told them that they could obtain leave to pronounce the latter with the proper authorisation. Having said this he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and, responding as it were to the thought which must have been uppermost in the hearts of his hearers, he gave vent to his feelings in the following prayer: "O my God! we give ourselves up entirely to Thee; give us the grace of living and dying in the perfect observance of a true poverty. I ask this grace of Thee for all our Sisters, for those absent as well as for those who are present," and turning to them he asked: "You wish it, do you not, my Daughters?" Then con-

¹ *Conférences*, t. i. p. 17.

tinuing he said: "Give us also the grace to live a chaste life, and to obey perfectly. I ask Thy mercy on all the Sisters of Charity and for myself. We give ourselves up to Thee, O my God, for the rest of our lives in order to serve our masters the poor. We ask this grace of Thee by Thy love of us. You wish it to be so, do you not, my Daughters?"

All the Sisters there present protested they had no greater desire than to give themselves to God; and kneeling down asked for his blessing, which he gave them, begging of God that He would give them the grace of accomplishing His holy designs upon them.

M. Vincent allowed about two years to elapse before taking any further active steps in the matter. With him no step forward, even in the service of God, was ever taken without prayer, deep consideration, and, frequently, consultation with those whom he looked upon as versed in spiritual knowledge.

The day chosen for the first members of the Company of Sisters of Charity to pronounce their vows was the feast of the Annunciation, 1642. It was the anniversary of the day when eight years before Louise de Marillac had consecrated herself for the rest of her life to the same work, and she came with them to renew her oblation at the same time as they made theirs. There was an entire absence of ceremony on the occasion, and equally of publicity. "Having made their preparation for Holy Communion the four Sisters who had received permission to make their vows assisted at Mass, and at the moment of the Elevation pronounced the following formula, which was ever afterwards used on similar occasions by members of the company:

"I the undersigned, in the presence of God, renew the promises made for me in baptism, and make a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the venerable

General of the priests of the Mission, in the Company of Daughters of Charity, in order to devote myself for this year to the spiritual and corporal service of the sick poor, our honoured masters. And this I do by the help of God's grace, which I ask of Him through Jesus crucified, and by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin."

The names of two of these Sisters of Charity have come down to us. One was Barbe Engibour, or Angiboust, whom we first hear of as begging to be taken away from the palace of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon in order to return to the service of Christ's poor; whom later on we come across at Richelieu, where she is reproved by her superior, and from whom she received her reproof so humbly that we read of her ever afterwards receiving Louise's letters on her knees and reading them in that posture. This humility, which was heart-felt, caused her to sign herself in her letters "Barbe the haughty."

She belonged to the parish of St. Pierre de Séréville in the diocese of Chartres. Her father and mother were exemplary Catholics and gave both Barbe and her sister Cécile to the service of God without repining. She was a mainstay of the company in its early days, and Louise de Marillac made use of her frequently in her foundations. At the time of her profession she was in charge of the galley slaves, and nothing could exceed her patience and charity in carrying out her arduous duties with regard to them. We are told that on more than one occasion these unfortunate outcasts of society, who resembled wild beasts rather than human beings, threw the meat and broth with which she was serving them in her face—at the same time vomiting forth language of indescribable filth. Barbe, paying no attention to their behaviour, would patiently pick up the fragments of the meal, and showing no change of countenance, continue with an undisturbed mien her mission of charity. She would

afterwards intercede in their behalf with their warders when they were threatened with punishment, and beg to have them spared.

Jeanne Dalmagne, who made her vows at the same time as Barbe, only lived for two years after her profession. She had first tried her vocation as lay sister with the Carmelites, and had shown such good dispositions that they had been prepared to admit her into the community as a choir nun. But hearing of the life led by the Company of Sisters of Charity she felt irresistibly attracted by God to the service of the poor and sick. She was sent shortly after her profession to Nanteuil to work in that parish, and the letter she wrote giving an account of her journey to Louise de Marillac has been preserved. It runs as follows: "Mademoiselle and my dearest Mother, we arrived here on Saturday, with fairly good luck. We had some troubles on the road. The first night we lodged in a village, and were delayed by bad weather and only reached it at ten o'clock. On Saturday we heard Mass and communicated. I offered up my Communion in honour of the good Mother of God, to beg her blessing on the action I was about to commence for the glory of her Divine Son and the good of His little children. I was greatly saddened during the journey by the thought that I was going away at such distance from my dear Mother, and into a country where I knew no one. Then the thought came to me of the promptitude shown by our Blessed Lady in her flight into Egypt, how she was never disturbed as to whether it would be pleasant or disagreeable there, or far off or near, or whether she would find friends when she got there. Then I went on to consider that this holy little company found no one when they arrived there to receive them, nor to give them food. Oh, my God! what confusion the thought of their example caused me! It was more than I can put into words.

Then I thought to myself how, having spent seven years in Egypt and made themselves very much loved by every one, at a simple word they returned into their own country. There I stopped myself, and I resolved to remain firmly fixed. It was then and there I made a firm resolution, my dear Mother, never to attach myself to anything which could turn me from my holy vocation—as long as I have your prayers and those of my dear Sisters, to whom I wish to be remembered with all my heart.”

The devotedness of this holy Sister was equal to the charming simplicity of her sentiments. One of her duties at the *Charité* of Nanteuil was to visit the hospital, where poor vagrants were lodged for the night, in order that she might instruct and help them. “If she found out that they had had nothing to eat (we quote from the account given of her later by M. Vincent) she used to beg permission to give them the bread which had been provided for the community (her Sisters relate), for she never acted except under obedience, and when they said to her, ‘Take this bread, Sister, it is dry,’ she used to answer: ‘That would never do, my Sister! we must never give anything to God except the best. I will eat it gladly.’ Then she used to eat what was left, giving the fresh bread to our masters the poor.” It is said that her devotion to the sick and sorrowful was such as to cause astonishment to M. Vincent himself. Nanteuil offered a large field for her labours, as the poor there were numerous and neglected. There was one unfortunate family in the parish, consisting of a mother and daughter, who were avoided by every one; the daughter being afflicted with a cutaneous complaint of an infectious character. Jeanne used to go twice a day to dress her sores, and sometimes being in bad health herself the sight of the girl’s wounds caused her to faint, but no sooner

had she recovered than she went on with what she was doing. Such was her gentleness and charity that the peace of Jesus Christ seemed to breathe from her person, and diffused itself all round her. She only lived two years after she was sent to Nanteuil, her death being accelerated by her life of self-denial and devotion to the poor. Louise hearing of the state of Jeanne's health sent her a Sister of the name of Elizabeth Hellot with the following letter: "How deeply I regret, my dear Daughter, that I am unable to assist you myself in this last act of love which you are about, willingly, to offer up to the Eternal Father in honour of the death of His Divine Son. . . . All your Sisters here ask you to remember them in Heaven, when God in His mercy takes you there. Do not forget the wants of the poor little company to which God called you. Be its advocate before the goodness of God to plead that it may accomplish His designs upon it, and pray to our good angels with the same intention. I pray to Jesus crucified to bless you with all the virtues He practised on the Cross."

Jeanne recovered sufficiently to be brought back to the Mother-house; she died on the 25th of March, 1644, the anniversary of the day on which she had pronounced her vows. Louise de Marillac grieved so deeply over the death of this beloved Daughter that M. Vincent felt it was necessary to recall to her the duty of acquiescing in God's good pleasure. "It is easy to say it," he remarks in the letter he wrote to her, "but the tears shed by our Saviour over Lazarus show that it is not easy to restrain them. If you weep let it only be for a short space, and after that remain in peace."

On a later occasion, speaking at a conference of the death of this holy soul, M. Vincent remarked: "The last time I saw her I said: 'Well, my Daughter, tell me which at this moment would you rather have been during your

past life—a great lady or a Sister of Charity?’ And this good Sister, though scarcely able to speak, managed to utter these words: ‘A Sister of Charity.’ What goodness! what holiness!” cried the man of God. “What a treasure have we not lost in this Sister! I promise you, my Sisters, I have read many lives of saints, but I know of none who have surpassed our Sister in love of God and her neighbour.”

As this was the first Sister of Charity who died in Paris after the community had moved into the new house at St. Laurent, Louise interceded with M. Vincent that she should be buried in the churchyard attached to the Priory of St. Lazare. M. Vincent after much reflection deemed it necessary to refuse the request. She was accordingly buried in that of the parish of St. Laurent, which was ever afterwards the place of sepulchre of the Company of Sisters of Charity in Paris.

CHAPTER XII

It was not till the year 1641, when the company was entering into the eighth year of its existence, that M. Vincent, addressing a conference at which many Sisters were present, told them that "owing to the large number of poor under their care it would be necessary to have Rules drawn up suitable for their different employments."

This duty was one which had ever devolved on Louise de Marillac, "who," as Mgr. Baunard remarks, "was the law-giver as well as the foundress of the Institute," the director reserving to himself the right of control only. These are the terms in which he conveys his approbation for the proposals made by her: "I have just read, Mademoiselle, the suggestions for the Sisters' Rule of life which you have forwarded to me, and I approve of it. Those belonging to La Chapelle and the Hôtel Dieu can adopt it as it stands. The Sister attached to the parishes, the prisons, and the foundling hospital should observe it as far as they are able to do so, in their several employments. You would do well at the end to add what you think proper for those in charge of the foundlings and the same for the galley-slaves. Will you write what is necessary for the children and send it to me? I will see it to-night."

The Rules with regard to the service of the prisons we have given in a previous chapter, as well as that appropriate to the use of the Sisters serving at the Hôtel

Dieu in Paris. The latter received some additions in consequence of the increase of the work, which was at this period settled on a larger and more permanent basis, but for the most part it remained unaltered. Mme. de la Soucarière had succeeded Mme. Goussault after the death of the latter in 1639 as superior of the *Charité*. The following year the plague broke out, and the Sisters of Charity and the ladies visiting the hospital were again exposed to great risks, but on this occasion they escaped uninjured.

The charge of the foundlings was connected, we learn from the regulations, with that of the Hôtel Dieu. For it is to the Sisters helping in the hospital and their *Sœur Servante* that is committed the care of "carrying some of the children to the church on the days of the feasts of our Lady, and to provide that there should be a Sister present whose duty it was to beg, and to take care that the behaviour of the nurses and children should be exemplary. To this Sister the care is confided of keeping an exact account of the alms she received from the ladies for this good work. To her is also confided the duty of emptying the box placed in the same church for alms intended for them. If the Sisters have any spare time when their work is over it should be employed in useful work by which to gain their livelihood, such as sewing, spinning, or making jelly which could be sold for the benefit of the poor; in short they should keep the regulations as practised at the Mother-house save for that regarding the hour of rising: those who had to get up to receive infants brought to them from the hospital at night (which they took in turns to do) being allowed two hours' more rest in the morning.

A collapse of some of the good works undertaken by the Association of Ladies of Charity was threatened in the course of this year in consequence of the falling off of

the numbers visiting the hospital, and of their subscriptions. The adoption of the foundlings and their maintenance was specially threatened. Louise de Marillac's letters, as well as M. Vincent's, refer to the impossibility of keeping up the large and daily increasing number of foundlings with wholly inadequate funds. The hopelessness of the effort to meet these expenses and the peril of contagion for the visitors at the Hôtel Dieu, were alleged by the ladies as excuses for giving up their engagements; but probably a growing slackness, the reaction after great and almost preternatural effort, was the true determining cause of the breakdown.

Again M. Vincent, using the only means in his power, assembled the Association, and in the simple, penetrating words of which he was a master—words which, coming straight from a heart burning with love of God, never failed to reach the hearts of those whom he addressed—told them what would be the result of their failure to carry out their engagements.

“The crown,” he said, “is only given to him who perseveres to the end of the struggle. Allowing such a work as the one you have undertaken to perish, would be to look back, after your ‘hand has taken hold of the plough,’ and he who does so, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. To act in this manner is to deprive oneself of the blessing of mercy promised by God on those who are merciful. It is to expose oneself to the curse fulminated against those who when Jesus Christ was hungry did not feed Him, who when He was in prison neglected to visit Him. Again, it is to deprive ourselves of the happiness of performing a good action and of the happy death which is its reward. Again: are these visitors who have given up their holy mission in discouragement prepared to rob hundreds of souls of the spiritual assistance which they had been accustomed to procure for them by means of

instruction and through the ministry of the priest? Is it possible that they will deprive God of this glory, the Church of edification, and themselves of the merit, in order to rejoice the powers of darkness and serve as a triumph of the wicked?" He ended by appealing to the company to answer these things. The response was hearty and generous. All those present declared their readiness to resume their duties at the Hôtel Dieu and contribute to the support of the foundlings. For the time all was well, but not many months were to elapse before the scene had to be repeated.

Amongst the regulations drawn up by Louise at this time we come across one for the use of the Sisters working in the villages. She insists especially on the importance of teaching the little children. The Sisters should be ready to receive the pupils who present themselves for instruction at any hour. As these are of all ages the Sisters should use discretion in inviting those who are shy, and ashamed of their ignorance, to have their lessons apart—receiving them warmly, even though they should come at a late hour, or at meal time. They should take monthly note of those who are negligent, and reprimand them; and reward with some small prize those who have been assiduous. This is followed by some advice of a personal nature addressed to the Sisters; such as that they shall try and give good example in the villages, avoiding the gossip which is so common amongst village people. They should be careful not to be an expense to the poor; they are also recommended to take care of such churches as are badly kept up and neglected; and to watch over the lamps, and provide with oil those which are not kept burning for want of it. They should exert themselves in their free time to gain their livelihood, occupying themselves in spinning, washing and other employments.

It is clear that in those days the Sisters were expected to eke out the tiny pension which they received either from the funds of the Association or from the family who had invited them to the parish with the work of their own hands. M. Vincent, we know, wished that they should be entirely self-supporting. "Oh, how I wish for you," he said to them on one occasion, "that you were in a position to be able to serve the poor at your own expense in the villages where they cannot afford to maintain you! What could be more beautiful than to see the Sisters nursing the sick, and serving the poor, without any contribution from any one, and that, in part, by means of their work which they are able to carry on according to the time they have at their disposal, after they have acquitted themselves of their duties. What a blessing there would be on this, and what good they would accomplish!"

It was settled at this time that in future no Sister should be sent singly to any parish at a distance from Paris. The trial of being sent alone a long way off, of being separated from Sisters and superior, as well as from kith and kin, was indeed one which human nature could hardly be expected to endure. It was one that henceforth they were spared, and evidently through the compassion and sympathy of their superior.

A letter is preserved from Louise dated the 9th of February, 1641, which alludes to this trial to one of her Daughters:

"Sister Marie is in great apprehension about having to go alone, and at the prospect of not being any longer with her Sisters. But she takes it in good part without murmuring, and making no opposition to the execution of the obedience imposed on her; only it is clear that she is in great fear about it. But I am less reasonable; for the recollection of the resolution, that it seems to me you

had made, never to send a Sister alone has remained so fixed on my memory, that I have judged it advisable to send some one with her. She might be taken ill whilst on the road; or, when she arrived at her destination, there might be evilly disposed people who might take advantage of her and treat her badly. Also, as we are none of us insensible to these impressions, and it is no small sacrifice that these good girls make in giving up everything, it may be too great a trial for her; and with no comfort at hand there is great fear of her discouragement. Another thing that I dread is that it should have a bad effect on others, who might say that we are indifferent to what happens to the Sisters, as we allow them to go about alone. All these reasons combined cause me to take the liberty, Monsieur, to ask you to think the matter over, and, if it is possible, agree to my request, so that her example will be an encouragement to the others." Anticipating his consent she goes on to say: "I have thought of giving Claire—the stout Sister—to Marie as a companion. She is of a sociable disposition, and I think they will get on well together. Sister Marie has brought twenty crowns with her, which will suffice for their expenses." The journey will not cost much, and when they arrive at their destination they will earn a little by their work; was not Sister Marie accustomed to work in the laundry whilst at St. Germain—she can continue doing so, and so forth.

Special regulations were drawn up for the use of the Sisters when on a journey. We have read before how Louise invoked the blessing of God on her travels by prayer and the Sacraments, and the rule followed by the Sisters was very similar. They are if possible to receive Holy Communion on the day of their departure, and receive their Father Superior's blessing. They will then take the road, honouring by so doing the journeys made

by our Saviour when He was on earth. Modesty—both in speaking and looking around them—shall be their veil, to the edification of those who travel in the coach with them, and who assuredly will be watching to see how they behave. They should place themselves side by side so that it should be impossible for any one to single out one or other in conversation; they should then begin the prayers for travellers, and go through their practices of devotion at the prescribed hours. At each village they pass without alighting they should salute the most Blessed Sacrament, and the guardian angels of those residing there. On reaching their halting place for the night they will ask the hostess for some small room which they can occupy alone. They will not dine at the common table, but having previously provided themselves with some food they will resort to some retired spot in the inn to eat it. With this object they will buy a large loaf at a baker's shop—bread being in general dearer at an inn; but the meal should be a good one because of the fatigues of the journey, and of the convenience of having something over for future needs. As soon as they shall have reached their journey's end, the Sisters shall go to the nearest church in order to adore the most holy Sacrament, and if there chance to be sick in the hospice they must go and visit them. Or if they should come across children, or even the servants of the inns—who very often require to be reminded of matters affecting their souls—they should instruct or catechise them, having provided themselves with some little pictures, or such like, with the object of giving them to the said children or servants.

Whilst Louise was thus expediting messengers of charity and the love of God all over the country districts of France—to Chars near Pontoise, Maignelay, La Roche Guyon near Mantes; Issy, Houeilles and Crespière, in

the neighbourhood of Versailles, and many others—her own time was fully occupied with working at the *Charités* nearer home. She was particularly engaged during the years succeeding the removal of the community from La Chapelle to St. Laurent in developing the resources of the parish in which the Mother-house was now established. The education of the children, especially of young girls, had been much neglected there. In a letter addressed to one of the dignitaries (M. le Chantre) of the Chapter of Notre Dame she draws attention to this crying want in these words: "The great number of poor belonging to the Faubourg St. Denis makes me very anxious to occupy myself with their instruction. It is much to be feared that evil will get the upper hand, and may imperil these children's salvation if they continue in their present state of ignorance. I trust on the other hand that it will be to the glory of God that these poor people, even if they are unable to contribute anything, should freely send their children to school . . . and these souls who have been ransomed by the Blood of the Son of God will be bound to pray for you, Monsieur, in this world and for all eternity." The petition was granted and Louise was authorised "to take charge of the education of the poor children of the parish only, and to bring them up in the knowledge of letters, good habits, and pious practices."

The year 1642 was also signalised by another event of consequence to the congregation. M. Olier, the holy reformer, took possession of the parish of St. Sulpice, and one of his first efforts was directed to getting a branch of the company to work amongst his poor. The Association of the Ladies of Charity had been started in the parish ten years previously, but at the time of his installation it was in a moribund condition, and when the Sisters entered into their duties of looking after the sick and

teaching the children, they found in consequence of this neglect a double task imposed upon them. A letter of M. Olier to M. Vincent explains the situation, and the anxiety of the former to remedy the evil: "I venture to take the liberty," he writes, "to beseech of you for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and the good of His members, to come if your engagements should permit of it to speak a few encouraging words to our ladies of Charity. They are holding a meeting to-day so as to consider the possibility of going to work in the service of the poor according to the regulations of the Association—not having hitherto considered themselves bound by them. I beg of you in the name of our Lord not to refuse me this favour."

M. Vincent not only granted his friend's request but so successful was his appeal that we are told a new era of the Association commenced for the parish. They agreed to meet on the first Thursday of the month at the presbytery, and the infusion of fresh blood in the person of the excellent Mme. Leschassier and her daughter, both zealous and devoted women, and of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon put new life into the Society. It was said of the latter by one of her contemporaries, that, "when she went to visit her poor people, or when she entered the Hôtel Dieu to serve with her own hands the patients with their food and refreshment, her head was uplifted and her face lit up so that any one might have thought from her look of transport that she was on her way to some great feast."

The help and encouragement thus given to the hard-worked Sisters of Charity did not arrive before it was wanted, as their labours in the parish of St. Sulpice had previously been almost unendurably hard. Witness the following letter from Louise to M. Vincent in which she says, "Would it not be possible to take measures so that

our Sisters of St. Sulpice should not be so over-worked, they having five or six people over them. They are much discouraged, and they likewise feel the contempt and suspicious manner in which they are treated." Probably when the value of their services was better known this unworthy treatment ceased, as we hear of no further complaints from their *Sœur Servante*.

This constantly enlarging sphere of work of the company leads to another thought, or speculation. What must have been approximately the number of its members at this date? Mgr. Baunard, as a contribution to an answer on this subject, draws attention to a remark made by M. Vincent at a conference on the 25th of January, 1643. "Is it not true," he asks, "my Sisters, that you have received in return for the mother and sisters you have left sisters and mothers *by the hundred?*" All the Sisters assented. Though no doubt this was a figure of speech and need not be accepted literally, it is clear the company was fairly numerous at the time. We also know that in the memoir forwarded by M. Vincent to the Archbishop of Paris in 1646 he mentioned that thirty sisters were then resident at the Mother-house. Mgr. Baunard sums up the argument by stating that there were probably in the years 1643-6 a permanent staff of the little army of not less than a hundred members.

We know from the testimony of Louise de Marillac, who, later on, avowed that nothing had been such a source of trial to her in the early days of the company than the continual change of faces in the Mother-house, that the Institute in the early forties was still in a very fluid condition. No doubt many came, without a true vocation, to what was a life of great hardship and self-denial, demanding a very special grace from God, and attraction to the service of the sick and poor to ensure perseverance in it.

Probably, too, as years went on, the process of selection at the outset got to be more strict, so that the palpably unfit were never admitted on trial, when the certain result was seen to be a failure. This, at least, is what we read between the lines in such a letter as the following of the foundress to Abbé de Vaux: "I have no wish," she writes, "to receive any persons excepting such as are likely to be suitable for the company, both as regards health of body and sanity of mind. You know of what importance this is in a community. I must, therefore, beg you to ascertain that it is not the desire to see Paris which is the cause of their wishing to come here—nor that of making themselves a livelihood." "I feel a little doubtful," she remarks in another place, "about those who live and have worked in towns; nevertheless the Spirit of God is poured out everywhere." Again, in writing to Angers she repeats: "We do not want chatterers and sluggards, nor those who would like to come to Paris but have no idea of labouring at their perfection in the service of God. These are the causes of our having to send many away, or of their leaving us. It is necessary to explain to young girls who ask to be received into the company that it is not an Order or a hospital where they would be established permanently; that their calling would admit of their being changed continually from one spot to another, and going out to nurse the sick in all weathers, at the hours indicated; that their food and clothing will be of the poorest description . . . thus that they should have no motive in coming to the company except the one of serving God and their neighbour; that life in it is a constant exercise of mortification of soul and body; that they should have the will to observe all the regulations, especially those that have to do with unquestioning obedience. They should also be in-

formed that when they go out of doors in Paris they will not be allowed to pay visits to their friends without permission." It is further laid down in the same document "that the company does not recognise as members any who have joined the *Charités* in the provinces who have not gone through previous training and received the habit at the hand of the superior in the Mother-house in Paris."

If the above regulations show a certain sternness in their brief outline, we must remember that we have only to see in them the logical outcome of the doctrines of Christ Himself. As M. Vincent never tired of telling the Sisters of Charity, they were called to be good Christians, *e.g.* to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him; to renounce father and mother for His sake, and more than all, to love their neighbours as themselves. To human nature all these are hard doctrines, but did not our Lord sum them up by saying: "Take up my yoke upon you, for my yoke is sweet and my burthen light"? Nor was it otherwise with the little company. Their rules were administered in the very spirit of charity and kindness of the Divine Master Himself, as we are forcibly reminded by innumerable examples in the lives of the holy founders. For instance, Louise writing on one occasion upon the subject of a postulant who was proposed to her, observes: "If God wishes to give her to us I assure you I am prepared to welcome her as if she was my nearest relation, in the hope that we may be able to work together to the glory of God."

As we have once before had occasion to mention, the company was not entirely recruited from the middle and lower classes. Occasionally we find the attraction to give up the world and assume the humble garb of the Sisters of Charity, the *filles du couvre-chef* as M. Vincent

took pleasure in calling them, extending to the high and leisured classes. Marguerite du Plessis Thilouze was of this number; her generous devotion to the service of God and the poor moved Louise's admiration and sympathy, as we see in the following letter:

"My Daughter," she writes to her, "I was greatly consoled to hear of your perseverance, and the fervour of your resolutions, and the joy it was to you to change your worldly garments for the poverty of those of the servants of Jesus Christ. They will adorn you much more beautifully than would the world's brocades and satins, if only your soul is ornamented with the virtues worthy of the habit of penance—humility, patience, and obedience, and above all, of the holy fear and love of God. Love with all your heart this much-despised servitude, this low slavery to which you are willing to dedicate yourself at the feet of Christ crucified, that is, the service of the poor to whose service you are going to devote yourself for the rest of your life."

What could be more tender and yet more inspiring than the letter written by Louise to Elizabeth Martin at the hospital of Angers bearing the date of 1642?—

"Are you very courageous? Can you do like the Good Shepherd, Who gives His life for the good and the safeguarding of the flock in His charge? I believe it, because, though we have not always occasion to risk our lives, opportunities will never be wanting where it is necessary to renounce our wills to accommodate ourselves to those of our neighbour, to break our habits and inclinations in order to serve as an example to our Sisters, and to surmount our passions so as not to rouse those of our neighbours. Thus it is, my dear Sister, that we have to behave in order to maintain cordiality, to exercise sympathy, and to live in the close union of the true charity of Christ crucified, which I implore God

to give you. Recommend well Sister Mary Martha from me that she should be all that that name implies; as, being called Mary, she should be possessed of a great purity, sweetness, and modesty, and be ready to please everybody, and her name of Martha should oblige her to a great exactitude in carrying out the Rule. As for Sister Cecilia, oh, how sweet and peaceful she should be in imitation of her holy patron saint—singing sweetly the praises of God! And our dear Sister Brigit should love and practise stability in trials and in the perseverance of the accomplishment of God's designs over her. As for our Sister Frances, I trust that God will give her grace that the force of her soul may make up for what is wanting to the strength and size of her body. What about our dear Sister Catherine? I trust she is not overwhelmed by the heavy wheels and harrows¹ of her life. Has she, like her dear patron saint, sufficient love of God to resist all that weighs her down? Tell her that all depends upon herself, and that the same beloved Spouse of her soul has as much love and as many graces to give her as He gave to that great saint, provided she is faithful to Him. I say the same to our Sister Barbe, to whom I wish holy perseverance, and increase of perfection, as I do to all of you, my dear Sisters. Remember the wants of the company, which requires the help of your prayers and especially of the merit which God confers on works done for His service."

Sister Martin, who was *Sœur Servante* at the hospital at Angers, fell ill, probably from overwork, and was taking a well-deserved rest at Richelieu when the following letter was addressed to her by Louise, dated the 3rd of August, 1644: "My very dear Sister: Our good God is making you a partaker in a very striking manner

¹ An allusion to the instruments of St. Catherine of Alexandria's martyrdom.

of His sufferings. I implore of His mercy that you may receive the consolation which He is accustomed to give to those whom He leads by this path. Two things will help greatly to make you bear them; one is the love we ought to have of honouring the sufferings of our Lord in this manner; the other the frequent thought that this life is of short continuance, and that sufferings patiently endured conduct one to a happy eternity. Let us love them then, my Daughter, and let us make many acts of the will to accept them as long as the will of God should impose them on us. Be assured that it is a proof of God's love for you, inasmuch as He makes you bear resemblance in this way to His Son. Suffer them in this spirit by submission to all God asks of you, and make use of all the means given you for the recovery of your health. I pray my Sister Anne to take the greatest care of you. I am convinced she has already done so, and I wish that she may do so in the spirit of perfect charity."

Not the least of the trials to which Louise de Marillac was subjected in the early days of the company was the want of appreciation, the sublime vocation of her Daughters met with in all classes of society. Pioneers are seldom appreciated, and what were they but pioneers in the service of their neighbours? To the populace of Paris, of Angers, or elsewhere they were neither flesh nor fowl; not nuns, for they wore no veils, neither were they screened from the world by walls and grilles, and yet were they not lay-women. Who had a greater right than the Sister of Charity to look upon herself as the mystic spouse and handmaid of the Lord—yet the world at large saw in her only a peasant girl; thus she not only shared in the toils, but in the ignominy of her Divine Master. It was in allusion to these trials that Louise, reminding her Daughters of the humble nature of their first beginnings, remarked: "Could anything

have been more degraded (*ravalé*) in the eyes of the world than your Institute was in its commencement? Some village girls engaged to carry food and remedies, who after a time were assembled to live together in community without making any change in their way of life, or their clothes, or in the simplicity and roughness of their country habits—that was all! Indeed, my Daughters, we hardly dared to show ourselves in the streets in the beginning.”

If it was long before the world at large recognised the merits of heroines of charity such as Margu rite Naseau, Barbe *l'orgueilleuse*, or Jeanne Dalmagne, to their superior they were more than fellow-workers, they were dearly loved children, and undoubtedly it was no small trial to her to forgive those who failed to appreciate them, or who cast aspersions on them. We see a shadow of this just resentment in a letter to her good friend M. l'Abb  du Vaux, who had evidently quoted some remark to their discredit. “I should wish, Monsieur,” she writes, “that it was known that our Sisters are not of such a stamp that it is possible to say of them that they are picked up anywhere, and that nothing is known of them. I beg of you to rest assured that we do not receive any without having inquired all about their characters, and being satisfied with what we have heard.”

The ten days' interval between the feast of the Ascension and Whit Sunday were ever devoted by Louise, as we have before remarked, to prayer and recollection. We find mentioned in her Life that this retreat of the year 1644 was one which she kept with special fervour and which left a great impression on her subsequent career. “A great work was operated at this time, which, beginning in the mind of her venerated spiritual Father and in that of some of the Sisters had for its object the establishment of the little company on a solid basis. It

was to effect a close union between the way of life which God had indicated the company should lead, and that which was ever to subsist between it and the Institute of the priests of the Mission of which that much-revered Father was the head.”¹

We learn by a letter from Louise to M. Vincent that interior trials such as had assailed her in her early life were once more troubling her. “I cannot refrain from telling you,” she writes, “that I suffered greatly to-day from fears on the subject of my predestination, the result of some thoughts which occurred to me whilst I was at prayer.” She adds, however, in a concluding paragraph to this letter that these fears had not prevented her from having recourse to the heavenly Physician who alone could cure and restore calm to her much-trying soul. “I forgot to ask your permission to communicate every day of the Novena as long as the Mass of the Holy Ghost is said. I am availing myself of the leave you gave me to do so when my health permits of it.”

An accident which might have ended fatally marked the end of her retreat. M. Vincent describes it as follows: “Mademoiselle was in the community room when the joist supporting the floor broke. A Sister who had heard sounds of cracking came to caution her that it was unsafe to remain in the room. She paid no attention to the warning, but when an older person came to tell her the same thing, in deference to her age she turned to go. She was not three steps from the nearest door when the joist broke and the floor fell in. This escape could not have happened without the special permission of God.” M. Vincent intended to hold a meeting of Ladies of Charity in that very room the same afternoon, but he goes on to say: “Something occurred to cause me to

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 330.

put it off, and which also prevented the ladies from coming, otherwise we should all have been crushed by the floor giving way."

As soon as M. Vincent was informed of the danger to which Louise had been exposed he wrote to her to tell her that she was not by any means to look upon it (as she was much inclined to do) as brought on her by her sins: "But you have," he wrote, "still greater cause for increasing in your love of God, for He has preserved you like the apple of His eye from an accident which might have been fatal. I told what had happened to our Congregation of Priests, and we have all thanked God who has protected you by His good providence."

Louise was under no delusion; for we find the following note with regard to this merciful escape amongst her writings: "Miserable as I know myself to be, and though I had every reason to believe that the accident was due to my sins, I never attributed it to that cause, either at the time or afterwards. But the thought was on my lips, and still more in my heart, that I escaped death by the grace of God and this happened for some end unknown to us, but which His goodness might reveal to our venerated Father." She adds later on: "The day and occasion when God displayed His great goodness in my regard by saving me from destruction in the collapse of the floor, brought before my eyes in a striking manner the great interior trial which I underwent on the same day twelve years before, when His mercy enlightened me in the great troubles and difficulties under which I was labouring." This day of Pentecost, she resolves, will henceforth be to her a day of even greater devotion than heretofore. She will try all her life to preserve a recollection of the graces given her upon it. She will ask permission for herself and her Sisters to communicate once a month on the same day in

thanksgiving for them, and she will arrange so that every year the Sisters should be enabled to make a retreat during the time between Ascension and Whit Sunday. She ends by saying: "I would that I could give, and cause others to give, much glory to God in thanksgiving for His merciful designs upon us."¹

Louise also formed the project of making a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin at Chartres, for the good of her own soul she informs her holy director, as well as in the interests of the little company.

On the 14th of October of the same year she writes to M. Vincent from Chartres and gives him the history, day by day, of what she has done there: "On Sunday my prayers were offered up for my son. Monday, the day of the dedication of the church, I spent in offering to God the company of the Daughters of Charity—consecrating it entirely to Him, and asking of Him that it should be destroyed, rather than established, if it was contrary to His Divine Will. Taking our Blessed Lady for Mother and Guardian of the said company I asked for it the purity which its members require; charity between the Sisters, and a share of that fidelity of which the blessed Mother was a model in the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation. Then, for my own part, I put the resolutions conformable with those which I have submitted to my much venerated Father, in the hands of the blessed Virgin, with the desire of preparing for death, waiting for God's pleasure to be fulfilled in me by holy obedience."

Crosses were thickly strewed through the course of the following year, both on Louise's path and on that of her spiritual father.

In the first place the life of each in turn was despaired of. Let us listen first to Louise. "The thought that

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. ii. pp. 194-6.

I am approaching fast to my last end," she wrote to M. Vincent in the spring of 1645, "continues to weigh upon me, and though I am willing, if God so wills, to leave all my affairs in an unfinished state, and in a bad way, I cannot help suffering from the prospect of doing so. Our little company also was never in a feebler state than it is in at present."

As usual, her ten days' retirement from the world at Pentecost brought with it fresh life and hope. "I have the greatest devotion," she wrote to M. Vincent, "to the feast which is about to take place commemorating the great graces God conferred on His Church. On this day He in His bounty bestowed on me, in particular twenty-two years ago, those signal graces of which your charity is aware. I feel in my soul an attraction which I cannot describe, but which invites me to belong more entirely to God, but in what manner I know not. Tell me, I beg of you, my much honoured Father, what you think of this, in the name of Jesus, by whom we are what God sees us to be. I hope much from your holy prayers, and I beg of your guardian angel to keep you in mind of my wants."

Three months later, in August 1645, M. Vincent, who had long been suffering from a complication of maladies, constant intermittent fever, ulceration of the legs, accompanied by insomnia, was brought to the brink of the grave. Louise de Marillac, deeply conscious of the loss he would be to the company of Sisters of Charity, to herself, and to the world, writes in the following terms to implore of him to take proper remedies: "Our good God then wishes you to be ill! But also, Father, He must wish that you should (for love of Him) have some pity on your body, such as you would have for that of a poor person; and, if I may venture to say so, it is clearly His will that you should do this. I conjure you there-

fore to make use of the remedies you require for the occasion, and to forgive the too great liberty I am taking—having for its object the glory of God.”

Whether this letter succeeded in its object we are not told, but in the middle of the month his symptoms had aggravated and he was no longer able to say Mass. The fever from which he was suffering mounted to his brain and caused a delirium from which it was not expected he would recover. His attendants remarked that even whilst his mind was wandering the thought of God was ever before him and, he kept repeating: “In spiritu humiliato et in animo contrito suscipiamur a te Domine!”

When this crisis passed off he began to recover, and was so much better by the 24th of August that Louise was able to write to her Daughters at Angers to unite their thanksgivings with hers: “We have reason to thank our good God for the grace He has given us of giving us back our much-venerated Father, who has been very ill and in danger of death. I beg that you and our Sisters will say some prayers with that object.”

The annals of the company record another providential escape, as striking as that of Louise's and almost similar, which happened during the course of this year to one of her Daughters.

The Sister, who was attached to the *Charité* of St. Sulpice, was mounting the staircase of some house in that parish, *marmite* in hand, carrying a mid-day meal to a poor person living there. Suddenly a shriek of “We are lost” was heard, and the whole interior of the house collapsed. More than forty inmates were killed or injured in the fall of the house. The Sister clung to an angle in the staircase where she managed to secure a foothold to which she held on till assistance came to her. Then, after carefully (we are told) providing for

the safety of her little pail by hanging it on to the hook of a long rod which was produced and held up to her, she saved herself from her dangerous perch by dropping down on to some sheets stretched out by the bystanders to receive her. M. Vincent commenting on this providential escape, as his custom was, at a conference held shortly afterwards, made the following observation with regard to it: "My Daughters, can we doubt that it was the angels who preserved her from danger? What a merciful protection! Can you think that it was by accident that she escaped without any injury! Oh, no, no. It was wholly miraculous. God has pre-ordained it so as to demonstrate to your company the care He has of you."

CHAPTER XIII

M. VINCENT in the beginning of the year 1645 had taken occasion of a conference to tell the Sisters of Charity assembled to hear him that the time had come to establish their company on a more permanent and durable basis. His words were as follows: "Now that your way of life has been established on a sure footing by long usage it has become necessary that these Rules should be drawn up in writing, in order to preserve the memory of what God asks of you, so that those who come after you should also be maintained in the same observance. . . . Oh, what reason you have to humble yourselves at the sight of the great designs God appears to have with regard to you!" He ended by saying that a great servant of God had told him that he knew nothing in the Church more useful than their company.

The state of Louise de Marillac's health, and M. Vincent's age and increasing infirmities, must have warned them that there was no time to be lost if they were to complete the task of settling the company of Sisters of Charity on a solid and durable basis.

Up to this time, though the "little company,"¹ as the holy founders were accustomed to call it, had been given much encouragement of an informal nature by the ecclesiastical authorities, it had received no formal

¹ M. Vincent used indifferently the names of institute, confraternity, and company when speaking of it. The title of company was ultimately adopted by him.

recognition or approbation from them. M. Vincent accordingly, the time being in his opinion ripe for the step, drew up a statement of the Rules and objects of the institute which he sent with the following note to Louise: "Mademoiselle, I send you a memorandum of the Rules of the confraternity. First; it describes the manner in which under Providence it took its rise. Secondly; the way of life led at the present time by the Sisters. Thirdly; the Rules of the confraternity and the association." He ends by the observation, "I have suppressed many things I could have said on the subject of your share in it; let us reserve these for our Lord to say when all things will be made known, and meanwhile, let us keep ourselves hidden."

The observations made by Louise on the document had reference for the most part to small details; such as the title of Sisters of Charity. One note made by her is characteristic: "Is it necessary to dwell at such length on the achievements of the said Sisters? Would it not suffice to say that besides the corporal assistance they were accustomed to give to the sick poor, God had blessed their efforts to help their patients spiritually?" and so forth. There was one point, however, in which Louise and M. Vincent did not see eye to eye. Louise was convinced that the stability and permanence of the company in its present form depended on its being placed under the jurisdiction of M. Vincent and his successors. The holy man left the choice of ecclesiastical superior in the hands of the Archbishop of Paris in his memoir, and promised obedience on the part of the Sisters to any one whom he appointed. In spite of a strong remonstrance on the part of Louise no alteration was made in this particular. This petition for a formal recognition of the new confraternity was granted by Mgr. Jean François de Gondi on the 20th of November,

1646, and was afterwards sanctioned by Letters Patent on the part of the King. Only one formality remained to be gone through—which was that of the registration of the document by Parliament. Louise might now have considered hers a lost cause; for had this last form been observed the company would have passed away (after M. Vincent's death) from the power and influence of the Priests of the Mission, and been placed under the control of the Ordinary of the diocese. The delay saved the situation, and, as we shall see later, Providence answered her prayers by giving the company of Sisters of Charity the security and support which she had so earnestly desired for it.

It was on the 27th of May, 1647, that M. Vincent was able to announce in a conference to the Sisters that the petitions made in favour of the company had received a favourable answer. These are the words which he addressed to them:

“Up to this time, my dear Daughters, you have worked with no obligations except that of pleasing God. You have formed no distinct body, separated from the ladies' Association of Charity. But God wills that you should now be an Institute apart, with special exercises and functions of your own, and attached to the Church in a closer manner—in consequence of the approbation given to your Rule by Mgr. the Archbishop of Paris.”

M. Vincent then read the Statutes of the Congregation. The first article related to the term of office of the superior. It was laid down therein that she should be elected for three years: she might then be re-elected for three years, but no longer. “This Rule will, of course,” he added, “only be in force after Mademoiselle's death.”

It is related that Louise de Marillac at once knelt down and implored the good Father to put the Rule

into practice at once. "Your daughters and I," responded M. Vincent, "have good reason to pray that God will preserve your life for many years, as He has been used to preserve by extraordinary means those who are necessary for the accomplishment of His works; as, moreover, if you will look into it, Mademoiselle, it is at least ten years since you have ceased living according to natural means." M. Vincent then resumed his discourse and made some very beautiful reflections on God's mercy in legislating for His chosen people, beginning with the law which he gave to Moses, which was a type of that taught by Jesus Christ. "What Moses said to God's people I say also to you, my Daughters, these Rules have been sent to you by the grace of God: if you are faithful to them Heaven's blessings will be poured upon you. You will be blessed in your work, blessed in your going out and your coming in, blessed in what you accomplish and in what you leave undone: you will be filled with abundant blessings. I have told you formerly, my Daughters, that he who starts on a long voyage has to submit to the laws that govern the navigation of his ship, otherwise he would be in danger of perishing. It is the same with those who are called by God to a community life, if they do not observe their Rule they run great risk of being lost. By the mercy of God I believe there is not one amongst you who has not the intention of following their Rule. This is true, is it not, that on this point you are all of one mind?"

The Sisters answered unanimously: "We are, Father."

"Do you not desire with all your hearts to live and die in it?"

Again they answered—all kneeling on the ground together—"Yes, Father."

"I pray, then, that the sovereign goodness of God

should, through His great mercy, pour abundantly His choicest graces and blessings on you so that you may perfectly accomplish His Divine Will by the observance of your Rule." Here some of the Sisters publicly asked pardon for some breaches they had committed of the Rule, and M. Vincent made the following reply to them :

" I pray God, my dear Daughters, with all my heart that He forgive you all your shortcomings. And I, miserable man that I am, who fail in keeping my own Rule, I ask His pardon also as well as yours, my Daughters. How many faults I have committed with regard to you and this work you have undertaken ! I beg of you to beseech God's mercy upon me, and for this object I pray to our Lord Jesus Christ to give you Himself His holy benediction. . . ." Here M. Vincent kissed the ground, but Louise and the Sisters all uniting to ask the holy Father to give them also his blessing he answered :

" Pray then, dear Daughters, to God that He should overlook my unworthiness and the sins of which I have been guilty, and have mercy on me, and pour His blessings on you, whilst I pronounce the words: *Benedictio Dei Patris*, etc." Such was the conclusion of this touching scene which was so characteristic of the profound humility of the holy founders of the company of the Sisters of Charity.

Negotiations for the employment of her Daughters at the Hôtel Dieu of St. Denis occupied Louise's attention largely during the year 1644 and 1645. The first mention of them in her correspondence took place as early as the spring of 1643, when Louise observes in a letter to M. Vincent that " Mme. de Lamoignon and Mme. de Nesmond came here to-day after visiting the hospital of St. Denis ; they have the intention of asking for Sisters of Charity in the event of the hospital nursing Sisters

not accepting the proposals which are being made to them."

Mme. de Lamoignon was widow of a distinguished member of the French Parliament who had occupied for some time the post of President. She had been noted for her abundant charities during her husband's life-time, and after his death she gave herself up entirely to good works. In her youth she had been intimate with St. Francis de Sales, and was one of the holy women who had been directed by him. It was in a letter to this devout servant of God (of whom he spoke on one occasion as "one of the holiest women I have ever known") that St. Francis used these striking words which might be taken as a summary of his teachings:

"The perfection of charity is the perfection of life, for charity is the life of our soul."

After lengthy discussions and much negotiation an agreement was signed between the authorities of the hospital and M. Vincent on the 22nd of August, 1645, in which the superior made the following stipulations: (1) The Sisters of Charity shall submit to the will of the administrators of the Hôtel Dieu on all points which concern their work there, but as regards the persons of the said Sisters they shall continue to be, as before, under the direction of the head of their little company, Mlle. Le Gras, or any one who should succeed her in that office. (2) Their hours of work at the Hôtel Dieu shall be long, or short, according to M. l'Abbé's good pleasure, but whilst they are on duty no other persons shall be associated with them in its performance. (3) The said superior shall have the power of changing one, or more, of the said Sisters to replace them with others—providing always that these should be capable of the work required."

In conclusion the administrators are asked to treat

them as Sisters consecrated to the service of God and the poor, and not as hired domestics. Sister Turgis, Sister Françoise-Paule Noret, and Marguérite Lejoint, a native of Arras, were the first three selected for the work, and others—we are not told in what numbers—were sent later on to their assistance, when it was found that they were tasked above their powers of endurance. A letter addressed to M. Vincent from one of the Sisters shows what was expected of these devoted women: "Monsieur," she writes, "we are weighed down by our labours and shall succumb to them unless help is sent to us. I am obliged to write you these few lines in the night-time whilst watching our sick patients, never having a moment off duty in the daytime. Whilst I am writing to you I have to leave off in order to exhort two dying persons; first I go to one and say to him: 'My poor fellow! raise up your heart to God and ask His mercy.' Having done that I come back and write two or three lines, and then I run to the other and make him ejaculate 'My Jesus mercy, Mary help! Oh, my God, I believe in Thee!' Then I go back to my letter. Thus I go backwards and forwards, and write to you by scraps, having my mind distracted in all directions. This letter is to implore of you very humbly to send us another Sister." Let us trust the petition was granted; but we know that in answer to a similar one Louise replied that the number of the Sisters at the Mother-house was so reduced that she was unable to spare one more in response to the application.

The regulations laid down for St. Denis differed little from those for the Sisters at Angers, the only addition being in the shape of advice on the manner of dismissing patients from the hospital who had been declared convalescent: "The Sister in charge shall do this with sweetness and charity, but likewise with judgment and

firmness, taking care that the patients should be strong enough not to run risks of relapse. But on the other hand they must be on their guard against giving in to a purely natural feeling of timidity which would be to encourage the idle and the sluggish to remain on too long. In this matter they should take example from our Saviour who, when He had cured the sick, told them to rise and walk. If there should be girls amongst the sick patients it would be well, with the advice of the Sister in charge, to try and place them in situations, or to recommend them to the care of some lady in the town. This must be done, however, without leaving the hospital in order to provide for them, the Sisters' first care being that of looking after their sick patients in the hospital."

An invitation on the part of the Governor and administrators of the hospital at Mans followed within a very short time of the establishment of the Sisters at the one at St. Denis. It appears from Louise's correspondence that before inviting her to send members of the company to the assistance of the Hôtel Dieu—where disorders of the usual character were rampant—these same administrators had made inquiries at Angers as to the success of the Sisters installed in the hospital in that city. The information they received there was of such a nature as to make them very keen to secure the Sisters' service for Mans; for as M. l'Abbé Ratier wrote to Louise, "Thanks be to God, never have they been more appreciated here than they are now." A death which had thinned the ranks of the little band working at Angers in the year 1646, though a severe loss to the company, had been a source of great edification to her Sisters and the whole community. Her name was Marie d'Espinal, and apparently she was of the number—alas, but too numerous—of those who had succumbed to

over-work. Louise wrote as follows about her to the Sister Servant whilst there was still hope of her recovery : " I am deeply distressed about our good Sister Marie. If she is still living greet her affectionately from me, and tell her that I pray that she will do all that is possible to get better, so as to employ the rest of her life in the service of God. Oh, what compassionating love she will have for the poor after having gone through such prolonged sufferings herself ! I pray that God may have blessed her with much consolation and help in bearing them." Sister Marie's agony lasted many days, and M. l'Abbé Ratier, the chaplain of the poor of the Hôtel Dieu, wrote as follows to the Abbé de Vaux : " Our good Sister Marie d'Espinal has been in her agony since Wednesday and can neither live nor die. She had yesterday afternoon such a great sense of the presence of God that the words she used—addressing herself to her crucifix—would have drawn tears from a stone. Never have I witnessed stronger marks of predestination than in this soul. I will write to Mademoiselle about her after her death. I am doubtful if she can survive till to-morrow's happy feast ! " This was written on the eve of the Ascension 1646.

Negotiations between M. Vincent and the authorities at Mans were carried on during the spring of the same year, and terminated in an invitation from the latter to M. Vincent to send members of the company to take over the Hôtel Dieu in that town. The usual stipulations were made by M. Vincent and agreed to by the administrators, and the Sisters, four in number, started for Mans on the 4th of May. Unfortunately for the success of the undertaking, a complication (which though foreseen by Louise was apparently passed over by the other contracting parties) proved to be of so serious a nature that the scheme was wrecked upon it. This

complication was the presence of a nursing sisterhood in the hospital, to whom some members of the administration had committed themselves in such a way that it was found impossible to dislodge them. The upshot of the matter is thus described in a letter from M. Portail, head priest of the congregation of the Missions, of which a branch was established at Mans, and who had been a prime mover in the affair :

“ Here, Mademoiselle, are your Daughters starting, as you desire, on their return to you. I think they are none the less meritorious in their inaction than had they performed the most heroic deeds. If they had been productive of no other good than to have preached by their modesty, and their patience, in the storms which have been raging here, it was worth the time and money spent on their journey ; joined to this God will certainly in His own good time repay what they have undergone with interest—to your advantage and that of all your little company.”

The foundation at Mans was therefore finished before it was commenced ; two of the Sisters returned to Paris whilst the others were sent to the hospital at Angers.

A fortnight later M. Vincent in a letter bearing the date of the 25th of May acquainted Louise with an invitation from three members of the congregation of Fathers of the Poor to undertake their hospital at Nantes. It was worded in the following somewhat grandiloquent manner :

“ The grandeur of your charity having spread in all lands, as well as principally in this town, has encouraged us to trust that your zeal is equal to lending us assistance to remedy the disorders which are being committed in our hospital, to the detriment of the poor. Thus we have thought it our duty to implore your kindness to give us the assistance of six of your Sisters of Charity, to

nurse the poor patients of the hospital, whose wounds and sores are as so many mouths to intercede with your piety to grant us your assistance." They added that they were ready to receive the Sisters on the same terms and conditions as those subscribed to by the managers of the Angers hospital, and begged that the agreement might be proceeded with at once.

Accordingly about a month later, Louise began to make arrangements for her own departure and that of four Sisters to Nantes—for on this occasion she deemed it advisable to accompany them. Before leaving the Mother-house she appointed Jeanne Lepintre to take her place in the general superintendence of the affairs of the community, and a Sister of the name of Julienne Loret to the charge of the postulants. The latter is described as being "of short stature, and very pleasing and kindly manners, speaking little, but what she said being much to the point. Hers was a small body enclosing a big soul." In right of her office of first assistant to Mlle. Le Gras she was at the head of the community, over which she presided on those occasions when their superior was prevented doing so by sickness. Warm-hearted, circumspect, tactful, and kindly, she had in addition to these virtues great discernment of character, uniting in her person "the wisdom of the serpent with the simplicity of the dove." The second assistant, whose name was Elizabeth Hellot, like Sister Julienne was a native of Paris, and of good family. Sister Elizabeth was a woman of cultivated mind, and Louise made frequent use of her as secretary. To her likewise belonged the duty of recording M. Vincent's conferences, which she did (with the help of Louise and others) with literal fidelity.

Louise before taking leave of her Daughters drew up some instructions in writing for their benefit which began in these words:

“ I am leaving you so that we may conform ourselves in all things to the most holy Will, in accordance with the resolution we have formed of never opposing it in any particular, and of abandoning ourselves to its guidance. Let us then, you and I, take this journey in accomplishment of this promise which we have so often renewed.” Then addressing herself to Jeanne Lepintre: “ *Ma Sœur Jeanne*, you know that this same Providence has caused you to be named *Sœur Servante* of the whole company by our much revered Father. I trust that God will give you the grace to discharge this duty faithfully.” She then went on to recommend her to take M. Vincent’s orders on all subjects of importance, or M. Lambert’s in his absence, and to treat with her two co-adjutors upon all and divers matters that should present themselves, with great sweetness and amiability.

Before her departure Louis organised a weekly visit of inspection of the Sisters living in the outskirts of Paris and charged with various duties to those parishes—appointing the Sisters to this difficult office with these remarks: “ You shall, my dear Sisters, look upon this duty as an important one which you have undertaken in the sight of God and under holy obedience. And for this reason you will commence it by making an act of humility, casting an eye on your own faults and infidelities. You will honour in so doing the actions of the Son of God, and you will propose His great sweetness for your imitation. Your visits to your Sisters will always be made with great cordiality, and you will hold converse with them on such subjects as your mutual offices, and of God’s graces to you, and so forth.”

Finally the Father director, in the beginning of the week of Louise’s departure, named the Sisters who were to be her companions at a conference at which all the community assisted.

The Sister who was to be at the head of the hospital at Nantes knew nothing of her appointment till the news was broken to her by M. Vincent in the following terms. Beckoning to her to come forward he bade her be seated ; he then asked her why she had entered the congregation.

“ Father, it was in order to do the Will of God.” M. Vincent, turning to M. Almeras, one of the priests of the Mission who happened to be present, exclaimed with great satisfaction: “ What could be better ! Well, my child, God be praised ! you will now have a great occasion of practising it,” upon which he informed her that a foundation was about to be made in one of the most famous towns of the kingdom and that Divine Providence had appointed her to the post of Sister Servant to it. The Sister knew not what to say—being much taken aback—and remained silent. Then M. Vincent turning to the others said : “ Now, my Daughters, what shall we give Sister Elizabeth for her journey, for each of us should give her a present. You my child,” pointing to a Sister, “ what will you give her ? ” One of them wished her the love of God, another great devotion to the poor. Made-moiselle desired that she should have the cordial support of her Sisters. M. Almeras, who was likewise invited to make her a present, wished her a cheerful and patient spirit.

“ Here are much riches, my Daughter, and I wish you them in all their plenitude,” continued M. Vincent. “ But what I particularly wish you is that you may accomplish the Will of God, not only in obeying your superior, but in responding to the interior inspirations which God may put into your heart.”

“ The following Thursday,” Louise records, “ I went to take M. Vincent’s orders for the journey, and had the consolation of receiving his blessing. I then told him of the just fear I had of committing many faults on the

journey, and he begged me to give him an account of all that should happen to me. . . . On the 26th we started in the coach for Orleans, and God gave us the grace of making the journey without failing to keep our Rule. When we passed any towns or villages one of us reminded the rest to greet the good angels of the inhabitants, with the desire that they should redouble their care of the souls, there, in order to help them to glorify God eternally; and when passing before churches we made an act of adoration to the Blessed Sacrament, saluting also the holy patron saints.

“When we arrived at the resting places some of the Sisters went to the church to give thanks to God for His assistance—asking for a continuance of it, and for grace to accomplish His holy Will. If there was a hospital in the town some of the Sisters visited it or if not they went to see some sick persons, doing this in the name of the company to manifest our desire to offer our persons and our services to God in serving the poor members of His body. . . . At the Pont de Cie we had the honour of being turned out of the inn, having arrived there very late on Thursday night, but after leaving this house we were received with great kindness by a good lady of the town.

“We arrived at Nantes on the 8th of August at 3 o’clock in the afternoon. We went first to the nearest church, which was that of the Ursulines, to adore our Lord, and to renew our offering of ourselves to Him in order to accomplish His Divine Will. Several ladies came to find us there, and took us to the hospital, and as soon as we reached it the good Fathers and administrators came and made over the premises to us. We have, however, so far made no changes, and done nothing without communicating with them and gaining their consent. . . . Our Sisters set to work the very next day with much zeal, and in

very few days such a change was visible that the people took pleasure in coming to see it. Such a crowd flocked in to see the poor patients take their meals that it was with difficulty one could approach the beds, and tables of the sick."

Though Louise in this slight sketch of her adventures on her journey to Nantes, and her arrival there, does not dwell on her reception in that town, we know from her biographer that she and her Sisters received a veritable ovation from the good people, and the ladies belonging to the Association.

"The arrival at Nantes," he says, "was a triumphant entry of which all the circumstances were described in the newspaper. Priests and ladies went for a considerable distance beforehand to meet them, the townspeople formed a procession to accompany them from the gates of the city to the nearest church, whither they betook themselves in order to adore God, and dedicate themselves anew to His service."

From thence Louise was conducted by the ladies to Belestre, Mademoiselle des Rochers' house. There the Father in charge of the hospital, at the receipt of a letter from M. Vincent which the superior brought with her, presented himself with several ladies of leading position in the town to greet her, and afterwards to accompany her with her Sisters amidst the applause of all and sundry of those who were interested in the installation, to the hospital of St. René.

A letter from Louise to her "much honoured Father" gives us a few more details of the expedition. The length of time taken for the journey (fourteen days) is explained by the statement that part of it was made by water, and the canal being very low owing to the drought, caused a delay of several days. "I do not know what will come of this foundation; so far I have seen no drawbacks,

unless it is some little murmurs from the people, but the applause given us is quite incredible."

A special blessing seems to have been attached to this journey of the holy superior, as her health, she writes to her community at home, was never better: "it is such as to remove all fear from me for undertaking future journeys or anything else (she adds) that God should ask of me for His service or that of the poor. It is your prayers, my dear Sisters, who have obtained this grace for me." She repeats the same good news in another letter to Sœur Hellot—from whom she also asks news of her son, about whose health she was in much anxiety at this time.

The figure of Michel Le Gras, it may be remarked, flits through these pages almost in the manner of a ghost, and nearly as unsubstantial as one—the material for converting him into flesh and blood being quite wanting. All that we can learn of him was that he had an unconquerable dislike to work of any sort; perhaps a not unusual characteristic. He was probably not more weak and dissipated than many young men of his age, but his nearest relatives being of the class and rank which had not found it necessary to work in order to live, he preferred to be a hanger-on upon them rather than to aspire to independence by leading a life of uncongenial action. To his mother this frame of mind was the cause of deepest anguish, and probably she was not mistaken in thinking it had brought this dearly-loved son no happiness. For as she wrote on one occasion to M. Vincent: "If my son took up some occupation it would divert his mind from the melancholy which in my opinion is caused by the want of it. He has always had the fear of God before him, it appears to me, and the wish to acquit himself faithfully of the duties confided to him."

It was in the midst of the work involved by the new foundation at Nantes that Louise received the news of

her son's illness. It was broken to her in a letter from M. Vincent dated the 14th of August, 1646 :

“Your son is laid up in his doctor's house. I have offered him a room here, and everything that depended upon us to make him comfortable; or the services of two of our Sisters in case of his preferring to remain where he is at present. He accepted the help of the Sisters, who have now been looking after him. M. Brin (a priest from St. Laraze) has been lately to see him, and he assured me that he was going on well and that there was no cause for anxiety. So I beg of you not to put yourself to any anxiety about him.” He adds a postscript to the effect that he has heard still later news, and that her son is quite convalescent. Louise's answer was as follows :

“It is a great relief to me to learn of your kindness to my son. The day I received the honour of a letter from you I was strongly under the impression of wishing to make an entire surrender of him to God. This helped me to bear the news contained in your letter. I am grieved that he would not accept your offer of taking him into your house. My God! I fear my prayer will never be heard for his entire conversion. I cannot help fearing that his illness was more serious than was supposed.” Her anxieties were not over, for though Michel (who was laid up at the house of Vacherot, one of the best-known doctors of the day) seems to have made a rapid and satisfactory recovery, he speedily returned to his vagabond ways.

“Who is this Comte de Mony (or Mauny),” she asks, “with whom he has struck up a friendship? Is he a friend of the ladies with whom he is staying? or is he a friend of older date whom I have never heard of? If it is one of the latter I beg of you to do your utmost to make him give up this journey he talks of making to the

country." Later on she writes: "I had hoped his illness would have done him some good, but from what I hear he goes about as usual, and even sleeps out of the house. He has written to me, and shown much displeasure at not being allowed to go into the country. I have a strong feeling that he is putting pressure on his heart that it should not take cognisance of the state of his soul." Many tears were to be shed by the anxious mother before her prodigal came home, but before her death she had the comfort of knowing that her prayers were answered, and that Michel had settled down, and become a reputable member of society.

Though the first impressions of Louise of the new foundation had been so favourable it is clear from a later letter to M. Vincent, dated the 28th of August, that she had begun to discover thorns amongst the roses. She begins by saying that she had been persuaded to stay a week longer: "We have encountered a great difficulty, no less than this: It has been a custom in this town to employ a contractor to supply food to the hospital, whose wife had been used to come and cut up the portions for the sick, and distribute them as seemed good to her. I fear this will be the cause of considerable trouble and difficulty, and, I foresee, endanger the peace and union of our Sisters, all the more on account of this woman having shown dissatisfaction at their management of the meals; she has also been trying to come to a secret understanding, first with one and then with the other. Therefore I did not feel justified in leaving them till this obstacle was got rid of. If this can be done this week, we shall leave on Monday; but as I cannot settle precisely I beg you humbly to send me word what course I had best take. As this man and his wife have received notice to quit in three or four months (the administrators having settled to suppress the post for

various other inconveniences) I should like especially to know if I ought to leave on the understanding that this should be done, because I fear greatly that the complaints, disorder, and want of successful treatment of the patients during that interval will leave an unfavourable impression on the minds of people, and that our Sisters will be blamed for these faults."

Whether or not Louise's mind was set at rest on this knotty point before leaving Nantes is a matter of conjecture, but we know that within six months of her departure more difficulties arose, and that this foundation, which began under such happy auspices, was a source of great and increasing anxiety to her for the rest of her life. Frequent communications had passed between Louise and the Mother-house during her absence at Nantes; Sister Hellot clamoured for her return, and declared she could not get on without her help and her presence there; in answer to which the holy mother scolds her affectionately, telling her that she must expect a good "talking to" to punish her for her cowardice. "Do you think," she writes, "that I can accept a heart which is so full of its fears and fancies that one might really imagine one was reading a page from a book of romance!"

M. Vincent had given one of his conferences in her absence, and Louise inquires whether it has been properly reported—a duty which was always entrusted to Sœur Hellot. There had also been other conferences, little familiar discussions, which the Sisters held together every Friday. These had also been committed to writing by Sœur Hellot, who, as Louise told her on one occasion gaily, was a real "deluge of paper."

Louise returned at the end of September, and the canal being still almost unnavigable she gave it up (after being, she writes, on three or four occasions in

great danger of shipwreck), and after leaving Angers performed the remaining part of her journey on dry land.

One of the first undertakings embarked on by Louise on her return was the foundation of a *Charité* at Fontainebleau (or as she calls it in her letters Fontaine-belleau), at the request of the Queen Regent. This foundation began on a small scale, with a poor school and the care of a few sick people; but it grew rapidly, and in the course of 1647 we find the Sisters in charge of a hospital and of a large and flourishing school.

Apparently the Queen took considerable interest in the little company and their doings, and was in the habit of visiting them, as Louise, writing to Sister Barbe, who was in command, tells us that she is to make no difficulty about speaking to the Queen should she desire it, and adds: "Above all, speak to her with absolute sincerity about the wants of the poor." The winter succeeding Louise's visit to Nantes was one of great trial and suffering to her. She had one illness after another and she wrote to Sister Turgis, "I had not entirely recovered from one malady when I began with another, and a more serious one."

Her thoughts turned so much on her approaching death that she wrote in the month of June in that year (1646) to ask M. Portail, M. Vincent's representative in Rome, to procure for her the blessing of Pope Innocent X *in articulo mortis*.

"Many a time," she writes to him, "since my childhood I have wished, though so unworthy, to get the blessing of the Father of the faithful. But as my age and my ever-increasing infirmities make me lose all hope of going to Rome in search of this happiness, I have conceived the idea of beseeching you very humbly to obtain this grace for me at the hour of my death."

The Pope granted her request not only for herself but extended it to "all the Sisters to whom God would give the grace of dying members of the congregation of Sisters of Charity." M. Portail in his answer acquainted her with the consoling assurance that "the consideration of your work for the sick poor was one of the principal motives of your request being entirely accorded." The priests of the congregation of the Missions in Rome undertook also to say each a Mass at St. Peter's, and to make the visit of the seven Basilicas for the intention of the Ladies of Charity.

This occasion was the first on which the name of Louise de Marillac and her Daughters were laid before the Holy See.

Louise had need of this and all the supernatural helps and encouragements providentially vouchsafed her at this period of her life. For troubles of all sort were gathering thickly around her. Civil war was on the point of breaking out; the burthen of the foundlings threatened to become well-nigh overwhelming in its responsibility and magnitude; and the affairs of the community at Nantes were going from bad to worse. It was in Easter-tide 1647 that Louise wrote to M. Vincent telling him of the anxiety the behaviour of "our Sisters at Nantes" caused her, and suggesting that he should give himself the trouble of writing to them to testify a "little displeasure mixed with some encouragement."

The saint's response to this appeal has been handed down to us, and if there is a rebuke in it we hardly perceive it—so kindly and with such fatherly words is it conveyed:

"I can never think of you, my very dear Sisters, and of the happiness you have of being Sisters of Charity and of being the first, where you are, to be employed in the service of the poor, without consolation. But when

I hear that you are living as true daughters of God—as well as true daughters of Charity—my consolation increases to such an extent that it is only God Who could make you understand what I feel. Continue therefore, my dear Sisters, to work at your perfection in the state of life to which you are called: these are the reasons which should draw you to do so. It seems to me I hear you say that you would gladly do so but that many difficulties and temptations stand in your way. To this I answer, these temptations are sent to you, or permitted to happen to you by God for the same reason that He allowed His Son to undergo them; that is, that He might be enabled to give proof of His infinite love of His Father.”

M. Vincent then touches on some of the causes of their troubles; and specially on the difficulty of submission to their superior, and of divisions amongst them; and ends by imploring them to be patient, and to persevere in their spiritual exercises, so as to bring down the blessing of God on themselves and on their work. Louise in forwarding this benign and fatherly letter makes the following comment upon it: “I must tell you in simple language, my dear Sisters, the thoughts to which this letter gave rise in me. Oh, my Sisters! what he says about the graces God has given you and me, and his other instructions, worded in such kindly terms, affected me in a manner I cannot describe; reminding me as they did, how often God has warned us of our duty through him, and how often he has known and yet ignored our faults and shortcomings, and never ceased from exciting and encouraging us to amend.”

In a letter from Louise written on the 8th of May to the little community of Nantes, she returns to the same subject, and informs them that M. Vincent is sending them Jeanne Lepintre as superior; she adds: “He

would have desired me to go had I recovered my strength after my severe illness—and why do you think he would have done so, my dear Sisters? In order to learn from your own mouths the state of your minds, and from whence have come these little troubles which have appeared in your community, and what has introduced the cockle which seems on the point of smothering the good grain.”

In reading this correspondence, of which we have only given the faintest outline, as it extends to many pages, one is tempted to ask: Who was to blame? Was it the Sisters of Charity or—almost wholly—the administrators of the hospital? The only data we have to go upon is that afforded by the “Fathers of the Poor,” administrators of the hospital, whose plea for pressing for the services of the company was that they should remedy the abuses and disorders which already existed there. These are corroborated by Louise, who was an eye-witness of a flagrant case of such improbity during the short stay she made at Nantes. Louise’s biographer, commenting on the situation, remarks that “doubtless had the Sisters possessed the support and counsels of a friend such as the community at Angers possessed in the Abbé de Vaux they would have been saved from many a difficulty due in part from their inexperience, and from the divisions fomented amongst them by parasites and hangers-on of the hospital and its staff.” Besides this, Mgr. Baunard does not hesitate to say that the Sisters were replacing “unjust stewards, retrenching illicit gains, and cooked accounts, in short, they had interests, as well as passions, to contend with.”¹ M. Lambert, sent by the holy founder to inquire into the complaints made against the Sisters, wrote to Louise “that the conditions of affairs in this hospital are such

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 341.

that is only due to extraordinary graces that the Sisters should have preserved their vocations as they have done."

Sister Jeanne Lepintre was sent to Nantes a year after the installation of the company to replace Sister Elizabeth Martin, who had broken down in health. Louise's intention was that she should stay there a few months. She remained there seven years, and during that time there were occasional truces, but no permanent peace between the belligerent parties. Still, if we are to judge by the correspondence which passed between them, no thought crossed either M. Vincent's or Louise's mind that the situation in which the Sisters were placed was an impossible one—impossible, that is to say, for flesh and blood to submit to. No! They were to bear themselves as followers of a crucified King, and carry their cross after Him, and their holy Mother's last word to them is summed up in the advice: "One must not hope to escape slander and calumnies, but must make up our minds to suffer them, since our Master lived and died in great peace in the midst of calumniators."¹

Besides a foundation at Chantilly which was started at the request of the "grand Condé," and which was to look after the poor in that and three surrounding villages, a large and more important one was inaugurated in the same year (1647) at Montreuil-sur-Mer. Here the Sisters, besides the care of a poor-school and the sick, were put in charge of a hospital where their experiences on their arrival were not unlike those of their Sisters at Angers and Nantes. M. Vincent in a conference prepared them for it, telling them: "The Sisters must go to the length

¹ Louise in one of her letters to Sister Hellot (*Louise de Marillac*, t. iii. p. 240) alludes to *attaches* among the Sisters, *i.e.* particular friendships. It is probably through ignorance of the meaning given to that word in religious communities that a modern writer attributes unworthy behaviour to them for which there is no shadow of proof.

of asking pardon of those whom they have reason to think are displeased with them even when they have given them no cause, and although these good women should be disposed to think that the Sisters have only come there to turn them out, and supplant them.

A letter from Louise in the course of that year carried the same message :

“Remember, my dear Sisters,” she wrote to Sister Jeanne at Montreuil, “that it is by the most holy Will of God that you have been sent where you now are, and that you should work for the accomplishment of the same like an Ambassador does for his King. We should consider the interests of those with whom we work more than we should our own, or even those of the company. This is what has been taught to us by our very revered Father who has learned it from the Son of God, Jesus crucified.”

The summer and autumn of the year 1647 records a series of relapses in Louise de Marillac's health. M. Vincent in a letter to a priest of the Missions in Rome, on the 13th of December, 1647, who had also been very ill, mentions her in the following terms :

“It seems to be with you as is the case with Mlle. Le Gras, whom I consider according to nature to have died ten years ago. To see her one would think she had come out of her grave, so wasted is she, and so pale her face. But God knows the strength of her soul! It is not long since she made a journey of a hundred leagues, and if it was not for her constant illnesses, and for her submission to obedience, she would continually travel from one place to another to visit her Daughters, though she may be said to have no life excepting what she gets from the grace of God.”

It was round this frail creature—whose life hung on a thread—that troubles, greater than any she had gone through before, were now closely gathering.

CHAPTER XIV

As early as the year 1643 the Association of Ladies of Charity were made to realise the magnitude of the work they had undertaken in adopting the foundlings by the fact that they had already outgrown the house in the Rue St. Victor.

To procure, by rent or purchase, a large house in Paris meant a vast expense, and already the institution was struggling with an income irregularly paid, and quite insufficient for its needs and outgoings. When, therefore, it was suggested to some of the leading spirits of the Association that the old fortress of Bicêtre, which had been restored by Louis XIII, and was at that moment untenanted, might be put at their disposal, due formalities being observed and the permission of the Queen Regent obtained, they at once set to work to secure its possession.

The negotiations, which were conducted through the Chancellor de Séguier, proceeded slowly, so that it was not till the 19th of August, 1645, that Louise, who at the request of M. Vincent had gone to inspect the building, was able to report upon it. It is clear that its great disadvantages, which seem to have been minimised by the Ladies of Charity—who were led away by the grandeur of the edifice and its palatial size—were clear enough to her practised and unbiassed eye. They might be summed up, from her account, as follows: inconvenience of the build-

ing; unhealthiness of the house and site; the bad name which that quarter had earned for itself; dangers of the road for the Sisters; difficulty of access (for moving the infants there); difficulty of provisioning the establishment; the large number of Sisters which would be required in order to run it; finally, the impossibility for the Sisters who were in residence of attending the monthly meetings at the Mother-house, which was so essential for their spiritual training and well-being.

One stipulation—she concludes by saying—she must make; and that is from the time that the installation takes place daily Mass should be said in the chapel, for the purification of the locality, and, doubtless, for the consolation of its inmates.

The final preparations and inauguration took place in August 1647, under the special superintendence of Mesdames de la Soucarière, de Romilly, and de Traversay, and Louise found in their plans and arrangements more ground to justify her anxious fears for her Daughters. "Experience will show us before long," she writes to M. Vincent, "that it was not without cause that I apprehended the establishment at Bicêtre. These ladies wish to get an amount of work out of our Sisters which they are incapable of getting through, and the poor souls do not dare to complain."

There were other drawbacks besides those above mentioned, the principal one being that there was no means of hearing Mass at the castle, the nearest place at which they could assist at the divine Sacrifice being at Gentilly. "And in the Sisters' absence," Louise asks, "who would take charge of the children, and what would become of the work? I very much fear we shall have to give up the care of these poor little things. May the Will of God be done!"

However, nothing daunted, Louise set to work to make

the best of the situation, and a month later we read she had started a school for boys, and another for girls.

It would be interesting to ascertain how many foundlings were supported by the Association at Bicêtre, and elsewhere, but no statistics are available for the purpose. We know, however, by a memorandum in the Archives that the expense of supporting them in the year 1644 exceeded 40,000 livres per annum. To meet this sum M. Vincent had obtained from the late King Louis XIII a yearly grant of 4,000 livres *tournois*, 1,000 of which was earmarked for the support of the Sisters, and the remaining 3,000 was intended for the benefit of the children. To this income, Anne of Austria added 8,000 which was raised on a Crown property of the name of The Five Farms. Twelve thousand livres was all the revenue therefore that Louise had to count upon, the rest being made up by private contributions and collections at church doors.

Unfortunately the Queen's grant was always in arrears, so that we read that a certain Sister Geneviève Poisson, who was noted for being a persistent and persuasive beggar, was deputed to the Procurator-General in October 1647 to represent the case of the foundlings. She was successful, as on the 19th of that month 5,000 livres of the 8,000 due to them was paid in to Louise's exchequer, as she mentions with a grateful heart to M. Vincent on the same day.

The year 1648 opened under stormy auspices in the city of Paris. A letter from Louise to her assistants, the Sisters Hellot and Loret, warns them to be careful to shut all the shutters and doors on the ground floor of the Mother-house, and show lights in the upper windows to prove that the house was not deserted; in other words Paris was a prey to mob-rule, and the Fronde, or what was afterwards called *la petite Fronde*, had begun.

The cause of the outbreak, which, though begun by the

people, was sympathised with by many of all ranks and classes, was the crushing taxes imposed by an unpopular Minister, Cardinal Mazarin, and the equally unpopular Queen Regent, on the "notables," merchants, and shopkeepers of the city. We read of the burghers and townspeople arming themselves, and on the 7th and 8th of January of the year 1648 clamouring, muskets in hand, at the Palace of Justice for the redress of their grievances. The Queen ordered out the Guards, but the mob were too strong for them and forced them to retire.

These were the first rumblings of the storm; it was followed by a lull, but gathering fresh strength, it broke out again in the following summer, and spread with fury all over the country.

We see the reflection of these disturbances in Louise de Marillac's correspondence, as she anxiously inquires from M. Vincent what measures it would be prudent to take to provision her establishment against the rise in prices which was foreseen to be at hand. We read of her purchasing a large quantity of flour and barley meal, and in January 1648 she caused an oven to be built, and set up a baker and bakery on the premises at Bicêtre. At the recommendation of M. Vincent she had also started a wine industry for the profit of the Orphanage—the property of Bicêtre including a vineyard. "Would it not be better," she writes to him in the course of the winter, "to commence the sale of the wine, as in consequence of the soldiers being quartered in the neighbourhood there is a great demand for it." The manufacture of the wine was no light affair apparently, as she adds sadly, "The work this has been for the Sisters is almost incredible, not only on account of its severity, but of their natural repugnance to it." The sale of wine was not unattended by trouble, as the local vintners not only objected strongly to the rivalry, but carried their opposi-

tion so far as to abuse and even maltreat the Sisters, and we are told that M. Vincent with his usual goodness of heart was moved to intercede for these malefactors when they were brought to justice.

Though Louise did all in her power to make the establishment at Bicêtre a success by neglecting no means of earning what was necessary for its support, she complains in the spring of the same year that the funds of the institution were distressingly low. For the work increased from day to day, and the resources appeared to diminish in a corresponding ratio; "for many seeing what a magnificent place this is, and believing that it belongs to the foundlings, and drawing the deduction that the people who conduct it are all wealthy and of the higher class, think that it is well provided for. As a matter of fact we have to borrow money in order to pay for our provisions beside all the other expenses of which you are aware."

But the worst part of the objections to Bicêtre, foreseen as they had been by Louise, remains to be told. The rate of mortality of the children, owing to the insanitary state of the building, had gone up to an alarming extent since their installation there. She writes on the 23rd of January, "Fifty-two children have died at Bicêtre since we came; there are fifteen or sixteen others who are hardly more than just alive. I trust that when all the arrangements made by our good ladies have been carried out that the deaths will be less frequent." Again she repeats, "It is a necessity that our Lord should take possession of this house." More Sisters also were wanted. The work was overwhelming and (we quote her words) was increasing every day.

The summer brought fresh cares. Rumours reached Louise of riots in Paris, and she writes in the following anxious strain to her faithful assistant at the Mother-

house: "I am very unhappy about a rumour which is making the round of the country that there have been riots, in which a murder took place, in the streets of Paris. In the name of God, my dear Sister, tell me at once how M. Vincent and my son and our Sisters are, and find out all you can about the report." A little later she writes with even greater urgency, and after repeating her inquiries about the safety of those dear persons, she begs her to put away whatever there was of value in a place of safety, adding, "The best thing you can do is to have recourse to God. I beg of you to see that for some time to come there should always be one or two of our Sisters praying before the Blessed Sacrament, so as to unite with all good souls in imploring God that His wrath against us may be appeased. M. Vincent advises that my son should retire to St. Lazare, I having humbly asked that he should do him this favour." She ends with the postscript, "Remember me to all our Sisters; above all let them have no fear, but a great submission to the justice of God and His holy Will."

Louise's fears were but too well founded. The disaffection of the people had spread to the Parliament, which was incensed at Mazarin's interference with its rights, and when the Court took advantage of the general rejoicings at Turenne's victory at Lens to arrest three members of Parliament, the whole of Paris rose in their defence. Three terrible days, from the 26th to the 29th of August, followed, when it is said that more than 1,200 barricades were thrown up in the streets of the city—converting it into a huge armed camp. The Queen Regent, not prepared for this outbreak, was forced to capitulate and surrender the prisoners. She then retired, accompanied by Mazarin and her Ministers, to Reuil, which had formerly been Richelieu's chief country residence, and was now in possession of his niece the Duchesse d'Aiguillon.

Two months later she moved with the Court to St. Germain, where she was forced, on the 24th of October, to sign the celebrated Declaration of St. Germain, which practically sanctioned all the pretensions advanced by Parliament, and associated the legislature with the sovereign in the exercise of supreme power.

Though for the moment the popular will triumphed, the Queen Regent knew that help was at hand. For the Peace of Westphalia had just been signed which set free the victorious army of the King,¹ so she counted on soon having forces at her command equal to any that Parliament could bring against her. She therefore bided her time.

This armistice, however, offered no security for those who were able to see below the surface, and thus Louise in a letter written in the course of the winter asks M. Vincent if it does not seem good to him in his capacity of member of the Queen's Council of Conscience, and taking into account the consideration in which he was held, to plead the cause of the people with her, and of a durable peace.

To this M. Vincent responded as follows: "Rest assured that there is nothing that I have thought I ought to say which I have not said by the grace of God, and which I have not said in regard to all things. The misfortune is that God has not blessed my words. . . . It is true nevertheless that I try to speak in the manner of the good angels who suggest without being troubled when use is not made of the lights given by them. This is a lesson which was taught me by Cardinale Berulle of blessed memory. But I have received proofs that I have not the gift of doing this, and that I injure matters when I act differently."

Whether the views urged by Louise in this correspond-

¹ Louis XIV was still a minor, being in 1648 ten years of age.

ence had any influence upon her holy director it is impossible to say, but it was followed shortly afterward by a conference and in the moving terms in which M. Vincent addresses his Daughters—like a father speaking to his children for the last time—we seem to see a foreshadowing of what was about to follow. The subject of the conference was the love the congregation should have for their vocation, and for the service of the poor. M. Vincent, in the course of it, recalled the divine origin of their little company, the beginnings of the Association, the first community under Mlle. Le Gras, “whom God had ever inspired with such zeal for His glory.” He congratulated the brave Sisters on their fidelity in spite of the many obstacles they met with and the arduous nature of their lives. “There are some amongst you, I know well, who by the grace of God are so deeply attached to their vocation that they would be torn to bits rather than suffer any thoughts to come between them and it. . . . Many of you have possessed this spirit so strongly that had some, who are already dead, lived in the time of St. Jerome, that great Doctor of the Church would have described their lives in such glowing terms—so great was their sanctity—that we should have been lost in admiration of them!”

It was the month of December, and recalling the difficulties the Sisters had to surmount to assemble at the Mother-house in order to hear him, the holy man ended by saying to them: “Well! my dear Sisters, what I have already said is enough for to-day. I regret to have kept you so long here—poor souls—who have had so much trouble to come here, and who will have equal trouble in returning whence you came. How busy the angels of God have been counting your footsteps! Those you have made in coming have been counted, and those again will be counted which you make in returning; for a great

saint has said that every step which the servants of Jesus Christ make in His service is counted."

Three weeks later M. Vincent started on horseback for St. Germain accompanied only by his secretary Brother Ducourneau. It was the 14th of January, and the weather having been stormy and wet, the Seine had overflowed its banks. Ducourneau, in the account he left of the journey, said that he "trembled with fright," as he followed his venerable master over the bridge which was deep in running water. Arrived at the Castle M. Vincent asked to see the Queen, and being shown into her presence he explained the cause of his being there.

He had come to tell her that there was only one means of averting civil war and its awful consequences: the death and ruin of thousands, and the famine of which it would be the precursor, and that was for her to dismiss her Minister, Cardinal Mazarin, who in the opinion of all France was accountable for the misfortunes that had befallen the country. Anne of Austria listened to him without showing any signs of displeasure, and finally dismissed him with the remark that she could not undertake any measure of such importance without consulting her ministers.

M. Vincent then had an interview with Mazarin himself, to whom he made the same appeal. Again, he drew a moving picture of what would be the result of a war such as was on the eve of breaking out, and implored him to yield to events, and, like a second Jonah, throw himself into the sea to allay the tempest.

The Cardinal likewise gave him a patient hearing, and promised to put the case before a Royal Council which was about to be held. Le Tellier was one of its members, and his was the deciding vote. He was a creature of Mazarin's, and when the question was discussed he was faithful to the man to whom he owed his elevation to power.

The result—which might have been looked upon as a foregone conclusion—was that Mazarin held to his post: and M. Vincent's journey had been made in vain.

Writing very shortly afterwards to one of his priests he said: "In going to St. Germain I had the design of rendering some little service to God, but my sins made me unworthy." To his contemporaries, even to the best and wisest, this action was accounted a failure; but looking at it at the distance of nearly three centuries one only can see its beauty, and, alas, "the pity of it!" its hopelessness.

The saint doubtless had seen Anne of Austria at her best—had seen her interesting herself in the poor, in hospital work, and the care of the foundlings. He had witnessed her efforts in the Committee of Conscience to redress abuses with regard to the appointment of ecclesiastic dignitaries; was it wholly surprising therefore that he should have hoped that when the fate of France hung in the balance she would have risen to the occasion and sacrificed her own feelings for the sake of her adopted country?

As for Mazarin, M. Vincent was clear-sighted enough to know the man he had to deal with; but to appeal to the best side of a man is to get the best out of him, and for a moment it almost seemed as if he, together with the grace of God, might have succeeded. Whether the favourite hesitated—standing at the parting of the ways—or not we shall never know, but Le Tellier's vote decided the matter, and no doubt the two others gladly acquiesced in the decision.

Many years later M. Vincent alluded to this attempt, and said that he had always felt that it was one that he would never regret having made at the hour of death.

The rôle of peace-maker is seldom a popular one, and when the news got abroad of what he had done, M. Vincent

found himself an object of suspicion in both camps. He therefore considered it advisable to leave Paris and asked for a passport in order to visit the houses of his congregation in the provinces. He went first to Villepreux, and whilst he was there he heard of the fate of his College of St. Lazare. A few days after his departure a member of the Parliament had broken into the house; 800 soldiers, it is said, poured in, and ransacked it from cellar to garret, destroying everything that they could not carry away with them. This lasted for three days; at the end of that time troops under Colonel de Lamoignon were posted on the premises, but it was too late—the work of destruction was complete.

M. Vincent makes no mention of this heavy loss in his letter to Louise from Fresneville, whither he went after Villepreux. "I congratulate you on your courage," he writes, "in holding on at your house. . . . May our Lord keep you in good health through it all. I give Him thanks for this with all my heart, especially at holy Mass, where I see you daily in His presence. May He take you into His keeping!" There was a little settlement of Sisters of Charity at Fresneville, and he says of them that "they were daily increasing in a holy union of hearts, and both loved their vocation and acquitted themselves well of its duties." They supplied the poor of the neighbourhood as far as they were able with food, reserving to themselves black bread only, which they mixed with barley. He took advantage of a delay there, owing to the severity of the weather, "to help the good people of Valpuseau" (as he wrote to Louise) "to give themselves to the service of God; so that our Lord might grant them the graces they require to make a good use of the afflictions which are likely to come to them."

Louise meanwhile divided her time between Bicêtre and the Mother-house in Paris, always going to the assist-

ance of those of her Sisters who stood most in need of it. It was on one of these occasions when she was at the Faubourg St. Denis that Mme. de Miramion—afterwards so well known for her life of charity, and devotion to the service of the poor, then a young widow uncertain what to make of her life—came to ask permission of Louise to make a retreat under her roof.

Mme. de Miramion records many years later how one night in January (the 18th or 19th), she was praying to know God's Will, and she felt some one touching her on the shoulder, and thinking it was a Sister who had come to take her to the chapel, opened her eyes and saw a brilliant light, and heard a Voice saying to her, "It is I, your Lord and Master. Give yourself to me wholly and without division, I alone will be your Spouse."

From the time she heard the Voice she renounced the world and any thought of marrying again, and devoted herself entirely to a life of prayer and good works. She became an active member of the Association of Ladies of Charity in her parish of St. Nicholas, taking up the various works connected with it, such as visiting the hospital and the galley-slaves, and it is said that in the days of deepest distress she fed more than seven hundred poor people daily on her patrimony alone, for the space of two years.

It was to her, as well as to the other members of the Association in Paris, that M. Vincent wrote on the 11th of February, 1649—a year of fratricidal warfare and misery—to implore them not to let the works of mercy they had undertaken perish in the general débâcle. "What are you about to do, mesdames?" he asked, "what are your intentions with regard to the good works that God has committed to your care, especially that of the Hôtel Dieu and of the foundlings? In truth it would almost appear as if our private troubles and losses should dis-

pense us from troubling about public ones, and that in the sight of mankind we should have a good pretext for withdrawing from them. But indeed, mesdames, I know not how it would be in the sight of God, Who might say, in the words of His holy Apostle, 'Have you resisted unto blood?' At the very least have you sold some of the jewels you possess? What do I say to you? I know that there are several amongst you—I believe it of all of you, many as you are—that you have given sums in charity, not only very great for persons in your condition, but which would be considered great had they been given by queens. The stones would speak if I was silent on the subject." He then made a special appeal for two or three thousand livres to meet the more pressing necessities of the foundlings.

A little later, on the 3rd of March, M. Vincent wrote to Louise to acknowledge gratefully the manner in which the Association had responded to his appeal. "I am much consoled with the blessing God has given to your work, Mademoiselle, and to that of Mme. and Mlle. de Lamoignon as well as to that of all the Ladies of Charity of the Paris parishes. I give great thanks to God, and pray to Him that He will give you the grace of their continuance. It has, however, been a great distress to me to hear that your poor foundlings at Bicêtre are again in trouble and surrounded by a great army. I console myself with the hope that our Lord has had them under His special protection, and has not allowed them to come to grief."

To explain the danger in which the foundlings and their guardians were placed we must return to the state of their unfortunate country. Early in January open war had broken out between the Queen Regent and the Parliamentary party. That of the Queen was reinforced by an army of 15,000 men set free by the treaty of

Westphalia and the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War; the popular party, on the other hand, received a great accession of force from great nobles such as the Prince de Conti, the Dukes d'Elbœuf, de Longueville, and de Bouillon, the Duke de Beaufort (known as the Roi des Halles), all of whom, disgusted with the misrule of Anne of Austria and jealous of the "foreigner" Mazarin, had thrown in their lot with the insurgents. Paris, leader always, in peace as in war, openly defied the Royal troops, and accordingly it was invested in February by the regular army, and for three months its unfortunate inhabitants underwent all the privations and miseries of a siege. These troubles, though they began in Paris, were not confined to that city; they spread to Normandy and Brittany and Languedoc, and even to far Provence; thus before this war—the result of selfish ambitions and turbulent passions—had been brought to a close the whole country was in flames. Meanwhile the Sisters of Charity at Bicêtre and in the Faubourg St. Denis were in the very centre of the disturbance; for the army of the besiegers were encamped at the village of St. Denis close to the Mother-house, and to the south at Bourg-la-Reine, very near Bicêtre. A Sister described later, as follows, what she and the community underwent in those terrible times: "The house of Bicêtre was kept in a continual state of alarm; there were always soldiers coming and going, and prowling round the house to try and effect an entrance." The warning letter which Louise wrote during the early part of the year to Sœur Geneviève Poisson, whom she had left at the head of the community, proves how deeply she entered into their trials and dangers:

"Let us give God the glory we are bound to render Him in the trying position in which He has seen fit to place us. I pray Him with all my heart to make known

to you how good it is to have confidence in Him, and to look up to Him as children look to their father and mother in their wants. I am firmly convinced that He will give you all the courage to die rather than to offend Him, and that you will make it appear by your modesty that you belong to the King of kings before Whom the powers of the earth must submit. Have the greatest care of the grown-up girls; you should always keep them in sight, or shut them up in the school, even though this should prevent their being of service to you. Courage, my dear Sisters, and indeed who should have more than you! since you are tried by afflictions in the midst of your exercise of charity. Oh! what joy our Saviour must take in the acts of love proceeding from your hearts, as well as of submission to His holy Will—which accepts all He asks in you and of you.”

She then recommends them to the care of the Blessed Virgin and their good angels, and recommends them to make a good confession, “not that I wish,” she adds, “to give you a fear of death, no, no! but that the graces you receive should help you to keep always in God’s favour and that He should ever have you under His protection.”

The position of Bicêtre became so unbearable that Louise removed half the number of children to the house in St. Denis. Apparently the house or grounds suffered severely from marauding soldiers, as M. Vincent writes from Mareille: “I am deeply grieved at the damage done to Bicêtre and the poverty in which the foundlings are plunged. . . . Since the place has become uninhabitable it is much to be desired that Parliament or the city of Paris should make some provision for giving us some other house, though very likely they will not do so. We must not let that, however, prevent us from making the attempt.”

There was a moment in which Louise feared that all the Sisters of Charity—scattered as they were at this time in every part of France—might in the universal famine and destitution be sent back to her, at a time when she had already more mouths than she could feed. These fears had not been realised. Accordingly she writes to her Daughters at Nantes on the 6th of April: “You will share in the consolation it has been to us that all our Sisters have been kept at their posts, and have always continued serving the sick poor, and moreover the poor who were without bread, for you can hardly conceive the amount of money that has been given in charity in Paris. I believe it has attracted the mercy of God upon us and given us peace.”

The peace of Rueil had been announced three days before, on the 2nd of April, after a siege which had lasted three months.

Though the investment of Paris had never been complete it had brought the greatest misery on the poorer classes. M. Vincent, who was still kept in the south of France, partly by bad health, and partly by doubts as to the prudence of returning, did all that was possible to feed the starving multitude. “Although wheat is so scarce,” he wrote to M. Portail, who had just returned from Rome, “we have been able to distribute three or four bushels of it daily; this has been a source of great consolation to us in the extremities to which we have been reduced, and has given us hope that God will not abandon us.”

All this time Louise and her Daughters were making unheard-of sacrifices in order to support the foundlings and other good works dependent on them, such as the free meals to the poor of Paris and sick galley-slaves. We read that when matters were at their worst, the Sisters at some of the houses had cut down their meals to one

a day, and that the food at the single repast was of the coarsest quality.

The practical side of Louise de Marillac's character is continually displayed in the letters we possess of hers during these trying times. No sooner is peace declared than she makes arrangements for the cultivation of the fields both on the Bicêtre property and at St. Laurent. To the Sisters at St. Laurent she writes: "I beg our Sisters who have charge of the garden to work hard at its cultivation now that our Lord is giving us this good weather. Above all, I recommend them to grow plenty of chicory. I am sending you a packet of seed of fine beans; keep some for another year in memory of the war."

Whilst Louise was occupied with the cares of her communities in the neighbourhood of Paris, M. Vincent was taking advantage of his tour amongst the houses of the priests of the Mission to visit some of the *Charités* and settlements of the Sisters further south. His visit to the hospital at Angers was one of entire joy and consolation: "Affairs are so satisfactory here," he writes, "that my heart is filled with consolation." Again in another letter to Louise: "I feel I must repeat to you what comfort I derived from my visit to our dear Sisters at Angers. Oh! Mademoiselle, how much reason we have to praise God for His adorable leading of those good Sisters."

His progress was interrupted at St. Méen by a severe illness, and we find Louise writing to various communities to beg their prayers for his recovery. On the 28th of April he was well enough to proceed on his journey to Nantes where he was anxiously expected by the Sisters, who, as usual, were in trouble. "I found the poor Sisters just emerging from a great persecution of which they have become the object," he writes on that

date; "they had been accused of a number of things: one of the principal being that they had appropriated to themselves the goods of the poor people!"

True that an inquiry into these charges resulted in a triumphant vindication of the Sisters, but the prejudice stuck to them. The Bishop himself was of the number of their opponents, and M. Vincent was unable to convince him of the groundlessness of the accusation against them. There was nothing for him to do but to recommend to the community an even stricter observance of their Rule—and, with the help of God, he adds, he is leaving them resolved to persevere in their good resolutions.

Louise de Marillac wrote full of sympathy to her Daughters in their fresh trials, imploring them "in the name of God try to remain in great peace in the midst of your troubles and anxieties. Accept the order and leading of Divine Providence with entire submission. One day you and I shall be blessing God for these persecutions. Perhaps it may go so far as to be the cause of your being dismissed; believe, should this be the case, that nothing can happen to us except what is for the best. Know you not that God draws glory from our discomfiture?"

When M. Vincent was at Luçon he received a message from the Queen Regent inviting him to return to Paris, where she was about to make a solemn entry with the young King. He was not fit for the journey, and, it is said, he received the news of his summons with the remark: "Is my carcass worth so long a journey!"

The Duchesse d'Aiguillon sent her carriage for him, and on the 13th of June he reached Paris.

Peace was restored in Paris and its neighbourhood, but there was no sign in the summer by which it was succeeded of the plenty which ought to accompany it.

The harvest in the year 1648 failed, and it had been impossible in the following spring to get the ground sown, so that barley and wheat were still at famine prices. "If you only knew," Louise writes on the 25th of July to Sister Hellot, "the difficulties which reign in Paris at this moment—they are almost incredible! It seems as if the war had lasted ages, and that everybody is ruined. . . . And yet Providence has so arranged that more sums have been given in charity to the poor sick, and others, than one could have dared to hope for. It has sometimes seemed as if the Ladies of Charity showed more anxiety to provide wheat for the poor than for themselves."

She was perhaps alluding—amongst others—to Mme. de Lamoignon, who, having got a provision of wheat from her property of Basville which ought to have lasted herself and her family for a year, with the consent of her son, who was as splendid a Christian as herself and her daughter, distributed it amongst the starving poor of Paris. But if the state of the "submerged tenth" weighed heavily on Louise, it was nothing to the constant anxiety of providing for the foundlings, for this was a burthen which was not only overwhelming, but was ever increasing in its proportions.

She writes to represent the terrible pass to which they were reduced to the Chancellor Séguier in the following terms:

"Monseigneur, the respect which I owe your Lordship has caused me to seek through certain persons of distinction to recall to your mind the promise of assistance you made at St. Germain to the unfortunate foundlings. But as these resources have failed me, I take the liberty of addressing these lines to you, not being able to go to you myself, to represent to you that amongst the necessities under which they labour, there

are a hundred of these children who are in want of bread in these times of rejoicing ; a thing which afflicts me so much that I should think myself guilty if any consideration prevented my having recourse to your Lordship, who on so many other occasions have shown yourself a true help to the poor. Permit me, therefore, to use this humble frankness and with every expression of respect and submission, believe me your Lordship's humble servant, etc."

Louise was indeed reduced to the last extremity. We judge of it by the cry amounting almost to despair which she breathes into M. Vincent's sympathetic ear. "I fear I am too importunate, my much-honoured Father, but we have reached such a point that unless succour is given us at once everything will have to be given up. It was necessary yesterday to pay up every penny we had got, with the exception of about 15 or 20 livres for current expenses, in order to get flour for the children at Bicêtre, and to borrow more. In a month from this time it will be impossible to go on any longer."

The foundlings at this time—the autumn of 1649—had been divided into two parties: the elder ones had been sent back to Bicêtre, whilst the younger and more recent arrivals were kept at the Mother-house; it was with regard to the latter that Louise wrote: "There are twelve or thirteen infants, and no linen even to give them a change of garments. Will you please request the ladies at to-morrow's Assembly to come to some decision; either to get up collections at all the parishes on Sundays, to put boxes in some conspicuous positions, to get various preachers and parish-priests to speak in their favour, or to make some appeal—as was suggested—at Court in behalf of the Charity."

The Assembly of October did not mend matters, and Louise wrote in November (having the previous day

had an addition of four newly-born infants to her flock) to declare the impossibility of going on under these conditions: "There are at present seven who will not drink out of a bottle, and we have only two nurses, and not a penny to pay for their being put out to nurse, nor any supply of linen nor bedclothes; and we have henceforward no prospect of being able to borrow money. Do us the charity, my much-honoured Father, to let us know whether we can in conscience let them die thus, as die they must, for the ladies make no effort to come to our assistance. I have even been told that they consider we are enriching ourselves at their expense." She ends by saying that she sees only one resource: which is to ask the President (of Parliament) to discharge them of the engagement they had made to take the children, and get others—whoever he wishes—to take charge of them. She ends by saying, "Ah! if we could only carry this cross without giving you a share in the burthen, much-honoured Father, how willingly I would do it. But our helplessness forces me to speak."

The necessity of holding a general meeting of all the ladies of the different Associations in Paris became every day more imperative, for even the collations at the Hôtel Dieu were threatened, and Louise was forced to confess that she can no longer weary the ears of the rich, and the great people at Court with her tale of woe. Thus she writes to Mme. de Lamoignon on the 15th of December: "I must beg your pardon for not having written as you asked me to do to Mme. Séguier. I fear I have been only too vociferous about the extreme wants of the poor children as well as of those of their nurses, and have felt I have gone too far in wounding the tender and charitable hearts of some by my importunity. Soon the just sorrows of the mothers of the Innocents will be the fate of the ladies of the Associa-

tion—who have been more mothers to these little ones than their own—for like them, after the massacre, they will find it impossible to receive consolation for their loss. Nevertheless we must hope for some succour from the goodness of God.” She ends a letter with suggestions similar to those she had already made to M. Vincent.

Writing almost at the same date to the latter, she gives him a few points to which to draw the ladies' attention on the occasion of the general meeting, with a list of names of people to be asked, adding that some whom she mentioned might “perhaps keep some of the ladies from attending the meeting by making the mistake of proposing that they should bring their purses with them.” She continues, “The more I think of the money we owe, the more fear I have of going on with the undertaking. . . . The nurses in the villages are now using menacing words, and threaten to bring the infants back to us, and our debts are multiplying to such an extent that it seems hopeless to think of paying them. Soon the company will earn as bad a name all over the country as if it was paying in false coin.”

All this was no news to M. Vincent. He also had received importunate letters from Sister Geneviève Poisson begging for money to satisfy the unfortunate peasant nurses. “I have answered,” he writes, “that we are doing all we possibly can, and that they must have patience a little longer. . . . But as this was not hard cash I fear our good Sister was not entirely satisfied.”

The great meeting of the Association of the Ladies of Charity on which the fate of the foundlings depended was held on a Friday in the month of December 1649. M. Vincent made copious notes in preparation for it, many of which were taken from Louise de Marillac's letters, and from information derived from her. These

notes, which are still extant, give one a vivid idea of his speech.

The scene must have been a striking one, as no doubt this being a general meeting of all the associations in Paris, including the one especially patronised by the Queen Regent, many of the Court ladies and all the great leaders in philanthropic matters were present. But the interest for the most part of the audience was concentrated not on the women who formed the greater part of it, but on one insignificant-looking man—for such we know was his appearance—plain in features too, as we see from his portraits, with no eloquence or brilliant parts to recommend him. What was the attraction—whence the influence? What made M. Vincent a power in the land? The answer has already been given in the preceding pages. It came from the fact that no one had dealings with him, or came in contact with him, without realising that he was led by the spirit of God, and that all he said, and did, was stamped with the hall-mark of absolute single-mindedness and charity, of love of God and man.

M. Vincent began by demonstrating the extreme necessities of the foundlings. The case was urgent and must be attended to at once. "Ladies," he went on to say, "you are pledged to the undertaking. The work was taken up with full consideration, after delay, after giving it a trial, for good reasons founded on charity and religion; these reasons still hold good.

"In accepting the office of mothering them you have taken on yourselves the obligation of giving them food. They have no mothers in the world but yourselves. If you abandon them they must of necessity die. Neither police official nor any other can prevent their perishing. What is to be done then?

"First of all you must pray, you must go to Com-

munion; then you must speak of the extremity to which these infants are reduced, to all; to your friends, to your relations. You must recommend their cause to the curés of the parishes, to the preachers. You must place money-boxes in your churches; you must ask for contributions; and finally you must to-day make a firm resolution either to finish the work or to make a new effort to carry it on for another year.

“I would ask, now, what objections can be raised against this plea? It may be answered: the necessities of the present time which are impoverishing people to such an extent that it is a struggle to live. I answer, ladies, that it could be done without ruining any one. You are a hundred in number: if each of you subscribed a hundred livres, that would be more than is required. If fifty would do so, and fifty more gave something, it would be sufficient with what we already have. ‘But,’ it may be said by some, ‘I have no money.’ Alas! have you no superfluous baubles at your houses? I have known of one who has sold her jewels to keep an unfortunate man alive. But again you may say, ‘These heavy outlays will be a drain on the Association for an indefinite period; and every mother who wishes to get rid of her children will pass them on to us.’ To this I answer: ‘No. I have two prospects in view which will preserve us from such a misfortune.’

“Now consider what is before you. What will God’s verdict be Who called you to undertake this work if you abandon it? . . .

“What will the King and the chief Magistrates of the city think who have issued letters patent to hand over the care of the children to you? What will the public say who have hailed the work you had undertaken with blessings and acclamation. What will the little children themselves say? ‘Alas! are you, also, our mothers by

adoption, going to abandon us? That our own mothers should abandon us is but natural, they were bad. But that you should do it—you who are good women—it is as much almost as to say that God has abandoned us, and that He is not our God.' In short, what will you answer to God at the hour of your death when He asks an account of you of this desertion?"

Then the holy man, slightly raising his voice—which was shaking from emotion—summed up all his arguments in the following peroration: "Is it not true, mesdames, that charity and compassion made you adopt these little creatures as your children? You have been their mothers according to divine grace—since their mothers according to nature had abandoned them. Cease for a moment being their mothers in order to become their judges. Their lives and their deaths are in your hands. I will proceed to take your votes. It is time now to pass their sentence, and to find out if it is true that you will no longer have compassion on them. They will live if you continue to exercise your protection over them, and on the contrary they will infallibly perish, and die, if you desert them; long experience in the past does not admit of a doubt on the subject."

When the votes of the Assembly were taken, M. Vincent was found to have gained his cause. The ladies, deeply touched by his words, were unanimous in agreeing that the work should not be given up.

We should like to have recorded a greater result to this great appeal. Undoubtedly it saved the situation, but Louise's letters during the beginning of the year 1650 show that the sacrifices demanded of her and her devoted company were as severe as ever. These sacrifices even were shared by the unfortunate peasant women with whom the infants had been put out to nurse.

"It is impossible to resist the pity with which these

poor nurses inspires us," writes Louise, "in demanding what are their just rights, not only for the care of the children but for the food they have shared with them; and now they find themselves dying of hunger and are forced to come from great distances, sometimes three or four times, to ask for their money, and have to go away without receiving it!"

Again she suggests that there is only one means to be taken: to propose to the Ladies of Charity to give up taking fresh cases, and to pay all outstanding debts and withdraw the children who have been weaned from the country places.

The sacrifices made by the superior and her Daughters seem almost incredible; they deprived themselves of all but the bare necessities of life and, as we have already said, contented themselves with one meal a day in order to have more to share with the poor. It is not astonishing that Louise had to lament the loss of some of her most valuable co-workers during these years of scarcity and trouble. It is true that she consoles herself with the thought that they died martyrs to the holiest of causes, a life of devotion to the poor, and were ripe for Heaven; yet the gaps they left were very sensibly felt by her, and deeply mourned. Thus early in the year 1649 she writes to the community at Chantilly exhorting them to keep their last end before their eyes, death having been so busy amongst them; "the Holy Will of God has within the last fortnight called Sister Renée of Angers, and our aged Sister Jeanne Baptiste. At this moment," she continues, "we have Sister Antoinette dangerously ill, and Sister Jeanne Baptiste the younger has also been laid up."

Trials there were still in store for Louise in connection with the foundlings, but M. Vincent's engagements to the ladies at the *Grande Assemblée* were more than

redeemed within a year of his pronouncing them. Whether the promised help came from an anonymous source, or the names of the donors been lost in the lapse of time, we know not; but we are told that by degrees the Ladies of Charity interfered less and less with the management of the infants, and that the work lost nothing by this abstention, and that there was no longer any question of its being abandoned.

On one occasion when they made a renewed effort to repeople Bicêtre, Louise wrote to M. Vincent: "It appears to me our past experience should be against our falling back on that measure. The work seems to me to be getting on so well that I must own to you, my much-honoured Father, that I cannot help fearing the interference of these ladies may give a direction to our affairs contrary to that which God has established since they have almost given up their superintendence of the work."

At the date at which this letter was written (May 1651) the foundlings occupied a number of small houses which went collectively by the name of Treize-Maisons. This was in the parish of St. Laurent, and in close proximity to the Mother-house, and accordingly under the immediate supervision of Louise de Marillac herself.

CHAPTER XV

THE Venerable Louise de Marillac in the year 1650 had entered into the last decade of her life. These last years were no less fruitful in works for the glory of God and the good of her neighbour than those that had preceded them; and, like the others, they bore the stamp of the Cross. Trials of all sorts; trials of health, trials of disappointments and losses in the great work which she had made so peculiarly her own, that is the formation of the company of Sisters of Charity; trials that came from within, and others that came from without, were to be her portion during those remaining years. But with the increasing trials, and the added burthen of years, came an ever-increasing sanctity. More and more do her words and thoughts testify that her will is anchored to the Will of God, and her pleasure to His good pleasure, so that she might have said with the great apostle: "I live, but not I, for Christ liveth in me."

Some of the most beautiful of her letters of advice and sympathy to the Sisters at a distance from her—especially to the much-tried community at Nantes—date from this period. To Sister Lepintre, the superior of the hospital there, she wrote on the 14th of December, 1649, as follows: "I praise God with all my heart for the peace which you describe as reigning in your little company. I trust that God will always give you a similar grace as long as you do not trouble about what is said to

you. When the Spirit of God takes possession of souls it withdraws them from that weakness which causes them to say: 'What will be said of me?' or 'Why should they say this or the other?' And then you know well, my dear Sister, that nothing causes us to resemble Jesus Christ so much as to suffer persecutions in peace."

In another letter written on the 13th of January, 1650, to the same Sister she alludes to an appointment which had lately been made to the hospital—one which was looked upon by the authorities in the light of an olive-branch.

"I beg of you all, my Sisters, to profit greatly for the grace God has conferred on you in giving you M. D'Annemont in your time of need. I am persuaded that it is in order that you may have a calm after all the past storms. Also that it may renew in you that spirit of union and cordiality which Sisters of Charity should possess in right of the exercise of that same charity—which is accompanied by all Christian virtues, specially *our dear virtue*, that of a loving forbearance with one another. I recommend this virtue to you to the utmost of my power, as absolutely necessary, because it moves one to see the faults of others without bitterness, and to excuse them whilst humbling oneself. I beg of you, my dear Sister, to ask for this spirit which is that of our Blessed Saviour, and believe me in His holy love, etc., Louise de Marillac."

The beginning of January of this year was signalled by an event which Louise must have looked upon as an answer to many anxious prayers. It was no less than the marriage and consequent establishment in life of her son. According to Louise's biographer the Atticci family, and in particular the brilliant and lively Countess de Maure, had made it a matter of reproach (probably in jest) to Louise that she had not used

whatever Court influence she possessed to get him a suitable post, which might have led the way to marriage. The interview at which these remarks had been made had taken place at the parlour of the Carmelite Convent in Paris, where Mme. de Marillac¹ was a professed nun, and in the presence of Fr. de Atticci the Jesuit and the Countess de Maure's brother.

Louise remained silent under this laughing accusation but—she relates afterwards to M. Vincent—"What I did two days later was to write to M. de Atticci that all the short-comings, from the point of view of a good mother, of which I could accuse myself was that I had never allowed him to know that my late husband had consumed both time and money in the care of the affairs of the House of Atticci, and that his own son had suffered in consequence. But that if he designed to occupy himself about the son, without the concurrence of the mother, he might approach, as he was desirous of doing, the King's Secretary, who is well acquainted with me from having frequently met me at the house of my uncle, the Keeper of the Seals."

To this M. Vincent made reply that he could only praise her for working in her son's behalf. "God knows with what pleasure I would work for the same end if it were possible." M. Vincent had already done all in his power by appointing Michel to the Baillywick of St. Lazare by which he discharged the office of magistrate in that parish. Nor was this all, for at the end of the year 1649 we find by his correspondence that the holy man was doing his utmost to get him a clerkship in the Court of Finances. This fell through owing to the lack of money to purchase the advancement, as also did a marriage with a suitable young lady from the same cause.

Letters were exchanged again between Louise and the Atticci family—this time with Count de Maure, who

¹ Mme. de Marillac was the widow of Michel de Marillac's son,

seems to have taken a real interest in his wife's cousin. Finally a marriage was arranged for Michel in the fashion common in those days, that is, not so much by those personally interested as by their guardians and parents; and on the 18th of January, 1650, he was married to Gabrielle Le Clerck, daughter of the Seigneur de Chennevières, and of his wife Musset de la Rochemaillet. The marriage was celebrated in the parish church of St. Sauveur. Louise writes to the Sisters of the congregation to offer up their Communion for her son on his wedding-day and informs them that "God to all seeming has chosen him a very virtuous young lady who is not a Parisian."

Michel received the office of Counsellor in the Court of Finances from his wife's uncle, René Michel de la Rochemaillet, and took the oath whilst the Court was sitting in the 14th of July of the same year.

Michel's marriage with the duties that accompanied it, as well as his adoption of a profession, must have realised all the wishes his mother had formed for him, and when it was followed by the birth of a little girl the following year her satisfaction doubtless was complete. A letter from her to M. Vincent in the month of May, 1651 tells him of an *ex-voto*, a picture of our Lady—probably painted by herself—which she wished hung in the church of St. Lazare.

"My intention," she writes, "is that this picture should not be put in the Oratory here, but that it should ornament an altar dedicated to our Lady, in reparation, in some sort, for faults committed by my son, for which object I wish to employ money coming from the sale of a few rings which I still have in my possession."

Louise's thoughts were not suffered to dwell long on private matters, for within three days of her son's marriage an event took place which plunged France once more into war. This event was the imprisonment of

Condé in the fortress of Vincennes, by order of the Queen Regent. The immediate result of this arbitrary measure was that Turenne, probably fearing that the same fate awaited him, anticipated it by putting his sword at the service of the discontented nobility, and inviting the Spanish army in the Low Countries to help him to defy the Crown and relieve the prisoner from Vincennes.

The Imperialist troops, thus encouraged, advanced by the Ardennes on to Picardy and Champagne where they were met by the King's army under Plessis-Praslin. These unfortunate provinces therefore being transformed into the manœuvring ground of two large hostile forces, suffered equally from the devastations of both armies.

Abelly, again our informant, gives a vivid picture of the state of the unfortunate inhabitants after the raising of the siege of Guise, which was one of the incidents of the campaign: "The news that the two armies having in their retreat left a very large number of wounded and famishing soldiers dying on the roads spread quickly to Paris. M. Vincent, being touched by the pitiable state of these unfortunate men, with the assistance of the charitable Présidente de Herse despatched two of his missionaries on horseback laden with food, and provided with about 500 livres in silver. The priests when they had reached the districts found a great number of these poor fellows stretched alongside the hedges, and thus having soon exhausted their provisions went on in haste to the nearest town to buy more. But here they were much astonished to find the same wants and calamities that they had met with in the country places. Accordingly they wrote promptly to M. Vincent that the destitution was general all over those parts, and that the succour they had brought with them was nothing in comparison to what was necessary in order to meet the evil." To this Gobillon adds: "No one can picture to themselves the

terrible state to which Picardy and Champagne were reduced in the year 1650. In addition to the sufferings of the soldiers the people were robbed of all their possessions, afflicted by famine and pestilence, hunted from their homes, deprived of help or any place to which they could take refuge. Some were laid up in wretched hovels with roofs open to the sky ; others lay out in the woods, or on the high-roads, lingering on, half-dead, without priest, without sacraments, without consolation, and left, after death, without burial. The priests who were similarly afflicted were either sick, or had fled, cloisters were thrown open, nuns fleeing, churches profaned, and the sacred vessels plundered.”¹ Where was it possible to find a remedy for such widespread miseries? One man only, and that man Vincent de Paul, undertook to arrest its course.

The first means taken by the man of God was to call together a meeting of the Ladies of Charity, and these rose with absolute unanimity to the occasion. Many gave all their most valuable possessions, including their jewels and silver vessels. The Queen Regent, dismayed by the extent of the country's misfortunes, sacrificed, amongst other things, a pair of diamond ear-rings of great value. M. Vincent set the example himself by putting aside the sum of 800,000 livres, which had been presented to him by Mlle. de Lamoignon in the name of the Associations of Paris, in order to build a church at St. Lazare, for this purpose. “ This money,” he told them, “ will be better employed in succouring the unfortunate population in Picardy and Champagne.” And accordingly it was applied to that object.

A Committee was appointed to receive subscriptions and offerings consisting of the Présidente de Lamoignon, the Présidente de Herse, Mme. de Nicolay, Mme. de

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 97.

Traversay, Mme. Fouquet, Mme. Joly, Mme. de Miramion, and Mlle. Viole. The Archbishop at M. Vincent's request also issued an appeal, which was read in every parish church of Paris, asking for contributions for the two ruined provinces.

The spiritual destitution of the people being as great as their material wants, M. Vincent despatched ten priests of the Mission in August of the same year to the seat of war, and they were followed shortly afterwards by bands of Sisters of Charity. Whilst the former ministered to their most pressing wants, the Sisters distributed the remedies and food they had brought with them. "The Association," Gobillon tells us, "had provided—besides the sacred vessels required for the pillaged churches—food, clothing, and drugs to be applied to the various necessities of the poor; tools for the workmen, and seed and grain in order to cultivate the ground that had been allowed to go to waste. It was also arranged that hospitals should be established for the sick and wounded, and asylums for girls who had been turned out of house and home. . . . Mlle. Le Gras contributed by giving the ministry of her company; the Sisters whom she sent being ready to nurse and assist the people in all the misfortunes in which they were plunged. There were no services, however painful and dangerous their nature, which the Sisters did not render on this occasion. One of the most salutary of the different means of succour which they brought to the people was the distribution of soup, by which they saved the lives of a great many who were lingering between life and death, and at the same time they consoled their souls and won their hearts by this mission of charity."¹

The power of the printing press for good and evil was small and unsuspected in the middle of the seventeenth

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 100.

century in comparison to what it is now. We find M. Vincent, however—ahead of his age on this point as on so many others—publishing periodically, under the title of *Relations*, letters which reached him from the ruined provinces giving an account of what was being done there for the relief of the people. Four thousand copies of these *Relations* (or *Chronicles*) were issued monthly, and distributed broadcast, principally by the Association of Ladies of Charity, so that they reached every grade of society. Nothing can exceed the picture of misery and desolation given in them of the state of the population in these two northern provinces of France. It was said that it required a distribution of seven or eight thousand livres a month in alms alone, in order to keep a breath of life in the starving people.

No mention was made of the Sisters in the Chronicle till the month of December of the same year, when we read that they were lodged at the Priory of St. Thibaut les Bazoches, where they distributed remedies, and made soup for the sick and wounded. “The people arrive with the tickets—which we give them—and receive their pittance, and if unable to go themselves it is sent to them. The Sisters of Charity go wherever they are able. They bleed, and use all necessary remedies for the relief of the sick, and already we can perceive a great improvement in their patients.”

The services of the Sisters (we learn once more from the same source) were much in requisition for the women and children. “We found children clinging to their dead mothers, and it is a great mercy that Providence should have raised up a company of women to nurse these unfortunates. Here at Bazoches there are 1,200 sick; the expense of providing for these can be imagined. We willingly devote our lives to them, if you will help them with your money.”

The question may well be asked how defenceless priests and Sisters of Charity could traverse a country in safety infested with pillagers and camp-followers such as an army leaves in its train. We find that an Act was passed by the Queen Regent, at M. Vincent's request, by which Her Majesty "having regard to the immense services rendered by M. Vincent and the priests of the Mission" granted them a safe conduct, or passport, which placed them under her very special protection, and was to defend them from all molestation of every class of men—"governors as well as governed." This passport specially included "other charitable persons who had been sent to the seat of war and by whom a great number of poor people had been succoured in their illness and necessities. All soldiers, or others, are forbidden on pain of extreme penalty to take anything from the said priests and the persons employed by and with them," and so forth, at considerable length.

By this Act (M. Vincent's first biographer remarks) Vincent de Paul was constituted Great Almoner of France—or, as the Governor of St. Quentin called him, "The Father of his country."

We find from the letters of the missionaries that two Sisters, Anne Hardemont and Barbe Angiboust, were established in October of the same year at the hospital at Châlons, which was crowded with sick and wounded; the country surrounding that town being described as a desert with no one left but the infirm, and widows and children. The following spring there was no sign in the correspondence of those times of any material improvement in the situation. In a letter from Louise to Sister Guillemine Chesneau, who had been sent to St. Étienne in Picardy, she remarks: "All our Sisters praise God for the courage with which His goodness has endowed you for the service of His poor afflicted people.

Oh, my dear Sister, what a grace you have had in having been chosen for this holy employment! It is true it is an extremely trying one, but it is on account of this that the grace God has accorded you in confiding this charge to you is seen to be the greater. . . . I wish very much, my dear Sister, I could oftener receive news of you; but since it is to serve God that we have to submit to these difficulties of communication, may His name be praised."

It was not in these northern provinces (the ruined country, M. Vincent calls them in his letters) only, that destitution and misery stalked abroad; Paris was in the spring and summer of the year 1651 attacked both by smallpox and the plague. In September Louise wrote to Sister Jeanne Lepintre at Nantes: "All our Sisters at the house are either sick or infirm. And such is the number of those sick in Paris that it would almost appear as if we were all about to die. Our good God is sending us this scourge in order to warn us to mend our ways; beg of His goodness that He may show mercy to me. My son has been ill for eight days. I recommend him to your prayers."

Michel Le Gras recovered, but Louise suffered a severe loss a few months later in the death of the great benefactress not only of the little company but of all the charities of Paris. The "good Mme. de Lamoignon," as she was commonly called, died on the 30th of December, 1651. "God took her away from us, in this world, last night," wrote Louise to her Sisters at Angers. "He willed to make her rejoice in the glory purchased for her by His Son in recompense of her great virtues of simplicity, perfect humility, and great charity and generosity. When we have prayed for her, as the Church prescribes, let us pray *to* her, and in particular ask her to obtain for us those three virtues—for His glory."

Louise writes a little later to Sister Julienne Loret to say that the poor had interfered to prevent the body of their mother (as they called her) being removed for burial to the Church of the Recollects; she was accordingly buried at St. Leu, amongst those whom she had so faithfully tended and cared for through a long and devoted life.

To complete the disasters which befell the capital, the rise of the Seine and the Loire swept away an arch of the Pont-au-Charge carrying away at the same time a number of houses which surrounded it on either bank. The inundation was not confined to Paris. The Rhône, the Saône, and the Var equally overflowed their banks, and at some towns—Angers being particularly mentioned in Louise's letters—half of the houses were submerged, many being swept away by the force of the current, and the luckless inhabitants either drowned or reduced to beggary.

Sister Cécile Angiboust (a sister of Barbe), who was at this time serving the hospital at Angers, received the following sympathetic letter from Louise dated the 17th of February, 1652: "I have been exceedingly touched by the recital of all the misfortunes and losses which have befallen Angers, and the sufferings of the poor in consequence of them. I implore of the Divine goodness to console them and give them the help they require. You have had great anxieties, my most dear Sisters, but have you reflected that it is just that the servants of the poor should suffer with their masters, and that every one of us in particular deserves to bear her share of God's scourges. Oh, my dear Sister, let us only be astonished that God should have withdrawn us from those places where we might have been suffering with the poor people, in order to give us our daily bread and enable us to live in security."

Louise did not escape her share of illness and suffering in this same winter, as we find M. Vincent writing to one of his priests: "Mlle. Le Gras has been ill, and in the greatest danger, but through the grace of God she is now recovering."

Louise also mentions her illness in the following words: "I am able to give you a better report of my health, thanks be to God. You must unite with me in gratitude to God for His goodness in allowing me to go to my Easter duties to-day at St. Laurent." This was dated the 31st of March. M. Vincent had written to her a few days before to insist (if one may be allowed the word) on her getting well: "Do all that is in your power to recover, I beg of you. I cannot say how necessary it is to the poor that you should live a great deal longer, and never have I felt this so strongly as I do at present." The political situation during this year and the following was unchanged; it continued to be torn asunder by conflicting interests and factions, and therefore was as unfortunate for the country as the previous years had been.

Condé, rescued from Vincennes, had raised his standard in the north-west provinces, in which his name was a great power, and succeeded in rallying the people in his defence, and with a large army of followers had besieged and taken Angers. Meanwhile the Imperialist troops were attacking the King's army (led by the Duke of Nemours) in Artois and Picardy and on the line of the Oise.

Louise, writing on the 11th of March, 1652, to her dear Sister Julienne Loret at Chars, says: "I feel deeply for you in the constant apprehension you are in of the arrival of the soldiers." And again a little later she writes to the Community in Soissonais: "God be praised, my dear Sisters, for His having preserved you in your journey! I can assure you we all felt very much

for you ; at the same time there were some who envied you for the services you have been able to render to God. Oh, my dear Sisters, what consolations it appears to me you must be enjoying in the midst of your labours ! Good courage then. Work well at your perfection in the many occasions you must have of suffering, of practising patience and sweetness, and supporting rebuffs, and of surmounting all the contradictions you meet with. Enlarge your hearts in order to find nothing difficult for the service of God and His holy love. All the company greet you. I gave M. Vincent news of you to-day and he is praying for you."

The month of May saw Condé advancing with his army in the direction of Paris, which was defended by the Royal troops under Turenne, who had returned to his allegiance. On the 5th the rebels took Étampes—pillaging and destroying all around and behind them. "When, after two months," we read in the Chronicle, "the army departed, Étampes was nearly emptied of its inhabitants, many had died, many had fled, those that were left were for the most part sick or wounded. The fields surrounding the town were encumbered with dead bodies, and wolves, attracted by the smell of decomposing corpses, descended on to the plain, and even it is said had attacked and devoured three women in the surrounding villages. The neighbouring country, formerly so rich and fertile, had all the appearance of a violent tempest having passed over it."

There had been a small community of two Sisters established some years previous at Étampes and they, as elsewhere, had started soup-kitchens and applied themselves to the work of nursing the sick and succouring the afflicted. The missionaries, who were engaged in ministering to the spiritual necessities of these unfortunate people, on more than one occasion succumbed

to their fatigues and to the infection. M. Vincent writes as follows of one of these martyrs of charity, David by name :

“ He had only been at Étampes for about a fortnight, during which time he had done all that a man—coming as it were from Heaven—could do, in the way of confessing, catechising, succouring the sick, and giving burial to numbers of bodies, already decomposed. He went on a mission to Étrechy to bury twelve who had been infecting the village, after which he fell ill and died.”

Another striking instance, this time amongst the Sisters of Charity, was that of Sister Marie Joseph. It is related of her that being utterly worn out by her work—which never ceased night or day—amongst the sick and wounded, she was at last too weak to nurse her patients in their houses, so she caused those who required bleeding to be brought to her bedside, in order that she might attend to them. On one of these occasions, when she was nearing her end, she managed to effect her purpose, and then, weak and exhausted, she sank back on the bed and died, her last act being one of charity.

The Chronicle gives as an instance of the terrible state of the country that “ Such was the destitution of Étampes that on an occasion when a Sister of Charity, who had been spending the last two years nursing the dead and the dying, was herself at the last extremity, not a woman could be found in the town to nurse or attend to her.”

The town of Étampes was not ungrateful to the services rendered by M. Vincent through the priests of Missions and the Sisters of Charity. A large iron cross was erected by the townspeople to commemorate them in the neighbourhood of the Church of St. Basil, and

this cross was still standing there within the memory of man.

The little community at Valpuiseau, which was likewise in the war-zone, received the following letter from M. Vincent, congratulating them on their preservation from the misfortunes which threatened them and saying: "It seems to me almost as if God had brought you to life again after you had died. He will be your recompense, not only for what you have suffered but for the good you have accomplished, in serving the sick and wounded in the hospital and for the good example you have given there. I am told there are a great number of sick at Valpuiseau, and that at this moment that unfortunate spot is in much need of help, which makes me redouble my prayers to God that He will enable you to go there and console the poor people. We would willingly send you another Sister to help you if it were possible, but the misery is so great in Paris that Mlle. Le Gras has not got enough Sisters to take charge of the unfortunate refugees and the sick at the places where their services have been asked for. In a number of parishes they are employed in making soup; our Sisters at St. Paul distribute it daily to nearly 8,000 poor people, without counting sixty or eighty patients whom they are nursing. Never has your company worked harder than it is doing at this moment, and never more usefully. I trust that in consideration of this, God will pour His blessings abundantly on it. Your good Mother is pretty well in health. You are at present in a desert, as I look upon Valpuiseau in that light. But remember that our Lord loved solitude, and passed many weeks in the desert. Think, therefore, that it is always a blessing to us to find ourselves in the state of life which He led upon earth."

The approach of the two armies to the neighbourhood

of Paris increased daily the misery of its population. Abelly informs us that the villages for a circumference of eight to ten miles of the city were pillaged and sacked. The famine and rise in prices of provisions in consequence of the number of peasants, who, having been robbed of everything by the soldiery, sought refuge in the city put a finishing stroke to their misfortunes.

M. Vincent writes to one of his priests: "Our poverty increases with the public destitution. These troubles have at one blow caused us a loss of 23,000 francs a year in rents, for besides the loss of voluntary contributions no rents are paid. We have at this moment thirty-five priests in the house, so you may imagine the difficulty we have in providing for them." The Sisters of Charity also lost heavily in the general ruin, as part of their means of support depended on the rent of lands given to them by the Duchesse d'Aiguillon which ceased paying. It is said that in the month of May there were over 100,000 beggars in Paris, and 12,000 respectable families reduced to starvation.

As M. Vincent's newspaper puts it, "God is now knocking at the doors of our city with this inundation of soldiery. We must prepare to meet the same scourge as that which has afflicted the provinces." The quarter of Paris occupied by Louise became the centre of disturbance a little later. On the 1st of July La Chapelle and St. Lazare were invested by Condé's army and they encamped in the grounds and precincts of the College. The following day an engagement took place between the Royal troops and those of the Fronde, in which the latter scored a success, and which for the space of three months delivered the city of Paris into the hands of the insurgents.

Louise commemorates this day of alarm in the following letter to M. Vincent: "This fighting has fright-

ened us all very much ; the greater number of people are leaving the Faubourg and taking all their valuables with them. Should we follow their example? But it would be a terrible undertaking. If it is likely that the young Sisters should be in any danger we could arrange to place them here and there in several parishes, and have them supplied with food. As for me, I am preparing for death, and I cannot prevent my heart jumping every time I hear the cry '*Aux Armes.*' It appears as if Paris was abandoning this Faubourg, but I trust God will not abandon it and that His goodness will take compassion on us!"

The difficulty of providing for a large number of children was great. No flour was to be had except at enormous prices either in Paris or in the neighbouring districts.

Louise, by M. Vincent's express desire, moved, with some of the younger Sisters, to safer quarters in the town, leaving the Mother-house under the care of Sœur Geneviève Poisson. She writes in the following terms to Sœur Julienne Loret and her companions on the 14th of the same month: "Let us praise God, my dear Sisters; up to the present time through His mercy we have suffered from fright only, and no harm has befallen us. It is true that I was cowardly, I allowed myself to be persuaded to take refuge in the town, with some of our Sisters in a room we have hired. But the greater number remained behind, as well as the little children and their nurses. Our much-honoured Father did not move, though still in bad health, neither did M. Portail and the others."

Three weeks afterwards Louise writes to M. Vincent to remind him that she is still waiting to be recalled: "I beg very humbly of your charity," she says, "to remember that I am still here waiting to get your orders

to return. I have been nowhere, having been laid up in bed, but thank God I have escaped the illness I feared."

M. Vincent profited by the distribution of food made by the Sisters of Charity to give the poor who assembled in the St. Lazare quarters the instructions and exercises of a Mission. After preaching to them, he assembled the men and boys in the cloisters, and divided them into classes of eight or ten, each of which were catechised by a priest. Other priests gave instructions to the women assembled in the church.

Amongst the many refugees who sought shelter in Paris were a number of nuns, who were reduced either by fear of starvation, or by the perils to which they were exposed in lonely country villages, to break their enclosure. At the depositions taken for the canonisation of St. Vincent de Paul, a Sister of the name of Claude Muset testified that she was amongst the Sisters of Charity who served in the parish of St. Hippolite: "On which occasion that servant of God, seeing that a great number of religious of divers Orders had been turned out of their convents by the armies and were wandering hither and thither, and reduced to beggary, he assembled them together, and placed some of them with the Sisters of Charity in a house in the Faubourg St. Martin. They remained there several months and were fed by the company. I was one of the Sisters who had charge of these nuns in that house. M. Vincent often came to give them instructions, and Mass was celebrated there. . . . After he had assured himself of the good dispositions of the said nuns, he had them joined to other communities until, having procured them through the Ladies of Charity another habitation which he bought near St. Victor, he united all of them in that asylum."

The records of the time show a steady increase of des-

titution in Paris through the autumn of 1652. In October Condé, who had then been for three months in possession of the city, marched his army north to meet Turenne, who had assembled the Royal forces in the once fertile plains of Champagne. Again was that unfortunate province, and that of Picardy, made the battle-ground of the rival forces. M. Vincent, writing on the 3rd of January, 1653, alludes to these deplorable events in the following words: "I was at Mlle. Le Gras's house, giving a conference to her Daughters, when the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and the Présidente de Herse sent for me in order that we might consult together about taking measures for the assistance of the people in the Champagne district, which is in the possession of the armies, who are reducing it to the most pitiable state."

M. Vincent had already made an attempt, once more, to make peace between the belligerent parties, whilst the Court was in his neighbourhood at St. Denis in the summer of 1652. Needless to say it availed nothing. He followed it up by a letter to Pope Innocent X, on the 16th of August of the same year, to conjure him to heal the differences between the two parties: "In order to re-unite the Royal family and extinguish civil war." Again, a little later he addressed himself to Cardinal Mazarin on the 11th of September in a noteworthy letter (or memoir) imploring him to use his influence with the Queen Regent and the young King "to return and take possession of their city, and of the hearts of the people of Paris." On the 25th of October, and on the 20th of November, documents purporting to be a "Summary of the miseries of the country and of the neighbourhood of Paris," were presented to the Archbishop; these also were founded on statistics and information supplied by M. Vincent, though issued in the name of the Vicar-general, M. Feret. The outcome of these representations

was the establishment of a charitable emporium which was used as a *depôt* for all offerings of food, clothing, corn, medicaments, and workman's tools destined for the country which had chiefly suffered in this unnatural war. The response made to this appeal was very remarkable, and it came from all ranks of society. The corporation of butchers furnished 6,000 pounds of meat, bakers and grocers were equally generous. Side by side with acknowledgments for a string of pearls worth 24,000 livres, and silver, presented by Mme. de Miramion, there is mention made of some garments and a pair of shoes given by a poor woman, who after giving them departed barefoot. "When it was represented to her," the *Relations* says, "that she was more in need of receiving than of giving away, she answered that she gave the best she had because she was giving to God."

It was calculated that goods to the value of from twelve to thirteen thousand livres a month were forwarded by this *depôt* to the 193 villages where the sufferings and losses of the people had been most acute.

The Queen Regent, who, apart from her political crimes, appears to have been a kind-hearted woman, frequently visited the hospital at Châlons and other places where the Sisters of Charity were installed. The result of what she had seen of their care of the patients caused her to ask to have the Sisters sent to a military hospital at Sedan, when the tide of war had rolled up to the extreme North of France.

M. Vincent alluded to this invitation in a conference given on the 20th of July, 1654: "You have, then, been chosen, my dear Sisters, to go and nurse the poor soldiers wounded in the King's service; and by whom have you been chosen? It was by God Himself; though there are many in the neighbourhood of Sedan who were ready He did not cast His eye on them. No, it is

to the Sisters of Charity that His goodness—out of all France—has addressed itself, and to you, my Daughters, out of all your Sisters. And again it is the Queen who has asked for you. . . . And what are we but weak and miserable creatures—beggars indeed. Oh, we have indeed great reason to humble ourselves.” He then reminded them of their duty of instructing the poor wounded soldiers “in order to help them to make good deaths, or should they recover to enable them to lead better lives—doing for them what the Son of God did for man during His life on earth, and for His sake despising any praise of men, or suffering patiently their complaints. My dear Sisters, the angels from the moment you leave will count your footsteps: everything, whether it be your sayings, your doings, or your thoughts, will be counted before God. . . . Oh, my Sisters, how you will rejoice at having assisted so many poor people when you appear before our Lord !”

Louise mentions them a little later: “Ma Sœur Hardemont with three others have gone to Sedan to nurse wounded soldiers. They have been much edified at seeing them die like good Christians. Pray hard to God for the King’s army, and for the conversion of the enemy.”

A truce of a kind was patched up between the combatants in July 1653, which went by the name of the Peace of Bordeaux. But Condé, whose enmity to the Government of the Queen Regent and Mazarin, and equally to the peace of France, appeared to be relentless, never subscribed to its terms, and having thrown in his fortunes with the Spaniards prolonged the struggle for seven years more, till peace was at last restored at the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1660.

Meanwhile Louise de Marillac never ceased her supplications for the wrath of God to be averted from her

unfortunate country, the prey to such overwhelming woes. "We are continuing our prayers in the community for peace," she writes to one of her Daughters, "as long as the war lasts. These prayers are the anthem, and prayer to St. Michael in the morning, after the *Sacro sanctæ*, and the prayers to St. Geneviève after the *Angelus*. Also, for the last three months, two of our Sisters have been taking it in turn to pray day and night to avert God's ire from us, which we acknowledge we have deserved for our sins."

Louise had to lament many deaths in these years of national disaster. But it would almost seem that as fast as Sisters died at their post of duty, others came to take their places. During the years 1651 and 1652 there were many applications for Sisters to nurse, and teach in poor-schools, and start new *Charités*, such as at Brienne in Champagne, at Auxerre, at Châteaudun where (in 1653) they were put in charge of a hospital. And in every case Louise was able to find Sisters in response to these appeals.

It was in the month of July 1652 that M. Vincent received an invitation from the Queen of Poland, Louise-Marie di Gonzaga, to send several members of the company to Poland. But before following them to these distant lands—and it is hardly possible for us to realise how distant they must have seemed to the Sisters of Charity of those days—we propose to devote a chapter to considering the venerable foundress in the character of guide and spiritual mother to the company of which she was the first superior.

CHAPTER XVI

To have read, or still better to have diligently studied, Louise de Marillac's letters is to know her as she really was. Her inmost character reveals itself in them at every turn. We see her single-mindedness; her patience with human frailty, in spite of her high ideals of what is asked of those who are called to the service of God; her gentleness in correction, her wise and mature judgment in matters temporal as well as spiritual; above all her love of God and man. Owing to the narrow margin we have at our disposal for extracts, and the large number of letters of hers extant—extending to two volumes in the first edition of her works—we propose limiting them to those which specially bear on her instructions to her spiritual Daughters. Some remarks made on this subject by Gobillon, who had a thorough knowledge of the life and character of the holy foundress, derived from her ten years' residence in the parish of St. Laurent, will serve as a preface to them:

“ Mlle. Le Gras's charity, which was extended to so many objects, was not oblivious of the congregation to which she was so closely bound. She looked upon her Daughters as subjects to whom it was specially due, and having chosen them to minister to her love of her neighbour she wished them to learn the feelings they should entertain for their neighbours by those she manifested to them in their own persons. She had a mother's heart and

tenderness for them. Having received the Sisters, and as it were given birth to them in her company, she took a special care to form them after her own mind—applying herself personally to the work of training them to the service of the poor; teaching them frequently to read, and instructing them in the mysteries of the faith, as well as in the practice of prayer and Christian piety. She gave them a conference weekly to maintain them in the love and fervour of their observance; and though she tried to use simple language, she could not help clothing her thoughts in a high and elevated manner. Thus the ardour with which she spoke penetrated their souls, inspiring them with the sentiments with which her own was filled. Her sweetness and affability were such as to win the affection of all. She gave the Sisters liberty to address themselves to her at all times, never allowing them to perceive that they troubled her, even when she had to leave her prayers or occupation to attend to them. She had an answer for each one of the Sisters who came to her, however numerous they were, and she gave it with perfect tranquillity and evenness of temper, and without a word of reproof to them for disturbing her, however great the inconvenience was to her. And when through ill-health she was unable to hold converse with her Daughters, her reception of them was so kind and affectionate, that in spite of her having to keep silence, they left her presence consoled. This excellent superior united a constant watchfulness over the company with much love for it. She was most careful in observing whether the Sisters were faithful to their Rule, and had a particular care of those who were at a distance, informing herself about their state, and guiding them by her correspondence, and imparting to them by letter the conferences she was in the habit of giving to the community. . . . When she corrected any of her Daughters she made it

very clear to them that she was led by charity only. Instead of reproaching the delinquent, she excused her as far as it was possible to do so, and by a stretch of humility accused herself of having been the cause of her fault. To inspire the guilty with sorrow for their faults and to spare them from the confusion of it was her first object, and in order to do so she acquainted them with their errors in private, and never spoke of them except under pressing necessity, and then only to those whom she knew to be thoroughly trustworthy and discreet. She was careful to seize the right moment, and to find out the dispositions in which these persons were before giving them advice, and she employed gentleness or severity, according to what their characters required. When she corrected, it was with so much prudence and love, that she managed to make all that she had said acceptable to the recipient; by this means she left them encouraged to do better, and ready to persevere in their good resolutions for the future.

“When she knew that any of the Sisters had temptations against their vocation, she employed every means to encourage them, as she looked upon the loss of it as the greatest misfortune that could befall them, and she had a particular grace for winning hearts, and strengthening them in their good purposes.

“She had to use great violence to her inclinations in order to send any of the Sisters away. On one occasion her attention being drawn to one who had deserved it by her bad conduct, she answered: ‘That those who have charge of souls have much to consider. Do you think,’ she added, ‘that all one has to do is to get rid of them? Oh, there is great reason for care and thought in these cases.’ On such occasions she was guided by rules laid down by M. Vincent, and we can appreciate these by a letter he wrote to a girl who before entering

the company wished to satisfy herself about her future :

“ ‘ You may rest assured that it is rare for any one to be turned out, and then only for striking faults, never for ordinary ones—or even for extraordinary ones, if they are not considerable and of frequent recurrence ; even then their dismissal is put off as long as possible, and only after much patience has been exercised towards them, and every means to correct them having been employed in vain. Patience and charity are especially used towards those who have been long in the company ; so that if some leave, it is because they go of their own accord, either by want of stability, or because having fallen into tepid and lukewarm ways in God’s service He has vomited them “ out of His mouth,” and rejected them, even before their superiors have decided on doing so. To suppose that those who are faithful to God and submissive to obedience leave the company is to be under a delusion—both as regards those who are in good health and those who are infirm. Everything is done to encourage to perseverance all who come to the company, and every care is taken for those under one category, as of those in the other, till their death.’

“ Mlle. Le Gras was guided all through her life by these rules, and she made it apparent to every one that nothing was nearer to her heart than that her Daughters should persevere in their vocation. Accordingly there was no office of charity which she did not perform with regard to them on all occasions. She shared in their sorrows from whatever cause they emanated, and did her utmost to console them by letters or by visits. When they fell ill she spared no pains to alleviate their sufferings. She treated them all as very dear daughters, often going to see those who lived in her neighbourhood, and giving minute orders with regard to those who lived a long way

off. The tenderness and kindness which animated her words and actions when she paid them visits gave her Daughters so much joy and consolation, that it appeared to them as if by her very presence she cured them. She had a special gift for inspiring them with confidence in their sufferings, and disposing them to die happily, and whenever her infirm health allowed of it, she never failed to render them all the last charitable offices. If she was unable to visit them, she sent them the Sister Assistant, and was unceasing in the proofs she gave of her care and solicitude for them.

“She never lost any of the Sisters without deep affliction, and shedding tears; and when any had died, notwithstanding her submission to the Will of God, much precaution had to be taken in breaking the news to her. At one time when death was very busy amongst them, she feared that these losses were due to God’s ire enkindled against her and the company. M. Vincent re-assured her in these words: ‘I fear that from what you tell me you are suffering from too great depression. You are alarmed lest God is displeased with you and rejects your service of Him since He has taken so many of your Daughters. Rather it is a sign that He cherishes them in treating them in this manner; for He is behaving to you as He behaved to His beloved Spouse the Church, for He not only allowed those who were assisting at its foundation to die a natural death, but also permitted many to die in sufferings and torments. Might it not have been likewise said that He was moved to anger against these young and holy plants? Therefore you must no longer think this, but quite the contrary.’

“When writing to the Sisters to acquaint them with the death of their relations, she would often take occasion to exhort them to despise this life and aim at a holy perseverance in their vocation: ‘Courage, my dear Sisters,’

she said on making an announcement of this sort to a community. ' This life is short, and the reward of our sufferings is eternal ; but it is only given to those who have behaved themselves valiantly. I wish you all victorious in this combat.' ”¹

It was especially in her advice to those whom she had put in a position of authority that Louise de Marillac showed herself in the light of a true mother to her spiritual family. What could be more tender and considerate, for instance, than these words addressed to the superior of the little community at St. Denis?—" I feel sure you are doing all you are able to comfort our Sister Jeanne, and that you look upon her as a young and tender plant, from which good fruit may be expected, to be presented some day at the everlasting banquet of our good God. How happy you should be, my dear Sister, if by your gentleness and cordiality in reproving her, in all love, you could cooperate with Divine grace for her perfection ! I pray you to do this with all my heart. . . . I beg of you also, my Sister, to admonish each of our Sisters separately for their good, and to give them an example of patience and submission, and by your cordiality and your forbearance to be their consolation in their little troubles. It requires much patience to help them in little ways ; the greatest is to sympathise with them in their pains, and to represent to them the importance of adapting their wills to the Will of God, whose designs are unchangeable. You should also make a change sometimes when you see they have tired of an office, without waiting for them to ask for it. In short, you should use much loving-kindness in meeting our Sisters half-way in their wishes without appearing to notice them. You know that the duties imposed upon them are not so rigid as not to bend before the law of charity, and if we are *Sœurs Servantes* that should mean

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, Gobillon, t. i. pp. 113-26.

that we have to bear the heaviest burthens of mind and body, and that we must try to comfort our dear Sisters as much as we are able, as they will always have enough to do in putting up with us—sometimes on account of our tempers and at other times on account of the repugnance which nature and the evil spirit puts in the way of their obedience to us. I beg our Saviour to be Himself your strength and your consolation.”¹

The following letter was addressed to the community of Sisters of Charity at the hospital of Angers :

“MY VERY DEAR SISTERS,

“You have been in great anxiety about the illness of our dear Sister Cécile, whom I pray our Lord to preserve to you ; also about our Sisters Claude and Marie, who have likewise been ill. I trust you have taken these afflictions from the hand of our common Father, Who knows what is necessary for us, and consoles or afflicts as He sees best. What do I say, my dear Sisters ? If we loved His holy Will nothing would afflict us, since we know that He loves us and wills our good in all things. You have lately had a severe trial in being disappointed of your hope of seeing M. Duchesne for your jubilee. Oh, my dear Sisters, let us be like good householders who make our profit out of all things, and let us remember that it is not our own consolation or satisfactions, or what we get from creatures, that we should seek, but God alone, and that we should go to Him by the same path as His Son—Who teaches us by His example that it is one of mortification, interior and exterior.

“I have some reason to think that you have been having trials from those in authority ; if this is the case, my Sisters, ask fervently of our Lord the spirit of subjection and submission to the leading of His Providence.

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iii. pp. 343-5.

Take care to avoid giving offence to any one, and above all be truthful and disinterested. Oh, how good it is to suffer for justice's sake! But let us take great care not to give cause for such accusations, that is to say let us not give a handle to them by our behaviour, and above all not by our curiosity, or by mixing ourselves up in questions which do not concern us.

"I do not doubt, my dear Sisters, that you have a tender care of our invalid Sisters—whom I greet with all my heart. Observe, my Sisters, you cannot doubt that it is the love of God which puts them in the state in which they are—since it is in consequence of their fidelity to their holy vocation. This being the case we should willingly submit to all the trials and inconveniences that their maladies may bring upon us, only showing our great willingness to be of any comfort and assistance we can to them. I beg of our Saviour to give you the grace of His own Spirit, so that you should support and assist them in the spirit of charity and sweetness for the sake of His holy love."¹

Again, in the end of the year 1650 Louise had reason to warn her Daughters of the community at the hospital of Nantes of the dangers of disunion. It was on the occasion when M. Lambert, one of the priests of the Mission, had been sent to them to hear their complaints and settle their differences.

"In the name of God," she writes, "my very dear Sisters, be very submissive to all M. Lambert ordains for you, remembering that he comes to you from M. Vincent and by the Will of God. I hope from God's mercy, that all the little differences there have been between you in the past will serve only for the increase of your perfection, and to make known to all the Sisters of Charity how necessary it is that they should be humble, submissive,

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iii. pp. 357-9.

and attached to the practice of their Rule, for without these things they are like an unstrung chaplet of beads. Take courage, my dear Sisters ; if the enemy of our souls has had the upper hand for a little while, let us do violence to him and defeat him.”¹

Louise's letters to Sœur Julienne Loret at the *Charité* at Chars are not only frequent, but bear a touch of familiar country life. Sœur Julienne was near enough to Paris to be able to send her holy Mother fresh fruit, but apparently she did not shine in her packing of them. “Many thanks to you, my dear Sister, for your excellent fruit, but since you promise to send us some more, I must ask you to line the basket with hay, and even to put more hay between the fruit, because those you sent were much bruised and injured. You have not told us if the cake was of your own manufacture ; if it was you are a good performer. Our invalids, if they were able to write, would thank you gratefully for the cake and for your fruit.”²

The following letter, written to the superior at Angers upon avoiding too precipitate judgment about the Sisters who were being sent to her, is specially prudent and wise :

“I regret much having deferred writing to announce the return of our Sister Marguerite. She has not failed to give me all your messages. I trust that the remembrance of her will help you to have a great union and consideration for each other for the love of Jesus Christ—Who teaches us this virtue as a proof that we are His. And for the same reason, my dear Sisters, I beg of you not to form a hasty judgment upon the Sisters who have lately arrived. You know these changes require tact and patience, and that it takes time to learn new habits, and for people to accustom themselves to serve the poor well and adroitly. All that I can tell you is that these

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iii. p. 361.

² *Ibid.*, p. 377.

are all armed with good intentions, and have got on well where they have been before. So you must not think even if you repeat the same order a dozen times you have done enough, for you know memory does not always serve one on these occasions. For this reason, my dear Sister, you must exercise patience, not only on these last subjects, but on all the Sisters in general, and exercise it with much sweetness, condescension, and prudence. And above all practise great reticence in not expressing your opinion, nor saying to one Sister what you know of another.

“ It is necessary for the Sister Servants to be dead to themselves in order to acquit themselves well of their office. Oh, if we only realised what our responsibilities were, how we should dread the weight of such offices, and how the fear of being good for nothing in our own lives should make us tremble at being employed in superintending others. May God be glorified, and may we be everlastingly humbled, as we deserve, if we have not made use of our charge according to His holy designs. I am not saying this specially to you, my dear Sister, from any knowledge I have, but only speaking generally of all who are in a position of authority, and to no one more than of myself, who have a greater reason to fear than any one. Let us humble ourselves deeply before all so as to try to keep in safety, and above all let us give ourselves wholly to God, to suffer every possible humiliation that our pride requires, in order that it may not be the cause of our eternal ruin.

“ Say to our Sisters who have been with you from the first, that I beg of them to renew their courage, and to practise with fresh zeal one of the principal points in our Rule, which is never to communicate their troubles to others, and not to inquire curiously into each other's sentiments and dispositions.

“ Behave with great respect to Mgr. d’Angers in your intercourse with him, and do not take advantage of the honour he does you to become too familiar with him. Admire his humility, and be astonished at God having chosen you to the position you occupy ; and prepare yourself to pay for the honour which you receive, and which you do not deserve, by the humiliations you may get later, when God may show His mercy to you by moving you from the office you are at present discharging. Forgive me, my dear Sister, these little warnings which the duty I owe to God obliges me to give you. It is the cordial affection I have for you which causes me to speak to you in this manner.”¹

Louise’s letter to Sister Barbe Angiboust and the community at Brienne, during the time of the calamities of the civil war, shows her deep sympathy with her Sisters in their anxieties :

“ MY MOST DEAR SISTERS,

“ In the name of God do not weary of your sufferings, nor of finding yourselves without consolation ! Oh, if we only could penetrate into the secrets of God when He puts us into positions such as you are in, we should see that it ought to be the time of our greatest consolations. Well ! and so you come across numbers of unfortunate people whom you are unable to succour. God also sees them, and has He not the power if He willed it to give them greater comfort and assistance ? Carry their cross and burthen with them ; do your utmost to give them some little relief—*that* is in your power, and remain in peace. Perhaps you have your share in this poverty ? Let that be your consolation, for even if you had abundance, your hearts would not have permitted you to make use of it—seeing the sufferings of

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)* t. iv. pp. 10-13.

your masters, the poor. God chastises His people—that is each one of us—for our sins; is it not reasonable, therefore, that we should suffer with the rest? What are we that we should think ourselves exempt from the universal woes? If, through the goodness of God, we have not been exposed to the greatest calamities, let us be deeply grateful to Him, and let us believe that it is through no merit of ours, but solely from His mercy. . . . What God asks from you, my dear Sisters, at this moment, is a great union and mutual charity, so that you should all work together in God's service, in great humility and sweetness; and that nothing that passes between you should go further, so that you may be a cause of edification to the world. *Ma Sœur* Barbe, I beg of you, if you see that our Sister Jeanne has too much work to do, and cannot relieve her of part of it, get some one from outside to help her, as we cannot send you any assistance. We are forced to do the same in Paris, as there are some parishes in which there are 5,000 poor people to whom we give soup. In our parish there are 2,000 poor, whom we are feeding, not counting the invalids. Pray to God for us, my dear Sister, and believe me in His holy love yours, etc.,

“LOUISE DE MARILLAC.”¹

To another Sister Servant she writes on the subject of the confidence we should repose in God in trials:

“MY VERY DEAR SISTER,

“I sympathise with your sorrow at having had so little time to speak to M. N. . . . We must submit to the ruling of Divine Providence, and attach ourselves the more strongly to God when suffering the privation of consolations from creatures. Our good God knew

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 34-6.

your wants, and could have ordered matters otherwise, if it had been necessary for His glory and your good. Remain then in peace, and in the confidence you should have in Our Saviour's love. What cause have we not for this, my Sisters, when we think of the assurances He gave to His disciples on earth, when He wished to gain their love—exciting them to have no care of their persons or their necessities. Let us then advance courageously from day to day in the path in which God has placed us, and in which He desires we should go to Him.

“ In God's name, my dear Sisters, do your utmost to assist the souls of your poor sick people to make the acts of faith, hope, and charity which are necessary to salvation. Make them hate sin, and love virtue, so that they may resolve to lead a good life, should they recover, or prepare them to make a happy death. . . . I know that it is impossible for you to give a great deal of time to these exhortations, but, whilst going and coming, you could make many interior acts which may draw down God's blessing on them. I beg of those of our Sisters who have proposed returning, not to disquiet themselves, and to believe that God's goodness will never be wanting to them. Oh, my dear Sisters, how dangerous it is to wish greatly for anything before God wishes it for us! Doubtless your wishes have always been regulated by submission of spirit, and thus I do not blame you. But believe me a change of place is always attended with danger, that is to say if it is through your own choice. Many have asked to be changed, and it has ended in the loss of their vocation. And what do we ask, my dear Sister, if it is not to please our Saviour? Let us wait in peace till His Will is signified to us through our superiors. This is our practice, my very dear Sister, to submit ourselves to Divine Providence.”¹

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 54.

To Sister Julienne Loret, who had been suffering from over-work at Chars, and had just lost a member of the community, Louise writes a letter full of thoughtful kindness:

“ I give thanks to God, my dear Sisters, for all the assistance He has given in His goodness to our dear defunct Sister who in a short time had, I believe, made great progress in the perfection to which God had destined her. You are very happy to have had it in your power to render her service. I beg of our Saviour to give you in return an everlasting reward ; but I must beg of you to save yourself a little, and to be careful of your health, and for this object I think some exercise is necessary for you. If you trust to Sister Philippe she will undertake every kind of work, and will not stop till she breaks down altogether ; and for this reason I beg of you and of her to take it in turn to teach in the school, and the one to do what is required in the house-work, whilst the other has the care of the sick patients outside. . . . Sister Marguerite should make up the accounts of what you have paid to the nurses. Please let me know the state the children are in, and be careful to see that they should be returned when they are sent for. I am, etc.”¹

In a letter addressed to Sœur Jeanne Lepintre, Louise exhorts her to lean entirely on God, renouncing human consolation for the Divine:

“ How happy you are, my very dear Sister, to know yourself so well and to love the Divine Will so truly, which, when accomplished in us, should be our only good. I implore of this Divine Will to reveal itself to your dear heart, teaching you, and strengthening you, ‘in the inward man,’ particularly on two points: One is with regard to things which are passing round you,

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 49-50.

of which you fear you have not taken sufficient cognisance, and the other upon the pain you feel in a repugnance to confide in people, and in the belief that you cannot find any one who understands you. Let us remember, my dear Sister, that the great St. Teresa, who had affairs of an importance with which ours could scarcely compare, often had need of advice, and when she was not able to consult those she would have wished to consult, she, with much humility and simplicity, asked advice of any director who was sent to her by Divine Providence—listening to them as if God had spoken to her, and taking the help she required for the moment, and leaving herself, without troubling, in God's hands. I am satisfied, my dear Sister, that you have often experienced the truth that where man is wanting to us God communicates Himself more abundantly; and it is for our greater good if we will to give Him the satisfaction we should have had in a manifestation of our consciences, which manifestation is a great satisfaction to the soul without being of much profit to her. I am sending you two of our best trained Sisters. I trust, my dear Sister, that you are very particular not to show more affection to one than to another. If some are more faithful than others, do not make it appear to them that you wish they should acquaint you with what is going on, but listen to all that is said to you indifferently, without showing any ill-feeling to those who show you less confidence.

“I trust, my dear Sister, that our Saviour will not fail to give you all the graces you require to re-establish union in your community so that God may be glorified in it.”¹

The following letter addressed to Sister Barbe Angiboust when leaving Brienne shows the order in which

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 80.

the holy founders expected a Sister Servant to put the affairs of a *Charité* when giving it up :

“ I feel deeply for you, my very dear Sister, in more ways than one. May God be blessed for the strength He has given you to work in the place you are in, and also for the work you have accomplished at Châlons. How happy you are to have been employed in such holy actions. I trust that you do not fail in gratitude to our Lord—lest the greatness of these graces should be a matter of reproach to you.

“ M. Vincent, our much-honoured Father, has given me orders to let you know that you are to return on the receipt of this by the first convenient occasion, that is to say with our Sister Marie Poulet. I cannot tell you, my dear Sister, how rejoiced we shall be to see you again, and I think your poor body is in great want of a rest so as to be employed again elsewhere for the glory of God. I am sure, before leaving, you will do all you can to give the satisfaction that you owe to your neighbour. I know your heart, and that it is ready to undergo even humiliations under such conditions. I implore of our Saviour to bless all the words and actions which you will use or perform with regard to this subject, and am in His holy love yours, etc.” Later on, Louise adds this postscript: “ You will leave a note of all that you have belonging to the poor ; and this you will sign, taking a copy of it, which you will cause to be signed by your successor, with whom you will leave everything.”

To Sister Cécile at Angers Louise writes in 1654 as follows: “ It is necessary to strive to acquire evenness of mind and interior peace in all events that happen to us. This seems very difficult, but to effect it we must make use of two or three means which will be of great help to us: one is, my dear Sisters, to accustom ourselves to receive all subjects of annoyance as coming

to us from the hand of God, Who is our Father and Who knows what is best for us. Another means is to remember that the trials from which we are suffering will not last for ever, that a few hours more and they will pass and we shall feel them no more. And the third motive for acquiring peace in our little troubles is to reflect that God sees the state we are in, and if we love Him that which causes us much pain if endured for love of Him, and in order to accomplish His holy Will, will one day be a source of great consolation to us. Let us then try to do the best we can in order to please Him. The less exterior consolation we derive from creatures the more we shall advance in His holy love; for do you not know, my dear Sisters, what our Saviour does to a soul deprived of all human consolation, and who is happy enough and courageous enough to make this use of it? He Himself takes pleasure in being the guide of such a soul. And even if she should not be conscious of this guidance yet she may be confident that God will not suffer her to go wrong, and this should be the great object of our desires."

In the following letter Louise gives advice to Sister Elizabeth at Angers on her duties as assistant:

"I must tell you that I am edified with the love you have of obedience, and at the same time a little astonished that you should doubt your having opportunities of practising this great virtue in the place where you are, and where you have received so many graces since God has called you thither. You observe, my dear Sister, that the office you have been given is perhaps the cause of this; perhaps you are right, but in quite a different sense to that in which you understand it.

"Allow me to tell you, my dear Sister, that unless we keep a strict guard over ourselves when we are first put in authority, and if we have not a strong desire to

advance in solid virtue, we are in great danger. As, for instance, your office being that of assistant you have much need to ask of God the grace to keep guard over yourself, so as not to take upon yourself more than you should. Remember that you are not more exempt from the duty of obedience, and from little humiliations, than you were before you were given this office; on the contrary: you are even more so bound in order to give example to the others. This applies also to cordiality, and submission, and openness of language with the Sister Servant, which are even more necessary to you now, inasmuch as you should neither order anything, nor give any advice without ascertaining her views and intentions, especially where you are now, as those she has evinced have always given satisfaction. If something is said to you which gives you pain you must humble yourself, and take the cross that is sent you with great good-will, seeing that it is our Saviour who sends it to you.”¹

To another Sister, a somewhat illiterate one, who was with Barbe Angiboust at Bernay, she writes as follows: “I thank you for giving me your news. Tell me if the letter was in your own writing, as, if it was not, you should not make use of any hand to write it except Sister Barbe’s, who would be willing to help you; but it seems to me you have begun to write yourself? Even though your letter should only be that of a beginner, if there is something in it you wish to keep secret write your letter yourself, thus you would not be obliged to show it; still, out of friendly feeling you should tell your Sister to whom you were writing. Do not fear; she will not ask what you have to say to us, nor would she look at your letter, as she knows she would offend God by doing so.

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 116.

“ I think I see you two living in much peace, and in the desire of a union and cordiality which consists in great openness with each other, so that you will speak to each other about all that you have done when you meet after having been separated, telling each other also where you are going when you go out—one doing so by obligation, and the duty of submission ; and the other out of kindness and consideration. And so on with regard to your little exercises. If one should feel sad she will overcome herself so as to recreate with her Sister ; and the other, though she feels gay, will accommodate herself to the humour of her who is depressed, and thus little by little draw her out of her low spirits. And all this for the love of God, and in order that you may resist the temptation to go in search of consolation elsewhere and seek a relief to your poor heart there, which would be the complete ruin of the holy friendship which should exist between two Sisters, in which I beg of our Saviour to preserve you by His holy love.”¹

Louise writes to Sister Cécile at Angers on the spirit of the company with regard to the direction of souls: “ I beg of you all, my dear Sisters, to have great confidence in his (the Abbé de Vaux) counsels, and to obey him very exactly, and with great simplicity for the love of God Who has sent him to you for your guidance. But do not think, my dear Sisters, that it is necessary for you to speak often to him, nor even for all of you to do so at all, unless for a pressing necessity, and should he have a little time to bestow on you. It is the ordinary custom of the company for the Sister Servant to take all necessary advice, and she should communicate this to her Sisters in her guidance of them ; thus the spirit of union is fostered in communities, and confidence in

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 123.

the superior strengthened thereby, to the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. Without this, my dear Sisters, the Kingdom of God would not come in our souls, and it is by these means we shall become possessed of His peace and love." ¹

Again a little later she addresses a collective letter to the Sisters at Angers, beginning with the superior and continuing to Sister Elizabeth:

"I cannot express the consolation my heart received from your last letter. . . . And you, my dear Sister Elizabeth, what joy it gives me to know the dispositions in which you are at present! I always believed that your troubles would pass away: it is thus that we should belong to God Who wills that we should will no other thing than what He Wills. Be then very brave in your self-distrust. I say the same to all of you, my dear Sisters. I wish you all to be full of a love which occupies you so powerfully and so sweetly in God, and so charitably in the service of the poor, that your hearts have no room to admit thoughts which would be dangerous to your vocation. Courage then, dear Sisters; let us only seek to please God by the exact practice of His holy commandments, and of the evangelical counsels (since by the goodness of God we have been called to practise them), and the exact observance of our Rule, and this we should do in a cheerful and diligent manner which will help us to keep them. Serve your dear masters, the poor, with great kindness; show great respect for those in authority, and great honour to the ecclesiastic directors, for this you owe to them." ²

A letter to Sister Laurence at Bernay conveys some very sound advice on aspirations to perfection:

"I thank God with all my heart for the good desires He inspires you with. When your heart prompts you

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 137.

² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

strongly to do more than you are accustomed to do, teach it to humble itself, saying to yourself: Let me do what is permitted me to do, let me be faithful to our Rule both interiorly and exteriorly. And then rest in the assurance that our Saviour is pleased with you. It appears to me sometimes that we are very anxious to perform great penances, and extraordinary acts of devotion, and do not perceive that the enemy of our souls takes pleasure in seeing us amuse ourselves with these empty desires, while we neglect the practice of ordinary virtues which present themselves every hour of the day; and thus we lose the graces which are attached to those virtues, in order to wish for greater ones which God has no intention of giving us. This lesson which I give you, my dear Sisters, I feel I require even more myself, and I beseech you to ask of our Lord that I may learn it well. I am in His holy love, yours, etc.,

“LOUISE DE MARILLAC.”¹

Writing to a community who lived at a distance, Louise recommends them “to be very careful not to be misled by the enemy of our salvation who is ever putting difficulties to our perseverance in well-doing; he would be satisfied if even at the last day of our lives he succeeded in turning us aside from our good resolutions. Believe me our great aim should be to mortify ourselves severely, not by outward penances, but by a submission which comes of a true and solid humility, loving to be despised and making war on our senses and our passions, and attaching ourselves to strict obedience and mutual charity without preferences, for this hinders partialities and particular friendships. Above all entertain affection and esteem for your superior, or her successor when

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 149.

God should take pity on her and remove her from that post, for I can assure you, my dear Sisters, the direction of others is a heavy burthen." ¹

To Sister Cécile at Angers she writes on the subject of one of M. Vincent's conferences :

"The subject of our conference was the necessity which we should feel to work for the attainment of our own perfection this year more than we have ever done before.

"The first point was the reason why we should work at our *own* perfection. The second on the means we have of doing so. The third the obstacles we may meet with in doing so. If M. l'Abbé (de Vaux) had a little time to give you a conference on this subject it would be of great use to you. Believe me, my dear Sisters, that conversations in private, sometimes with one, and sometimes with another, are opposed to the attainment of perfection. To speak together when you are all assembled in God's name is of much greater value for your sanctification, provided that each one takes for herself all that is said, and as coming to her from God. But may I tell you what often prevents our profiting and becoming more faithful to God for instructions that are given to us in all charity? It is because we do not reflect who it is who is speaking to us, and we say to ourselves: 'That is being said to me on account of the low opinion they have of me,' or else—instead of realising that we require all the good advice we get—we are so foolish as to say: 'Ah, that is meant for so-and-so. How well they have described her!' Is it not too bad of me to say such things? My dear Sisters, do not think I believe this of *you*. But because I have seen cases of such things happening before, and because we are all capable of committing the faults we see others fall

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 174.

into, that I have permitted myself to describe such obstacles to our perfection—from which I beg of God to preserve you.

“I am much consoled at what you tell me about the state of Sister Claude, as also of that of all my dear Sisters. If humility, simplicity, and charity, which lead to mutual sympathy and union amongst you, are well established, your little community will be composed of as many saints as there are members of it. But we must not wait for another to set the example: let us be the first to begin if any of the holy practices have been neglected. And it is not enough to begin, we must each of us generously resolve: ‘I will never give up these practices, even if I should be the only one who should be faithful to them.’

“It has pleased our Saviour to take Sister Claude Chantereau, who nursed the poor in Lower Normandy, to Himself. Oh, my Sisters, she has indeed left a sweet odour of virtue behind her! Our Sister who had the happiness of being with her has sent us word of the consolation she derived from it. These poor girls have indeed showed their fidelity to God; they are fifteen leagues from Caen and in such a remote part of the country that sometimes they have been three months without any news of us reaching them, and our letters have often been lost; and notwithstanding this they lived just as they would have done here. Thank God for these graces.”¹

To Sister Laurence at Bernay she writes:

“I praise God for the way He has blessed your work. I am sure you well remember that in order to make the service we render God pleasing to Him, it is necessary it should proceed from a right heart: that is, one thoroughly trained in the mortification of our own judgment,

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 191-4.

of self-will, and the satisfaction of our senses and passions. Without this, my dear Sister, our actions are merely human activities in which self-love takes its satisfaction and are very far removed from the love of God—the latter being the philosopher's stone which turns all to gold, that is, which renders our actions meritorious.”¹

A letter to Sister Marguerite Chétif is of peculiar interest as it alludes to her interior trials—a subject in which no one was more conversant than the Venerable Louise de Marillac. Sister Marguerite afterwards succeeded Louise as second superior of the company.

“It does not astonish me to hear that our Saviour has made you a partaker of His interior sufferings. Do you think you could be thus honoured before God and His angels without the privilege costing you anything? I do not doubt that His grace will be your strong support in your dryness and desolation. Are you not aware, my dear Sister, that these are the trials in which the sacred Spouse of our souls takes His good pleasure as long as we make use of them with a loving patience and a tranquil acquiescence—not allowing ourselves to be disturbed by our sufferings whilst we are in this state. I know well that you do not lose the opportunity of proving your fidelity to God on these occasions, and that you shut your heart to human reasonings which would tempt you to look at it from another point of view than that of the leading of Divine Providence and of the most holy Will of God.

“I know you turn a deaf ear to regrets for the ‘flesh-pots of Egypt.’ Too often the moment we are proved by mortification and temptations we become a prey to depression and think ourselves in a lamentable state! And truly so we should be if we did not cling to God

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 199.

by all the powers of our souls, saying to Him with all our hearts: 'My God, let it be according to Thy good pleasure. I am thine.' We should do all our actions purely and simply for love of God, paying no attention to these trials, being satisfied with accomplishing His will in the state in which He places us, whether it be by His leading or by that of creatures.

"Have you ever noticed, my dear Sister, what is said of St. John the Baptist, who, as you know, gave so many proofs of love of our Blessed Lord and faith in Him? Notwithstanding this we learn that he went at a distance from Him, or rather our Lord, by the vocation he had given him, separated St. John from Himself, though he had not been born in sin. Do you not think our Lord wished to give this as an example to souls whom He desires to separate from all earthly affections in order to fill them with Divine love? What a consolation it should be to a soul to find herself thus entirely dependent on God for her guidance; it gives me cause to rejoice with you on account of it."¹

In a letter to the community at Angers she congratulated them on the good account she has received of them from the Abbé de Vaux—her, and the community's, very good friend. She then proceeds to say:

"We have a practice amongst our Sisters here which appears to me excellent; I pray them, and you also, my dear Sisters, to adopt it. It is that the Servant Sister is informed about everything that is done at the hospital, and that she only is responsible for its management to all the officials, having ascertained from each one of the Sisters the state of affairs under their separate charge. If this was always done you may rest assured all would go well, and that you would be in good repute

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 223-5.

outside, and that the cordiality and union between you would be so strong as to defy the efforts of the evil one to destroy it.

“We are under great obligations to M. Ratier for the trouble he has taken in giving you so many conferences. The angels will take note of them in order to present to God the profit you derive from them, and the evil one in order to reproach you with them at the last day if you neglect to put them into practice. To write them out, word for word, would be too much, and take all the time of one Sister. It should suffice for you to put down the principal headings of advice that he gives you, and from time to time to talk them over between yourselves.”¹

Louise in a letter to Sister Laurence at Bernay gives her advice as to her behaviour to the Ladies of Charity :

“I am not astonished at your difficulties with the ladies: it commonly happens that wherever there are hospitals in conjunction with the *Charités* in parishes, there are differences of opinion, without there being any fault on one side or the other; because each one feels obliged to procure the advantage of the work of which he, or she, is in charge. It should be your object to be very humble, and to take care that no one should be able to accuse you of arrogance or self-sufficiency. You should represent to yourself that you are subject to all and the last of all, and that you have no power or authority—as indeed you ought to realise and behave accordingly, doing nothing without the permission of those to whom M. l’Abbé has given the conduct of affairs.

“As for the statement which you have to render, let it be as exact and as humbly worded as possible; and with regard to the Ladies of Charity you should not look

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 229.

to see what their rank is before treating them with proper respect. It should be sufficient for you to know that they are members of the Association, for you to honour them as mothers of your masters, the poor, even in cases when they contribute nothing to their support. If you only knew, my dear Sisters, what lowliness, what sweetness, and submission our Lord asks of Sisters of Charity, you would grieve if you did not act in this spirit.”¹

A letter from Louise to Sister Marguerite Chétif shows how affectionate the relations were between her and her spiritual Daughters: “It seems to me, my dear Sister, that I might complain of the complaints you make of me, as I have written several times to you since I received your letter mentioning your vows, and as it reached me very near the day of the renewal, so that you would not have got my letter in time for it, we contented ourselves with accompanying you in spirit with much joy and consolation.

“It astonishes me a little, my dear Sister, that you should harbour thoughts against the assurance I have of your affection, and which you should have of mine, for I may say that never have you appeared to me to belong more to God or to be more true to your vocation than you are now. What more could I ask of you—knowing also with what diligence you work in the service of our masters, for which may God be for ever blessed. In God’s name never let any misgiving enter into your head that I am displeased with you, because I am convinced that you have no idea of giving us cause for any displeasure, and that on the contrary it would appear as if God is increasing His graces to you in reward of your fidelity to Him in your trials, and your confidence in His Divine guidance.”²

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 237-8. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 241-2.

To Sister Anne Hardemont, who was laid up with illness, Louise writes as follows :

“ MY VERY DEAR SISTER,

“ You know that the greatest works of God, and those which are most to His honour and glory, are the most trying to those who undertake them. Do not fail therefore to give yourself often to Him, and to ask Him what He wishes you to do. Do not be anxious about your strength ; rest assured you will receive as much as you require from the goodness of God for the time (which is known to Him) that you remain where you are. If you had not been employed in these hard undertakings many times before now I should try to incite you to generosity : you do not need that I should do so, but you require much grace in order to honour the inaction (*non-faire*) of the Son of God, Who as we know did not always exert His powers to their full extent when He was on earth. His work when He lived with St. Joseph at Nazareth shows us this, and doubtless you have often admired and dwelt upon this mystery before He put you in the position of imitating it, for which may His name be blessed. We must receive these inabilities to work, when it pleases God that they should come to us—with a loving heart, and make use of them in order to lift our souls above the things of this earth, and realise that God wills that having worked for our neighbour, we should begin to think of preparing our own souls for Heaven, which is our beloved country.”¹

In a letter to the community of the hospital at Nantes Louise tells them in what perfection consists :

“ MY VERY DEAR SISTERS,

“ I have received two packets of letters which you addressed to Sister Henriette, by which I see you

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 245.

tried to save me a little trouble . . . you must let me imitate you by writing one letter to your community. I beg of you to begin with renewed courage to serve God and the poor with more fervour, humility, and charity than ever, striving for interior recollection amidst your occupations at submission to God's good pleasure, and not by dwelling on what your fancy pictures to you, for this habit often ends in imaginary virtues, puts one out of temper, and frequently leads to disgust of all solid virtue. . . . Perfection does not consist in such things. In truth I am much moved to compassion when I think what hard work you have. But you may take pleasure in the hope, which almost amounts to a certainty, of your being shortly relieved of it. Continue, I beg of you, to be the edification of your neighbours, the consolation of the afflicted, and the solace of the sick and suffering. The account you gave me of your prayer was a great joy to me, it made me feel that when it shall please God to give you more time to devote to it you will be as faithful to larger opportunities as you have been to your present restricted ones.

“ My Sister Andrée, you have reason to praise God for the graces He has given your good mother and all her family. It seems to me as if I was learning about *you*, from this, because God in general takes under His special protection the souls of those dear to such who serve Him faithfully.

“ As for my Sister Ménage, she will doubtless remember that we have several times given her news of her sisters, and of all her family since her good father's death, and thanks be to God they are all in good health at present.”¹

The last letter Louise wrote (or that has been preserved) to the community at Nantes is dated the 30th of April, 1659 :

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 251-2.

“ MY VERY DEAR SISTERS,

“ I beg you very humbly to forgive me for having been so long without writing to you ; it is true that much business, and my feeble health have been the cause of it, but I must also tell you that the accounts you gave me of the state of your little community consoled me so greatly that it appeared to me as if I had nothing further to say to you touching your perfection. . . . Well ! my dear Sisters, what is there wanting to you, or what is there that you could desire on earth for your salvation that you have not got ? You are called by God to employ all your thoughts, words, and actions to His glory, and to encourage you in the performance of His counsels. Therefore you should look with suspicion upon all thoughts which tempt you to revolt from the path in which obedience has placed you : such as ‘ Oh ! if I was only in such a place—or in such another—it seems to me I should get on so well ! ’ Rest assured these are delusions, and you would be much worse there. Souls who have no fixed determination never make progress in virtue, because these disturbances prevent their habituating themselves to obedience, humility, and forbearance and the practice of their Rule. The evil one keeps them perpetually in suspense ; and I am so convinced of this, from many examples which I have come across in divers places, and even in the case of some of our Sisters who have lost their vocations thereby—and in others who have surrendered themselves to their cowardice and a tepidity which has caused them to submit to their bad inclinations—that if an angel came to me from Heaven to assure me of the truth of what I am saying I could not be more certain of it. For this reason I implore you all, in the name of and for the love of our Saviour, to believe me ; let every one say to herself : ‘ My Lord ! it is then Thy desire I should

be here, so as to make me partaker in Thy merits and to prepare me for Thy blessed Paradise. I will begin therefore anew, as if I had never done anything before, to take great pains to understand our Rules, and to exert myself to put them into practice out of obedience to my superior.' For you will find various things both with regard to the service of the poor and your practice of prayer which it will be impossible for you to carry out at the prescribed hours; but these our Sister Nicole will explain to you as being the custom of those parts, and you must obey her as you would obey our Saviour Himself." ¹

In one of the last letters written by the venerable superior to her Daughter, Sister Anne Hardemont, at Ursel, 13th of November, 1659, she gives the following touching details of the death of Sister Barbe Angiboust, whose death she deeply lamented, and who predeceased her by a few months :

" MY VERY DEAR SISTER,

" I own I am to blame, and that it is much too long since I have given myself the consolation of writing to you. You gave me much pleasure in ignoring this, but I like to think that you never doubted that my wishes were not wanting to give you all the satisfaction I can. It seems to me from what you tell me that you have good hopes for the success of your new establishment. . . . We have recalled two of our Sisters from Châteaudun on the death of Sister Barbe, whom we look upon as very happy. Our much-honoured Father having heard what her life and her death had been, wished them to remain here to give an account of them to our Sisters at the assembly which took place on the feast of St. Martin. Her firmness in executing the orders which were given her, and in helping our Sisters in the practice of the Rule; her detachment

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 283.

from all things, and the way she trampled all human respect underfoot, were admirable. And I must tell you—to my confusion—that one of our Sisters having begged her pardon for some notable shortcomings of which she had been guilty in her regard, her answer was so gentle and humble that the thought of it brings tears to my eyes: ‘What, my Sister,’ she said, ‘do you not put up with me, and why should I not put up with everything you have done to me?’ Those who had seen her during her illness owned that they could not believe it was her when they saw her after her death, and the public—who came in such numbers to see her for two days that it was found necessary at last to close the doors—said she must have been rouged she looked so beautiful. See, my Daughters, if it is not well to persevere in the love and in the service of God, in whom I am, etc.,

“LOUISE DE MARILLAC.”¹

Such are a few gleanings from the rich field of the Venerable Louise de Marillac’s letters to her Daughters. We are constantly reminded in reading them of the words her holy director addressed to her many years before—almost at the commencement of his acquaintance with her: “I never met with a mother so motherly as you are” (*une mère si fort mère que vous*). The words he added were equally striking: “In no other respect are you so feminine.”

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. pp. 301-3.

CHAPTER XVII

M. VINCENT in one of his earlier conferences, when explaining to the Sisters of Charity the duty of fidelity to the orders given them by their superior, had compared it to a sentinel's. "When," he asked, "have you ever heard of a soldier deserting the post assigned to him by his captain? Let it rain, or snow, or hail, the sentinel has to guard his post even though he should die at it. The soldier who deserts without leave is stripped of his arms and degraded." On another occasion when the holy man was recalling to the memory of the Sisters, again at a conference, how many times their services had been invoked in those days of trouble and danger—to dress the wounds of soldiers on the battle-field, to pest-stricken towns, to hospitals and galley-slaves—he joyfully recalled the fact that never once had any shrunk from these missions of charity when summoned at the call of obedience.

A new trial was to be set before these brave and devoted women, and perhaps, in a sense, a greater one than any to which they had been hitherto subjected. At the invitation of the Queen of Poland they were to be sent to nurse in a foreign country, and besides facing the risks to which they were exposed at home they were threatened, in addition, with the pangs of exile, and the strong probability of never revisiting their native land. It would seem strange at first sight that the renown of this little company, then still in its infancy, should have reached

so far, but the explanation is a simple one. Louise Marie de Gonzaga, daughter of the Duke of Modena, had been brought up at the Court of France, and having been married in 1645 to Vladislas Vasa, King of Poland, she had carried with her, beside a love of the country where she had spent her youth, a desire to introduce some of its pious institutions and Religious Orders into her new home. Her husband died in 1649, and very shortly afterwards she married his brother and successor, John Casimir, during whose reign Poland was perpetually at war ; first with Charles Gustavus, King of Sweden, and afterwards with the Cossacks of the Ukraine.

Four priests of the Mission had been sent by the Queen's invitation to Poland in the year 1651, headed by M. Lambert. Apparently the suggestion of following up the departure of the missionaries with that of congregations of women emanated from M. Vincent, as in a letter addressed to Louise Marie, of which M. Lambert was the bearer, he says : " Should it please God to bless your Majesty's pious intentions for the good of your kingdom, you might establish in addition a newly-founded and pious Institute, that of the Nuns of St. Marie (of the Visitation), and you would provide for the assistance of the indigent sick by means of the Sisters of Charity, whom your Majesty has asked for and who hold themselves in readiness to start."

Louise Marie had been a member of the Association of Ladies of Charity in Paris, and therefore was fully acquainted with the work done by their humble assistants in the hospitals and slums of that city.

She had also been present at the assemblies held in furtherance of the many good works initiated by the great apostle of the poor. It was to her (it is said) that Mlle. de Lamoignon, after listening to one of M. Vincent's fervent exhortations, turned, and asked her if she did not feel her heart on fire, as were the hearts of the disciples

when our Saviour joined them on their way to Emmaus. Louise Marie's answer was: "Why should this astonish us? He is the angel of the Lord whose lips have been touched with the burning embers of the love of God."

Louise in an unfinished note records the departure of the Sisters: "M. Vincent, our much-venerated Father, on the 5th of September announced to our three Sisters who had been chosen to go to Poland that they were to prepare to start on the following day. Nevertheless Providence delayed their departure till the 7th. These are the names of the Sisters who are going: Sister Marguerite Moreau, Sister Madeline Drugeon, and Sister Françoise Douelle."

A few half-defaced notes of the last discourse addressed to them by M. Vincent before their departure have been preserved. He asked them in the first place to perform their work in the spirit of God; a spirit of self-abnegation and entire devotion to God's glory, and of union with each other. "What a great grace is your vocation!" he repeated more than once; "Who can express it? Not the angels, only God Himself! I implore of His goodness to give you His greatest blessings which extend not from west to east, but from time to eternity, so as to make you advance from virtue to virtue. Cling fast to your rules—as a snail clings to its shell and dies if it is detached from it."

They took a roundabout route, *via* the Baltic Sea, in order no doubt to avoid the Netherlands and Rhenish provinces then at war with France. Louise wrote as follows about them on the 26th of October: "We have not yet heard of our Sisters' arrival, though we had news from them when they had got half-way. You know people voyaging by sea are always exposed to danger, which causes me to recommend them to your prayers."

The Queen gave them a warm welcome when they

reached Lowicz where the court was then in residence. "Our Sisters have arrived safely in Poland," Louise de Marillac wrote on the 4th of December, "and are now with the Queen, for which we have reason to thank God. But that unfortunate country is in a terrible state. We must continue to pray for its relief, and especially for the Catholic religion, which is in great danger of being banished from it."

The Queen wrote to M. Vincent expressing satisfaction at the Sisters' arrival, and the good impression they had made, and on the 2nd of February, 1653, he was able to give further details at a conference, held on that day, of their behaviour. "In truth, my Sisters,"¹ he told them, "our Sisters in Poland give strong signs of possessing the true spirit of the company. Have you heard how they were received by the Queen on their arrival there? After giving them a little time to get accustomed to the country, and to pick up a few words of the language, she said to them: 'Well now, my Sisters, it is time to begin to work. I wish to keep one with me, and I choose you, Sister Margaret, and the other two shall go to Cracow to nurse the sick.'

"This is what our good Sister answered:

"'Ah, Madame, what is this you say? We are only three of us, to nurse the poor, and you have so many others in your kingdom who are more capable than we are of serving your Majesty! Permit us, Madame, to do here what we do elsewhere and what God asks of us.'

"'What,' said the Queen, 'you do not wish to serve me?'

"'Forgive me, Madame,' was her answer, 'but the reason is that we have given ourselves to God for the service of the poor.'"

M. Vincent declared he was astounded at this answer. "Is that not beautiful, my Sisters, and is not this a grand

¹ *Conférences de St. Vincent de Paul*, t. i. p. 75.

example which God puts before us ! O merciful Saviour ! To trample underfoot the attractions of royalty and to refuse to live beside a queen ; what virtue is required to do this ! ”

In another conference, returning to the subject, he said : “ What grace was required, my Sisters, to make such an answer ! For do you think it would come from the natural man ? Oh, no, no ! . . . And this Sister, thanks be to God, is not the only one who is in these dispositions—there are many others of the same sort. What ! to prefer the poor to queens ; the plain dress of a Sister of Charity to silk gowns ; the conversation of poor girls to that of ladies ; a life of poverty to one of abundance ; no such a thing could ever come from creatures, but from God Who wills to make use of us.”

Only a few days later we find Louise writing to Barbe Angiboust to ask for her prayers for them : “ I recommend our Sisters in Poland to your prayers ; they are employed in nursing the poor in a town where there is a great deal of plague.” This was Varsovia, where they were sent straight from Lowicz. The Sisters on arriving put themselves at once at the service of the plague-stricken inhabitants of the town. The superior of the priests of the Missions had already gone to the assistance of the unfortunate people, and was giving them all the help in his power. He passed days and nights in improvising wards in temporary hospitals for those smitten with the disease, and in giving the last rites to the dying, and in burying the dead. The work was overwhelming, and before long he fell a victim to his labour of love—dying after terrible sufferings on the 30th of January, 1653.

His loss was deeply lamented by M. Vincent, who had said, when sending him to Poland, that in parting with him he felt as if his right arm had been wrenched off. It was also a great blow to the Sisters. Louise de Marillac

mentions him thus in a letter to her Daughters : “ God in His mercy has taken the good M. Lambert to Himself at the commencement of this year. He was in Poland, where he was beloved by the King and the Queen and by everybody, so that he was regretted after his death like a saint. His life also was that of a saint. The Queen wrote with her own hand to M. Vincent to tell him how greatly concerned she was at his death and the loss he was to her. I do not doubt that you are praying hard to God for the repose of his soul. Our poor Sisters there, also, are in much need of your prayers. Their affliction is great, as you can well believe; for though the Queen shows them every kindness, and takes personal interest in them, employing them in works of charity, nevertheless, their grief at the loss of such a Father must be very severe.”

Before the little community had been long established at Varsovia they started poor schools, probably at the Queen’s instigation, as Louise mentions in one of her letters dated the 25th of March of the same year : “ The Queen has sent word to M. Vincent that one of our three Sisters is teaching girls, some of whom are desirous of becoming Sisters of Charity. Thus, I believe, with God’s blessing it seems probable that before long we shall have a large foundation there.”

It is not surprising that as the work of these Sisters increased—already it must have been overwhelming—Louise became anxious to send a reinforcement to their assistance. M. Ozenne had replaced M. Lambert as superior of the missionaries, and Louise announces on the 19th of August, 1655, the arrival of three more Sisters : “ I thank you very heartily for the good news you give me of our dear Sisters. There could be no greater consolation to me than to receive information in all sincerity about them such as your charity has always given me, though

perhaps out of kindness you have been silent about what would have been a cause of humiliation to me. . . . You have asked for such miracles of accomplishments that perhaps you may expect these to be perfect. In the name of God do not entertain any such belief! But you may rest assured that they are good members of the Society, and have nothing contrary to the dispositions which should be entertained by a good Sister of Charity."

To the Sisters of Varsovia Louise wrote as follows, in a letter of the same date (19th August): "My dear Sisters, you have always told me that you had only one heart in your three persons. In the name of the Blessed Trinity whom you desire to honour I beg of you to enlarge it so as to make room for our three Sisters to enter into this cordial union, so that there should not be any distinction between the three first and the three last." Then after congratulating the elder Sisters on their grand mission of founders she ends by recommending the love of Jesus Crucified to all, and above all. "This being the case, how much good must we hope for, my dear Sisters!"

The new contingent, amongst whom was Sister Barbe Angiboust, had got as far as Rouen, and were about to embark there for their long and tedious journey to Poland, when, news having reached Paris of the invasion of that country by Charles Gustavus, King of Sweden, at the head of an army of 60,000 men, M. Vincent sent word in all haste to stop them.

Poland being totally unprepared for invasion was unable to make any effective stand against her assailants. Varsovia after a heroic resistance against superior numbers was carried by assault, and the King and Queen were fortunate in escaping to Opolo in Silesia. The Sisters of Charity and the community of religious of the Visitation shared their flight, but apparently the Sisters did not remain there long, as we hear of them shortly afterwards

as being sent to Cracow to nurse soldiers wounded in the campaign—one which was so disastrous to the Catholic cause. M. Vincent made the Sisters' labours in Poland the subject of one of his conferences in the winter of 1655.

“Here are news which will cause you deep joy. To think of Sisters of Charity having the courage to go to the succour of the soldiers! Sisters from the House in Paris, living here, opposite St. Lazare, going to nurse the poor wounded men, not only in France but in far-off Poland! Have you ever heard of its being done before, that Sisters should go to the army with such an object? As for myself never have I seen such a thing.”

It was not till two years later, in 1657, that the Polish troops regaining possession of Varsovia, the Queen returned thither, bringing back the Sisters of Charity with her, so that they were able to resume their work in the hospitals and poor schools.

Almost at the same time as the foundation of the Polish mission was laid another large enterprise loomed upon M. Vincent which was to make considerable demands upon his time, and resources, as well as on those of the venerable foundress, Louise de Marillac.

Abelly gives a summary of this project in the following words: “A merchant of Paris, impelled by a desire to perform some work pleasing to God, had recourse to M. Vincent, in whose charity he had a very special confidence. He told him that he had the intention of handing over a considerable sum of money to him to be employed in some work of piety according to what M. Vincent would judge to be most expedient, on one condition only: namely, that he was never to reveal the name of him to whom he was indebted for it, as he wished to remain unknown to all except to God alone.” Brother Ducourneau testifies that the good merchant had originally destined the money, which amounted to some hundred thousand francs, to

be applied to the Congregation of the Missions, but the holy founder of that Order had dissuaded him from doing so, and with his habitual disinterestedness advised him to spend it on the poor.

After taking some time for prayer and consideration, M. Vincent made up his mind that the establishment of a refuge or asylum for men and women, incapacitated by age or infirmity from gaining their livelihood, would be the greatest boon, both from the temporal and spiritual point of view, that could be conferred on the poor of Paris. Accordingly with the full approval of the donor M. Vincent bought two houses and a large plot of ground in the Faubourg of St. Laurent, and in the terms of the title deeds it was set forth that "the said houses should be employed for the housing of forty indigent people of both sexes, who should be fed and clothed; that they should be taught the truths necessary to salvation, and persuaded to live in the love and fear of God, and also to occupy themselves in some kind of labour so as to avoid sloth and mendicity, which are the parents of all vices."

M. Vincent, according to his wont, asked Louise de Marillac to give her advice on the subject of this fresh departure, and a memorandum exists in her handwriting marking her approval of it, as being directed to the honour and glory of God, and in execution of His Will Who has ordained that man should labour at the sweat of his brow. "They will also be assisted to participate in the merit of the life of labour of Jesus Christ for their eternal merit." She then proceeds to lay down certain rules for the organisation of the charity, which was to be under the charge of herself and her Daughters. "The greater the work the more important it is to build it on solid foundations, not only to ensure its success, but also its durability."

She proposes to select men and women of known

probity, not of the beggar class; and to cause these persons to be taught by workmen of good character, who would consent to live for a time in the Hospital with this object. She likewise recommends the choice of useful trades, (in order to lead to the manufacture of articles which would find a ready sale) such as cloth making, spinning, shoemaking, cobbling, button making, lace making, pin manufacturing, sewing and so forth.

M. Vincent adopted this programme *in toto*. The houses were furnished with a view to all the industries which were to be pursued in them, and twenty men and twenty women were collected and lodged in two buildings separately, the building being so planned that all the members of the establishment could assist at the same Mass in the chapel and hear the same lecture when at table. They were given a Chaplain to preach and administer the Sacraments to them, and an endowment was settled in perpetuity upon the work, which by the desire of the founder was to remain always under the charge of the priests of the Mission.

The house received the approval of the Archbishop of Paris, and was given the name of the Hospital of the Holy Name of Jesus. We possess very few letters relating to this foundation either of Louise de Marillac or M. Vincent, the close proximity of both to the hospital enabling them no doubt to discuss in person questions arising from it.

In a letter to Sister Barbe Angiboust, then at Brienne, Louise asks her advice with regard to the purchase of flax, "of which we require from four to five hundred pounds at a reasonable price to stock the Hospital of the Holy Name."

Whilst Louise superintended and organised, M. Vincent looked after the spiritual training of the inmates of the Home. The Sisters made notes of the first of a series of instructions given by him :

“ Having said beads with the poor men and women he said : ‘ My children, I think we should do what would be pleasing to God if we had a little talk about Christian doctrine, and with this object I will ask you some questions about the principal mysteries of the Faith.’ He added that this was the great wish of the founder of the house, and then, after saying how he admired a man of the world having been inspired by the grace of God with such ideas, he said that this knowledge of which he spoke was necessary to salvation. ‘ I will then begin,’ he proceeded, ‘ by asking you questions, and you must not be disturbed even if you cannot readily answer them. I shall ask you to make a sign of the cross, and if you do not know how to do so, you need not let that distress you ; alas, you are not the only ones who are ignorant ! How many are there at Court, perhaps even the presidents of Parliament, who are ignorant how to make it ! That should encourage you to overcome a foolish shame which comes from pride and make you behave like good country folk who always show us the greatest wish to learn.’

“ M. Vincent then showed them how to make the sign of the cross, making it himself several times. Then he explained how the early Christians recognised each other by this sign when they did not dare to declare themselves openly, and how, having recognised each other as brethren, they embraced, and mutually comforted each other. He then questioned them in turn on the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. Beginning with the men, he first addressed himself to a boy on the subject of God being Creator of all things, and how He had made even the smallest insect ; and then, when he had answered rightly about what one God in three Persons signifies, M. Vincent said, ‘ May God bless you, my son.’

“ Then addressing himself to a woman, he said, ‘ Who is God ? ’

“ ‘He is Creator of Heaven and earth.’

“ ‘What is it to be a Creator?’

“ ‘It is to make things out of nothing.’

“ ‘Oh, I see you know a great deal, my child.’ Our honoured Father then explained that the power belonged to God only, to make something without matter to work upon, and what the difference was between creating and making. And when he saw they were quite astonished at their own knowledge he profited by it to show them the advantages they derived from living in the Home.

“ ‘What could you wish for better?’ he asked them. ‘You are given your food; you are not fed as aldermen—but enough for your wants. How many poor there are in Paris and elsewhere who have not the luck you have! Many poor labourers there are who work from morning to night and are not so well fed as you are. All this should induce you to work well, according to your strength and ability.’ ”

Louise kept a strict account of the work done in the Home and some valuable notes are preserved in her handwriting with regard to its organisation. “The good of this institution from both the spiritual and temporal point of view,” she wrote, “is that it is aimed against a life of idleness, and this, especially at the outset, should be its first object.” This dictum of the wise superior was one she acted up to strictly. She made a rough calculation of the annual cost of the inmates, putting it at 165 livres per head. The expenses of each workman, the price of their handiwork, the sum total of the salaries, and that of the raw material, the tariff of prices, which was always lower than that current at the time in Paris, are all entered into her books. Each one received a fourth part of the price paid for his work, the wine he (or she) had drunk being deducted from it.

Jean Guesnet (we read) consumed 7 livres and 10 sols

(sous) worth in the month. Jean Ollier had spent more than he gained, Maître Gilles, weaver, has half his earnings deducted from the same cause, and many more were in the same predicament.

The women who spun flax and wool at 4 sols the lb. of thread, Jacqueline, Marguerite, Nicole, etc., are shown to be much more thrifty; their gains are also laid down with much precision, with their employment hour by hour, by the careful superior. These matters were all of moment, for as she said: "If the house should make some profit out of the toil of the work-people it will be with the object of increasing the number of those who can be admitted."

The hospital seems to have succeeded in all its objects; so popular was it that Abelly relates that applications for berths in it were made several years before they became vacant. Like all St. Vincent de Paul's foundations it had a lengthy existence. The Revolution transformed rather than swept it away. It exists still under the name of the Hospital of Incurables in the Faubourg of St. Martin, not far from its ancient site; and the idea of refuges—such as those so admirably served by the Little Sisters of the Poor—was taken from it.

The success of this experiment of providing for the infirm and indigent having come to the ears of the Ladies of Charity many went to visit the hospital, and before long the question was mooted whether it would not be possible to start the same thing on a larger scale for the relief of the submerged masses in Paris.

The problem of tackling the growing pauperism of the city of Paris was one which was forced on the magistracy each successive year with greater insistence, but in the early part of the reign of Louis XIV it was as far as ever from being solved. Begging was a profession, and its professors numbered, it was calculated, between eighty and a hundred thousand. It was also exceedingly well

organised, and able to set at defiance the police of the city. "Organised in corporations, forming a State within a State, extorting alms, weapons in hand, kidnapping children, robbing passengers in the street, encumbering the road-ways, obstructing the entrance of the churches; they were absolute masters of Paris." Bossuet spoke of them as "an infidel people living amidst the faithful, baptized without consciousness of baptism, in the Church but without the Sacraments, men dead whilst still in life: hunted, banished, vagabond, straying, and reduced to the condition of wild beasts."

Many edicts had been issued against them; one of the reign of Henry II in 1547 enacted that they should be distributed "amongst different hospitals and refuges . . . to be fed and succoured there, or under pain, on refusal, in the case of women, of being condemned to flogging and banishment, and in that of men of being sent to be chained to the oar in the galleys." This edict was renewed by Louis XIII in 1612. In short the weapon of force which had been used freely was the only one which had been resorted to, so far, and it had proved powerless to check the evil.

Difficulties which had staggered the wise heads of generations of civic fathers were not likely to be solved in a day by an association of pious women. This was clearly apparent to the ladies themselves, so before taking active steps in the matter they applied to Louise de Marillac for advice on a subject on which no one was more able to express an opinion.

Louise's answer (August 1653) was marked by her usual prudence and common sense. She began by laying down the following postulate: "If this work is to be considered from the political point of view it appears to me it would be better to leave it to men to undertake. But if it is to be taken up as a work of charity, women should

be able to attempt it, as they have done many other great and trying enterprises, which God has been pleased to bless with His approval."

This distinction puts the matter in a nutshell. Hitherto it had been a matter of police; was it to continue to be treated with harsh and restrictive measures, or were these wretched beings—the dregs of the populace—to be attracted to a reformed life by the means which had worked so well in the case of the Hospital of the Holy Name?

Louise goes on to suggest that a Committee should be started to consider the question, and recommends that it should be composed of men as well as women: "It is to be desired that some men of piety, either individuals or a company,¹ should be associated with the Ladies of Charity, not only for the useful service they would give, but for the greater knowledge of procedures and laws of justice which it will be necessary to be acquainted with to keep this kind of people to their duty." Louise concludes by citing the names of many "valiant women" such as Judith, St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Siena, etc., of whom Providence has made use in all times for matters temporal as well as spiritual.

The question whether the Association of Ladies of Charity should take up this tremendous work was discussed shortly afterwards at the next assembly, at which M. Vincent as usual presided. The holy man was in favour of delay, in order to pray and reflect; but the ladies were desirous of taking immediate action, and one offered a sum of 50,000 livres to start the enterprise, and another an annual subscription of 300 livres. Thus pressed, M. Vincent agreed to approach the Queen Regent with a view to obtain a grant of the buildings and plot of ground which went by the name of La Salpêtrière in

¹ She had no doubt the priests of the Missions in view by this term.

order to make a beginning there. This application was successful, as a warrant of the deed of gift to the Association was made out at the end of the year 1653.

Abelly remarks that the ladies—the above arrangements having been concluded—were anxious to go all lengths in reclaiming the beggars of Paris: “M. Vincent had difficulty in restraining their impatience, for it struck him they were going too fast for his pace. He said to them: ‘Ladies, I am of the opinion that we must not make at first more than a trial, and only take one or two hundred poor people, and these should only be beggars who come willingly, without being constrained. These being well treated and satisfied will serve to attract others, and thus the number will be gradually increased as Providence should see fit to increase our funds. Otherwise all will be ruined by precipitation, and having to use force, which might be a hindrance to the designs of God. If the work is from Him it will succeed; if it is merely human activity, believe me it will neither go very far nor fare very well.’”

Obstacles of all sorts presented themselves before long. Parliament, afraid of a general rising, refused to register the deed of gift of La Salpêtrière. It was not till three years later, in April 1656, that Louis XIV gave orders for the erection of a general hospital (or Home) which was to comprise not only the above-mentioned buildings and ground, but also two others known as *la grande* and *la petite Pitié* as well as Bicêtre, now no longer occupied by foundlings. The enterprise, too, resumed its previous character as a measure of repression. “It is a great undertaking,” M. Vincent wrote to a friend, “and very difficult to carry out. It is strongly supported by the King and the Parliament, and without opening negotiations with me they have, with the approval of the Archbishop, destined that it should be worked by the priests of our company and the Sisters of Charity. We have not,

however, yet decided to take up this enterprise, not being sure of God's Will concerning it."

M. Vincent called a council of the priests of St. Lazare to deliberate on the subject, and their verdict was that the company "for good and sufficient reasons" declined to undertake it.

Unwilling to discourage the work, which was obviously greatly required, and from which, if properly organised, great results might be expected, M. Vincent recommended M. Louis Abelly,¹ an excellent and pious priest and member of the Tuesday conferences at St. Lazare, as Rector of the establishment. Louise de Marillac gave the services of two Sisters (Sœur Jeanne Lepintre being one) to help in the installation of the hospital. Soon this asylum, or poor house, assumed the dimension of a "veritable town," in the words of Bossuet. It housed about 6,000 mendicants, who under its many roofs carried on all the trades of the various corporations of Paris. The idea of its being to a certain extent self-supporting was borrowed from the Hospital of the Holy Name. But the manner in which this principle was carried out differed completely in the foundations—charity, and a willing acceptance of the conditions laid down by it in the one, was replaced by force, to which resistance was constantly offered, in the other. The methods used in putting down mendicancy led to numerous risings amongst the people. In Paris in one year (1659) there were no fewer than eight serious riots which had to be subdued by armed force. With such high-handed proceedings the sons, or daughters, of Vincent de Paul were not likely to be in sympathy, and the saint showed his usual wisdom and prudence in holding aloof from them.

We have now reached the last chapter in the history of the charitable undertakings of Louise de Marillac's

¹ Later on M. Vincent's biographer.

life, and her first biographer mentions it in these words : " Having devoted herself in turn to succour every corporal infirmity, nothing remained to Mlle. Le Gras, but to take charge of the unfortunate lunatics in the hospital of the '*Petites Maisons.*' She accepted this work in the year 1655 at the request made to her by a Committee of the *Grand Bureau des Pauvres*, so well known in Paris on account of the rank and merit of the persons of whom it is composed. And because there were a great number of other patients besides those out of their mind who were supported by this bureau, she agreed to succour them also in their maladies. . . . We read of the widow who had befriended Eliseus bringing at the word of the man of God all the empty vessels to be filled with oil, till at last all being filled the oil stood. Thus it was with our Christian widow : having begun with little money, feeble health, and a very small number of Daughters, she would have been capable of but little had she put bounds to her zeal ; but when by the advice and under the direction of another Eliseus she determined to minister to every kind of want, she finds herself able to supply all that is asked of her. The oil flows in abundance and fills every vessel. She has sufficient strength in the midst of her constant infirmities to satisfy all needs that require her care or her guidance ; the number of her Daughters increases in proportion to her requirements ; she finds ample means to provide for an unlimited amount of misery ; all offices and departments of charity come within the range of her purveyance, and she passes even from her own into foreign countries." ¹

Perhaps of all the good works taken up by the company, not excepting that of nursing the galley-slaves, the care of lunatics was the most trying to human nature. And yet we know that such was the power of Vincent de Paul of inspiring his Daughters with his zeal for souls and that

¹ *Louise de Marillac*, t. i. p. 116.

of seeking Jesus Christ in all His members—however sinful or afflicted—that the charge of the lunatics was assumed by the Sisters of Charity with the same fervour that they had shown in all the others which they had previously undertaken. Sister Claude Muset in the evidence she gave in the process of canonisation of the holy Father said: “I remember when the Servant of God sent us to work among the poor maniacs of the Hospital, which up to that time had been rather badly managed, he gave us such an exalted idea of the grace God bestowed on us by giving us the office that we all felt inflamed with a desire to devote ourselves to it, notwithstanding the pains and trials which we should have to endure.”

In a conference which the saint gave on the 18th of October, 1655, he returns to the same subject:¹ “You know, my Daughters, that our Saviour wished to undergo all imaginable trials in His own person; for the Scriptures relate that He wished to be a scandal to the Jews, and folly to the Gentiles, so as to show us that we could serve Him in all who are suffering affliction. And because He wished to bear this appearance in order to sanctify it like the others, you must know that He is in these poor unfortunate people, bereft of their reason, just as He is in the person of the rest of the poor. It is with this belief you should wait upon them, and when you visit them you should rejoice—being able to say to yourselves: ‘I go to these poor people to honour in them the Wisdom Incarnate of a God Who willed to be treated as a fool or a lunatic.’”

Truly no mission could exceed in charity that which the Sisters of Charity had now taken up at the word of their holy foundress and her director, for the mad—and specially the violent ones—had as much to endure in

¹ *Conférences*, p. 377.

France as in other countries in those far-off days. It was then customary to imprison those whose mania made them a risk to public safety, the harmless ones being relegated to convents or other refuges, or allowed to wander about at will dependent upon the precarious help of their neighbours. It is not surprising to be told (as we are by Sœur Claude Muset) that in some cases, which she herself had nursed, of dangerous dementia surprising cures were wrought through the intercession of the saint, and, we may add, through the labours and piety of these heroic Sisters.

We have now completed the circle of infirmity, suffering, and affliction to which, under the guidance of divine Providence, Louise de Marillac and her Daughters gave their services to succour and alleviate. It remains only to examine the means taken by the holy founders to secure the stability and continuance of the company established by them.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE have already, in a previous chapter, drawn attention to the fact that the holy founders of the company of Sisters of Charity did not see eye to eye on the important point of the jurisdiction under which it should be placed. M. Vincent did not consider the arguments brought forward by Louise de Marillac sufficiently strong to cause him to petition that it should be withdrawn from the usual channel—that of the Ordinary of the diocese—in order to place it under the jurisdiction of the priests of the Mission. He had already laid down amongst the rules of his congregation that the priests were not to be employed as chaplains or confessors to religious Orders, in order not to interfere with the main object of their foundation: namely, the service of the poor. More than once Louise had ventured to represent to him that the stability of the little company depended upon their being led by the missionaries, who alone were fitted to carry out the views of their founders, and to understand both the scope of their work and its limitations. In a letter dated the 27th of November, 1647, Louise puts the matter in the strongest light before him. “It appears to me,” she wrote, “that God placed in my soul a great sense of peace, and union with Him, whilst I was occupied in meditating on the necessity of the company of Sisters of Charity remaining always under the same direction, both in spiritual and temporal matters, that Divine

Providence has given it. I thought that it was shown to me that it would be more advantageous to the glory of God that the company should come to nothing, than that it should be withdrawn from that guidance—since it would be opposed to His Divine Will. . . . I trust, then, that if your charity has heard the words which it has appeared to me our Saviour has said to you, as He did to St. Peter, that it was upon you He willed to erect this company, you would persevere in the service He asks of you for the instruction of little ones, and the succour of the poor and afflicted.”

These words were written in 1647, a little more than a year after the formal recognition, by letters patent, of the King and the Archbishop of Paris, of the company of Sisters of Charity had been handed over to the Superior-general. From a legal point of view all was in order excepting their Parliamentary endorsement, which, in the year 1655, was still wanting. Mgr. Baunard gives an explanation of this long delay in a minute which he quotes from the Archives: “The said approbation which was attached to the letters patent, which it pleased the King to give in these presents, addressed to the Parliament of Paris in order to be registered by it, were unfortunately mislaid by the secretary of the Sieur Procureur Mesliand, and the said secretary having since died, it has been impossible to discover the aforesaid approbation attached to the letters patent, notwithstanding all the search that was made, amongst the papers belonging to the said Sieur Mesliand, or those of his secretary, or in those of the present Procurator-General and his substitute.” No further steps were taken in the matter by St. Vincent during the years in which the “aforesaid letters patent,” so carefully pigeonholed by the secretary of the Sieur Procureur, lay dormant; but Louise de Marillac was not idle, and her letters to him on several occasions bear

reference to a matter which she had so deeply at heart. Thus in an undated letter placed by her biographer in the year 1650, she gives M. Vincent an account of an interview which she had had with M. Nicholas Fouquet, who then occupied the post of Procurator-General, which gave her an opportunity of re-opening the question :

“ I went yesterday by appointment to see M. Procureur-Général, and he said at once to me that no doubt I had come about some business with which he was at that moment occupied. I said I had come to refresh his memory on the subject. He asked me if we looked upon ourselves as nuns or seculars, and I told him we had no pretensions to be anything but the latter. He said *there was no precedent for such a thing*. I alleged the case of Mme. de Villeneuve’s Sisters, and proved to him that these went about everywhere. . . . M. le Procureur-Général showed no sign of disapproving of our designs—saying much that was favourable about the company, but adding that an affair of such importance required to be well thought out. I showed my satisfaction that he was prepared to take this view of it, and begged him if the work neither required nor deserved to be continued that he should put an end to it, but that if it was good that we would ask of him to establish it on a solid foundation. . . . He said : ‘ Leave me to think it over, not for months, but for a few weeks.’

“ He took the trouble to escort us down to the carriage though he was in the Court at the time. He manifested the greatest good will to us, telling us to greet you very humbly on his part, and saying that he would indeed be guilty of usury if he received the humble expression of gratitude which we gave him for the respect he shows all our Sisters when they approach him in their wants, whether for the poor galley-slaves or for the foundlings.”

The business with which M. Fouquet was occupied was

doubtless that of legalising the status of the company ; as a paper has been found at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated the year 1649, containing the text of a project of letters patent with respect to the confraternity of the Sister Servants of the Poor—the month and day being left blank to be filled up later. This paper refers to the episcopal approbation of 1645, and mentions that the King praises the confraternities of Charity established in the parishes of his good city of Paris and in other places, where they “ have exercised their office with the blessing of God.” “ But,” it goes on to say, “ as the ladies of which this confraternity consists are nearly all of a class that prevents their engaging in the lowest offices necessary for the sick poor, they have made use of the services of some good peasant girls to whom God has given the desire to employ themselves in this way—these girls having been trained by the Damoiselle Louise de Marillac, widow of the late Antoine Le Gras, who has taken them with this object into her house.”

These letters mention also the services rendered by the Sisters at the Hôtel Dieu, as well as at other works of charity, such as the care of the foundlings, and that of the sick galley-slaves, as well as at the “ hospitals of Angers, Nantes, Montreuil-sur-mer, of St. Denis in France, and the towns of Richelieu and of St. Germain en Laye, and in other country districts. . . . And as they are in great request in other places the said Damoiselle Le Gras trains them in her house, where she has always thirty at a time whom she instructs in their religious and charitable duties. These girls she provides for partly by alms, and partly by means of what they gain by manual work during the time in which they are not employed in other ways.” These letters then refer to the approbations given in 1646, and state that the confraternity was placed under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris and his successors in per-

petuity, also that the Archbishop had confided the direction of the said confraternity to his "dear and beloved Vincent de Paul as long as it should please God to preserve his life."

Fouquet succeeded Mesliand as Parliamentary Procurator-general in 1650, but notwithstanding his promises to Louise de Marillac to look into the matter touching the authorisation of the company, no more was done till five years later. The missing papers were not forthcoming, and the delay, which was entirely favourable to Louise's wishes, gave her time to urge her point with M. Vincent.

She returns to the subject on the 5th of July, 1651, in the following words: "My much honoured Father, Providence having pointed out to me the way in which I should speak to you on all occasions causes me in this particular one, when it is question of the execution of God's most holy Will, to tell you very simply what experience has taught me may possibly hinder the stability of the company of Sisters of Charity." Louise then proceeds to put herself in the first rank amongst the hindrances "by reason of the faults committed by the company of which I am the principal cause by my shortcomings and negligences. This is one of the principal reasons to provide from the present time a person for the company who would set them a better example." She then points out, with a view to its stability in the future, the necessity of two things: one of these is that the Rule should be formally drawn up, with the obligation on the part of the Sisters to read it at their monthly meetings. The second she words as follows: "It is impossible the company should subsist and that God should draw His glory from it unless the said society (which should be established under the name of company or confraternity) be entirely subject and dependent on the guidance of the much-honoured General of the priests of the Missions, *with the*

consent of their company by having been aggregated to it, participating in the good done by it, and through the Divine goodness, by the merits of Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, they should have the grace of living in the spirit of the said honoured company. These, my much honoured Father, are the thoughts which I have not dared to withhold from you—remitting them entirely to the judgment which God wills your charity to pronounce upon them, in the same way as His goodness has given me the grace of acting, since God put me under your guidance twenty-six years ago, in order to accomplish His Divine Will.”

There are proofs that M. Vincent was disposed to return to the question of the authorisation of the company in 1651, as he corresponded with Louise during the course of that year with a view to examining the papers drawn up in 1646, and then presented to the King and Archbishop of Paris. Louise explains in her answer that she had kept no copy of the formal request for the establishment of the company, but that she had found one of the Rule, which she accordingly forwards to him with the hope that it is the one he is in want of.

On the 25th of November of the same year Louise returns to the charge, reminding M. Vincent of her desire to give up the reins of government to some one else: “who by their virtues and exactitude to the Rule would form the Sisters in good habits. It is (she adds) perhaps on account of this that Providence has deferred the establishment of the company.”

She then sums up the whole question as follows: “First of all these are the reasons which more than once have made me doubt if God was favourable to its establishment: (1) The premature death of a number of good subjects who would have helped much to carry it on. (2) The apprehension lest the Sisters, when once they are

established, should have too high an opinion of themselves and look down on their employment. (3) The experience we have had of three or four already who have left the company with the intention of marrying—having had these thoughts when belonging to a company established especially to honour our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, whose lives were a mirror of chastity." A last reason she finds in some of the failings of the Sisters and their slow advance in the path of perfection.

Then come the reasons which can be urged in favour of its being indeed a work of God and blessed by Him: "First of all the goodness of the work *in itself* and the success with which God in His mercy has so far blessed it. The guidance of Providence in the formation of the company and the direction it has taken. Also the power entrusted to the superiors of getting rid of any members of the company, who were likely to injure it; and similarly the liberty of each individual to leave it of their own free will. Finally, the strongest motive for urging that measures should be taken for its establishment is, that if it is not done now by him who instituted it, and of whom God made use of to begin it, the attempt to do so is unlikely to be made successfully by his successors." She concludes with the following heart-felt prayer: "I implore the goodness of God to continue to bestow His lights and His guidance upon His work, and to destroy all obstacles to it, and to reveal His Will on the subject of those He desires to see associated with it."

No direct reference to this important matter has come to light in Louise's correspondence from this time, 1651, till the month of August 1654, when we find her writing as follows to M. Vincent: "Our good God knows what He desires to do, and what He will do with regard to the company. I have great confidence in His favourable dispositions towards it, if your charity would remove the

obstacles which I oppose to them by my faults and infirmities. This causes me to beseech of you for the love of our Saviour to take time to study the whole question. I will hide nothing that would prevent your seeing all my thoughts, actions, and intentions as they are in the sight of God, wishing to renounce all the satisfaction I could receive from them, and to accept, on the other hand, all the humiliation which might come from the same."

This desire entertained by Louise de Marillac and of which she made no secret of consolidating the links which had existed from the beginning between the congregation of the priests of the Mission and her Daughters, found frequent expression in her letters to them. Thus in a letter to Sister Cécile Angiboust at Angers she begs her "not to forget to pray for the preservation of our much-honoured Father. He works as hard as ever, and is at present engaged in a mission; though his health is always bad, by his speaking example he is a rule to the house. You know we are obliged to pray for the perfection of the missionary priests in general, and in particular for those engaged in difficult and dangerous undertakings that our good God may draw glory from all things."¹

Louise returns to this subject in a note headed: "Motives which should induce the Sisters to pray for the congregation." They should present the ends and objects of this association: as those doing most honour to God in the person of His Son, as tending to the perfection of priests who represent Him on earth, and from their desire to revive ecclesiastical discipline in its primitive fervour. "As it is likewise part of their objects to help the salvation of their neighbour, you should ask of the Blessed Virgin to obtain this spirit, in its utmost perfection for them and their successors. Ask also that they may obtain the grace from God that there may be nothing of human

¹ 23rd of May, 1653, *Œuvres de Louise de Marillac*, t. iv. p. 67.

invention in its establishment, and that if there has been anything of the sort in its past history she should destroy it all by her prayers, so that it should please God to lead it utterly by His holy Spirit as being in truth His work."

The experience of the previous twenty-five years must have gone far to prove that it was only by the two congregations working hand in hand, the Priests of the Missions as pioneers clearing the way, and gathering in a harvest of souls, and the "little company," as its holy founders loved to call it, following in their wake succouring the afflicted and attending to their bodily, and frequently to their spiritual, necessities as well, that the whole of the good of both great enterprises for God's glory and the welfare of their neighbour could be attained.

The experience of the much-tried community of Nantes must have been a powerful object-lesson both to the Superior-general and to his advisers; proving that it was almost too much to expect perfect concord and peace in a company of Sisters, as yet only partially trained, when brought in continual personal contact with disorderly elements such as existed there. As a contrast to this comparative failure the success of the Sisters of Charity under the most trying circumstances, such as prevailed during the fratricidal warfare of the Fronde, or in their Polish exile, when directed by the priests of the Missions and backed up by them, stands out with all the greater lustre. That these arguments were not without their effect we learn from M. Vincent's correspondence of the years 1653 and 1654. For instance, in a letter addressed to one of his missionaries, M. de la Fosse, where he says: "You have recognised the importance of the reasons why the company has always kept out of engagements in the service of religious communities so as not to put any obstacles to our work for the poor; and as you wish to know why in spite of this we look after the Sisters of

Charity, I must tell you first of all that these Sisters are not nuns, but simply girls who come and go like lay people. They are members of parishes, under the charge of the parish priests where they are established ; and the reason of our undertaking the direction of the house where they are trained is because God made use of us in giving birth to their little company, and you know that He generally employs the same means to preserve institutions that He did to bring them into existence. Again, our congregation having given itself to God in order to serve the poor, not only spiritually but corporally, and having established these confraternities of Ladies of Charity with this end in view, the Sisters of Charity have come into the general scheme, providentially ordained, whereby God has given us a means of doing by their hands what we were unable to do by our own. And thus we are also under the obligation to help them in their own advancement in virtue so that they may the better acquit themselves of these charitable functions. Unity of work, unity of origin, unity of spirit : are these not sufficient motives to desire unity of guidance and direction ? ” ¹

All the Venerable Louise de Marillac's aspirations must have been fulfilled when on the 18th of January, 1655, Cardinal de Retz, in answer to the formal petition of St. Vincent de Paul, agreed to the authorisation of the confraternity of Sisters of Charity under the direction of the Superior-general of the congregation of the Mission and his successors in the office.

In “ these present letters ” Jean François Paul de Gondi, Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, explains the objects of the confraternity which he has been invited by our “ dear and beloved Vincent de Paul ” to sanction, and draws attention to the fact that the papers relative to the answers given to a similar petition presented in 1646

¹ *Letters* (to M. de la Fosse), 370c, p. 433.

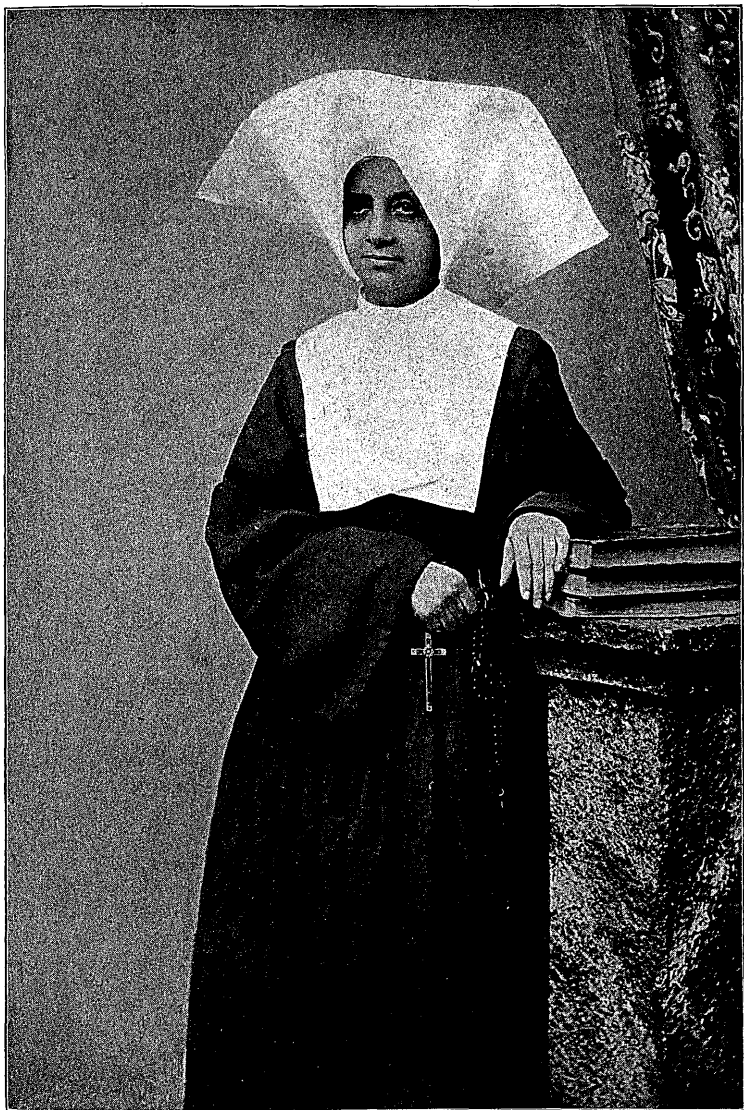


Photo Paul Zepfjz,

Salonique.

A Sister of Charity now at work on the Eastern Front.

had been lost. He then proceeds as follows: "From all these causes and being desirous to favour so good a work, and considering that the best means of making it last is to unite the said girls and widows in some form of society or confraternity, distinct from that of the Ladies of Charity, we have resolved to erect, and by these presents we do erect, newly, the assembly of these said women in our diocese into a confraternity or particular society under the name of 'Servants of the Poor of the *Charités*' on the condition that it shall remain in perpetuity under the authority and dependent on our successors, Archbishops of Paris. And inasmuch as God has blessed the labours of our said dear and well-beloved Vincent de Paul to make this pious work successful, we confide at this present time the guidance of this society or confraternity to him for his life, and after him to his successors the Superior-generals of the congregation of the Mission."

Cardinal de Retz was in Rome when the papers of authorisation of the company were presented to him for his signature, hence arose doubtless a delay in their being forwarded to Paris, for it was not till the 8th of August of the same year that M. Vincent announced their delivery at a conference which he gave on that day to the Sisters.

The event was a memorable one. The man of God had reached his eightieth year; but if his age showed itself in increased infirmities, his words, glowing with love of God and man, show no signs of it.

He began his discourse by holding forth on the excellence of their Rules. They came, he said, from God as they were taken from the Gospel, thus were inspired by Him. They were wings which should be used to fly to Him. They were also mild (*débonnaires*), more so than were those of many other Orders; they were softened by love of God, and their yoke was sweet, and their burthen light—like the one spoken of by Jesus Christ. The duty

of the Sisters therefore was to study them assiduously, and practise them exactly in the manner in which they were made known to them.

The superior then briefly recalled what Mlle. Le Gras had done for them, with the blessing of God, during the past twenty-five years. "The Sisters who preceded you," he said, "have followed these Rules and lived under their observance. It is true that in the beginning they were like a little snow-ball. At first it was very small, but now it has much increased in size. At the present time your company is very numerous, and very pleasing to God, and it has spread in all directions, so that one can say confidently that it is the work of God."

He then read the approbation given to the company by the Archbishop of Paris, which was listened to with great attention by the Sisters, some of whom, we are told, were moved to tears, especially when M. Vincent read and expounded their Rule to them.

M. Vincent then called their attention to the fact that they were to go by the name of company or society. This, he said, was done from the fear that the title of congregation should cause them to change their house into a cloister, and to become enclosed nuns—as had been done by the Daughters of the Visitation. He then implored of them never to consent to any changes, and to reject like poison any such suggestion. "Answer without hesitation," he said, "that you hope to have the crown which was promised to the Daughters of St. Mary." "There, my dear Sisters," he concluded by saying, "are your Rules for you to hand down to posterity—*Ad perpetuam res memoriam*. Give thanks, then, that God has chosen you for such a great thing as to be apostles of His charity! What remains for you to do but to show your gratitude to Him forasmuch as He has preferred you before millions of others to be His spouses, and to

render you similar to His Son. Since He has chosen you to be the foundation stones of your company you should give yourselves to Him with all your heart." He then put these questions to them :

"Do you all wish to persevere in this observance?" To which they answered with one accord :

"Yes, Father."

"Do you accept also this Rule?" Again they answered :

"Yes, Father."

He then terminated by the following prayer to the Blessed Virgin in which, it will be observed, he twice alluded to the work as "the greatest in the world" :

"Most holy Virgin! who speaketh for those who cannot speak for themselves, we beg of thee—our good Sisters and I—assist this little company. Continue, and put a finishing-stroke to a work which is the greatest in the world; I ask it of thee in the name of those present and those who are absent. And to Thee, my God, I make the same petition by the merits of Thy Son Jesus Christ: establish this work the greatest in the world; continue to guide and protect this little company; give to these good Sisters the grace of perseverance and never cease from pouring down upon them Thy Divine blessings!"

The statutes of the company, which were annexed to the petition and approbation, are a short abridgment of what were known as the "Common Rules." They comprise the government of the society; the different functions and duties performed by the Sisters of Charity towards the poor and towards each other; their religious exercises, and the virtues of their state of life with the means of practising them. The preface runs as follows: "The confraternity of the Charity of the Servants of the Sick Poor has been instituted in order to honour the charity of our Saviour, Who is its Patron, in assisting the sick and

indigent in parishes, and in hospitals, galley-slaves, and foundlings, both spiritually and corporally." Jesus Christ is thus proclaimed Patron, Model, and Leader of the little company.

The election of the office-bearers was made on the same day ; on the eve of it Louise had entreated the Superior-general to give her in place of the name of superior, that of first Assistant, urging that he only was founder and superior of the Society. "Permit me," she wrote, "to beg of your charity to leave me out when it is a question of an election of office-holders. The name of first Assistant will sufficiently denote that I am what I have been, and will not be an obstacle to my resigning when God shall acquaint you with the necessity of my doing so. My reason is that I wish to be entirely guided by God in this, and that if I was named (elected) by the company it might lead to certain consequences with regard to those who succeed me ; and, in fact, I feel I know not what repugnance to being elected. It is in the perfect frankness which you have always asked from me that I take the liberty of addressing this petition to you."

In the paper that was drawn up on this occasion, which is entitled the "Act of establishment," and is preserved in the National Archives and signed by Vincent de Paul himself, it is stated that he had summoned all the Sisters in Paris to be present on the occasion : "besides these, we have taken the names of those who have already been received into the company, and who are desirous of perseverance in it. And having read the said Rules to them, and the Act above mentioned, we have proceeded to the nomination of office-holders—and though it is said that these should be elected by plurality of voices, nevertheless as it is for the first time, and it was advisable that the one who had established the said confraternity should name the office-holders, we have named the following :

First we have begged Damoiselle de Marillac to continue her office of superior and directress of the said confraternity for her life, as she has done with a special blessing through the mercy of God since its establishment down to the present day.

“With regard to the three other office-bearers we have named Julienne Loret first Assistant, Matheurine Guérin second Assistant and Treasurer, and Jeanne Gressier Dispenser.¹

“This done,” the Act continues, “we have exhorted the above-mentioned members of the confraternity to give thanks to God for their vocation, to act up to it piously, and to live in the exact observance of their rules, and in the offices entrusted to them. This they have all promised to do—by the grace of God.”

The superior, the office-holders and about thirty Sisters² signed the “Act,” the last to sign being M. Vincent. The names of all the absent Sisters who had been received since the first establishment of the company were added to it. The seal of the Congregation of the Mission—a representation of Christ with outstretched arms, illustrating the words, *Venite ad me omnes*, was then affixed to it.

Two months later, on the 8th of October, Louise wrote as follows to her director: “Our Sisters who are in office appear to be getting on well. We began our little Council on Tuesday and discussed the subject of our Sisters’ recall from Nantes. . . . We have much need of your orders and holy guidance in all things for the advance-

¹ Sister Jeanne Gressier had only lately entered the company. She became a very useful member of it, and she was placed by M. Vincent at its head during the interregnum of five months which occurred after Louise’s death.

² “Those who had been longest in the company and were able to write.”

ment in perfection of the work, which is beginning to take shape. I trust you may be inspired to do this by the goodness of God, and that He may give us the grace to correspond to it."

It was on the 18th of October, 1655, that M. Vincent began a series of conferences on what he called the Common Rules (*Règles Communes*) which were continued at intervals till the autumn of the year 1659. These Rules differ considerably from those drawn up for the Archbishop's sanction, but only in the sense that the bud differs from the fully developed flower. The text of these Rules no longer exists; those at present in use were compiled by his successor, M. Almeras, and were definitely adopted at a Council held by the congregation in 1672. On this last occasion M. Almeras, the Sisters who held offices, and the elders amongst the members of the company who had been contemporaries of the saint, unanimously declared that these Rules were the same as those given by M. Vincent and Mlle. LeGras, and that the cause of their being drawn up was in order to remedy the evil of a diversity of copies, and to give the last finishing touches to them.

This treatise, which is about a hundred pages in length, is in manuscript, and is kept for the use of the company of Sisters of Charity, and for them alone; the Rule prescribing that it should not be communicated to externs, and that the superiors should keep it locked up, and neither allow copies to be made of it nor show it to any one outside the community.

The Rule, which comprised nine chapters, treats of the end and fundamental virtues of the institute, of the vows made by the Sisters of Charity, and finally of the employment of their day, and its division between exercises of piety and the service of their neighbour.

The postulants (whose rule of life is marked out for them) are to spend the period of their postulancy at the

Mother-house, and after so many months' probation—the time varying according to the subject—the opinion of the Council being favourable, are to be admitted to their clothing.

Contemporary writers¹ give the following account of the ceremony of clothing as it existed in the time of the first superior: "The eve of the day, Mademoiselle having invoked the Holy Ghost, made a short exhortation to the postulants on the subject of the habit they were to take and the obligations to which they were about to bind themselves. After they have responded that they were firm in their desire to serve God and the poor for the rest of their lives in the company of the Sisters of Charity, she gave them the toquois² to kiss, and then placed it on their head, telling them, sometimes, that it should be to them like the 'white garment' with which the priest invests the newly-baptized infant, and that they could recover their baptismal innocence by exercising charity towards the sick poor; at another time she would point out to them that this head covering should represent the purity which should be theirs, which can only be preserved by great modesty. . . . Having said these few words she recited the Litany of the holy Name of Jesus to which all the community responded, followed by the *Suscipe clementissime Deus*, etc., with the *Benedicat nos*, with which the ceremony concluded."

The profession, at which the Sisters pronounce their vows, follows five years after their clothing. We have already alluded more than once to the severe simplicity with which the holy founders invested every step and measure, and still more ceremony, connected with the company of Sisters of Charity. Their object was, needless to say, to mark its humble origin and above all to nip

¹ *Vie de Vénérable Louise*, etc., by Mgr. Baunard, p. 542.

² A white cap. The cornette is worn over this cap.

in the bud any, even the most distant, approach to ambition in its members to raise the company to the rank of a religious Order. To come from the poor, to return to them, to succour, to nurse, and to teach them in the spirit of their Divine Master; and above all to renounce a cloistered life which would have been incompatible with the one to which God had called them: this was the special refrain of the founders—the very burthen of their song. Accordingly we see M. Vincent return to it again and again. If he dwelt, as he frequently did, on the humble beginnings of the little company, of the *grossièreté* and ignorance of many of its members, it was only to throw into more vivid relief the greatness of the work they were engaged in, and the goodness of God in calling them to it.

“My dear Sisters,” he said to them in one of his conferences, “who can doubt that God is the author of your company? What has attracted you here, tell me! Is it any human being who has told you to leave your home, your father and mother, and—with some of you—your joys, and the pleasures of this world? No! since all these things are opposed to human nature; then it must come from a power from on High. My daughters,” he added, “this work is such that I know no greater in the whole Church. In your vocation you profess to give your life for the love of God and the service of your neighbour. What act of love can surpass that? And after doing this can you care for anything else but for your vocation, and will not your love of it go on for ever increasing?”

At another time he warned them against allowing entrance of any spirit into their midst which might endanger the way of life to which they were called.

“My Daughters,” he said, “you are not nuns; and if any wrong-headed person appeared among you who should say: ‘We ought to be nuns—that would be a

much finer thing!' Ah! my Daughters, the company would be at its last gasp (*a l'extrême Onction*). Fear nothing more than this, and as long as you live never allow this change to be made . . . for whoever says the word *nun* says *cloister*, and the Sisters should go about everywhere."

At another time, after he had expressed his approval of a Sister who had refused to go to a nun's profession, he told them not to speak of this because people might be led to suppose they looked down on the religious life: "On the contrary,"¹ he continued, "you should put it above you, and you should show them much honour. Esteem them greatly, these persons consecrated to God, but ask advice only of those who have the grace of directing you, and to whom God has communicated this spirit."

"They shall be in the world," he explained on another occasion, "without being of it; the spirit, and the ways and the language of the world shall surround them without penetrating to their souls. And then, by renouncing it, they shall also renounce themselves by resisting all self-indulgence of body and mind. They will thus practise, through love of God and the desire to walk in His presence, the virtues of nuns without taking their name. Thus through love they will be chaste; through love they will practise obedience, poverty, and seek solitude, and live 'in a cloister built not of stone, but of their free will.' Spectacle worthy of amazement before God and His Angels, that of these poor Sisters living together in a humble chamber under an invisible law which is ever before them. Truly nothing can be imagined greater, and nuns enclosed for life behind a grille are in no way superior."

There—in this cloister guarded by our Lord Himself—

¹ *Conférences*, t. i. p. 73.

M. Vincent urges the growth of the Christian virtues which befit members of the little company. He places first amongst these sisterly charity, which should be the soul of all their actions; prompt obedience and—what results from this—the readiness to go to any place, or accept any charge to which they may be sent; the love of work, and making a good use of admonitions. These were the subjects of the conferences during the years which succeeded the establishment of the company.

On one occasion, speaking of the training of a Sister of Charity in the hands of her superior, he said: "My Daughters, the same thing happens with us as with the sculptor who wishes to make a fine statue out of a block of marble; there is a poor peasant girl who is absolutely 'in the rough' when God draws her from the quarry, which is the world. He causes her suffering by striking her with heavy blows of the hammer, but all these blows are to bring out the beautiful soul which is in her. He takes afterwards the chisel to fashion her features; He adorns and embellishes it. Then He enriches her with His graces and ceases not till He has made her perfectly pleasing to Him. But to give you that beauty which makes you pleasing to God it is necessary to use first the hammer."

But though—to use M. Vincent's own metaphor—the hammer and chisel had its place in the training of the ideal Sister of Charity, yet, if we turn to his conferences, we find little trace in them of reproof or severity; rather are we confronted on every page with overwhelming demonstration of his paternal kindness and sympathy. Sometimes strange confidences were elicited from his hearers, in which we detect an almost tragic element of remorse for past misdeeds. For instance on one occasion when M. Vincent was about to conclude a Sister asked

leave to say something. The permission being given she said: "I ask pardon of God, and of you, Father, and of all the company, for having taken a book from a Sister who has since died. I wished to keep it because of its beauty, and seeing her search for it, I told her I had not seen it. God permitted for my good that I should be moved from the place I was at, and where I had the intention if I had returned to it of taking something else. One day whilst I was at prayer, I was seized with great compunction for having committed such a fault, and for having concealed it by a lie. I have asked pardon of God, and I made the resolution of coming and humbling myself before the whole assembly, and putting the book in your hands—which I do now, and I beg of you to obtain by your prayers the remission of my sins."

The holy superior received this confession much in the spirit of the father of the prodigal son. "You have committed a great fault, my child, but it has been well repaired, and God has been honoured by the act of humiliation you have made. I beg of our Saviour to grant us all this grace of humility." ¹

The confidences of the Sisters as a rule took a lighter vein; as in the case of a young Sister, Marguerite Laurence, who admitted that on one occasion when she was on her way to take food to a sick person she was much tempted to stop and look at the fun and frolics of a fair which she happened to pass. But taking the cross on her rosary in her hand she said to herself "O my Lord, Thou art more worth looking at than these follies." And so passed on.

If M. Vincent heard anything said in the Sisters' praise, how delighted he was to repeat it to them, in order to encourage them to continue in the same admirable path! As for instance the following: "I must tell you, my dear

¹ *Conférences*, p. 181.

Sisters, that I have frequently had the consolation to see the modesty with which you walk in the streets, and how, also, you allow no one to speak to you in a manner unworthy of the spouses of Jesus Chrst. A Counsellor belonging to the Court has lately told me that having met two of the Sisters, one of whom was carrying a basket and the other a basin of soup for the sick, he had observed such modesty in one of them that she had not so much as raised her eyes from the ground! Another holy personage has said the same thing to me. 'How happy, M. Vincent, your Daughters are in their community! There indeed they live in peace, and this should cause no astonishment, for it is out of poor material such as those that our Saviour began His holy Church.' "

If the touching and beautiful side of the life of labour and toil of the Sisters of Charity filled the holy founder with consolation, and caused him to overflow with kindly words, the reverse of the medal, the trials to which they were constantly subjected, were not passed over by him. It was in allusion to these that he once said to them: "When our Lord was visiting the sick, how often He must have passed by the crowded street or tavern, and many no doubt mocked at Him, and above all wounded His Heart by licentious songs or insolent words—well, my Daughters, if the Son of God has endured all these trials, who would wish to be exempt from them?"

Not one of these holy and devoted women who hung upon his words—drinking in the encouragement they required for their painful and trying duties—but must have felt their hearts glow within them when he told them (as he frequently did) that their work was that of Jesus Christ Himself, as it was directed to the salvation of soul and body. "It is such that, as some one says, if the angels and saints in Heaven were capable of desiring anything it would be to perform these holy deeds."

“My Sisters,” he said to them on another occasion, “if we could see the state of the soul of a Sister of Charity who works wholly for God we should be rapt in admiration: we should see it shining like the sun. We could not look at it without being dazzled. But we shall see it in Heaven.”

CHAPTER XIX

MENTION has been made more than once in the course of this volume of the familiar conferences given weekly by the venerable foundress to her spiritual Daughters. We use the word familiar because, like those of the Superior-general (which in their turn were modelled on those of St. Francis of Sales), Louise de Marillac invited the Sisters to express their opinion, and commented upon them; approving and, though very rarely, disapproving, as the case required.

Many of these conferences were taken down at the time, and preserved in the archives of the company. From these we learn that they lasted about three-quarters of an hour. They were not devoid of incident; perhaps—it may be allowed to note—occasionally, of a slightly humorous character. This we gather from the holy Mother's own observations.

“You should answer very humbly and simply,” she said to them once, “and with much respect, even when one of the Sisters says something that makes you laugh, as for instance when a Sister speaks with a strong Picard accent. Ah, my Sisters, take great care not to make fun of it! But if one of you finds it impossible to suppress a smile she should quickly ask pardon of her Sister, for fear that the other should think she was turning her to ridicule.”

Once speaking of the practical use of these conferences

she said : " My Sisters, have you ever noticed how masons make use of a level to rectify their work, not thinking it safe to trust to their eye ? Well, my dear Sisters, the conference is our level which we then pass up and down on our conduct, by which we can judge of its defects."

Like M. Vincent, Louise took the greatest pains to impress upon her Daughters a high esteem of their vocation. A conference she gave on this subject is so beautiful and elevated in its ideas that it is worth giving almost in full :

" One of the principal graces God has given you, my dear Sisters, for the advancement of your souls in Christian perfection is your vocation to the company of *la Charité* ; for this reason I wish to put before you the sentiments you ought to have respecting it. You might have very high ones, or very low ones, and the one kind would not be opposed to the other. Very low ones, my Sisters, for could anything be more humble in the eyes of the world than was the beginnings of your institute ? You will see in the conferences of our much-honoured Father how insignificant were its early commencements. A few peasant girls came to Paris to be employed to carry cans of food and take remedies ; then they were assembled to live in community, and a company was formed of them without any change in their simple country habits, neither in their lives, nor in their dress. What could be more abject, more degraded in the sight of the world ? . . . And with regard to yourselves, what a life of labour and toil you had led in serving little children, galley-slaves, and the poor ! What trials from insufficient food, and being always engaged in painful duties. Is not all this enough to make you have a very humble opinion of our company ? It is good for you to keep constantly before your eyes that yours is the most contemptible and lowliest institution, in the eyes of the world, of any that exists in the Church.

And do you realise the advantage it is to you to keep this firmly impressed on your mind? It is that you may never be taken by surprise when meeting with contempt, or other trials, that are a cause of suffering to you; and it will be a source of very great consolation to you to think that the goodness of God has chosen you for this kind of life in order to honour the one which His divine Son led upon earth.

“Then with very little reflection it is easy to see the high opinion you should have of your company. Could anything be higher than a vocation which encourages you to the imitation of so sublime an example?”

“Consider how God devised in its establishment a way of enabling some of those who were themselves very poor to exercise the virtue of charity. Which amongst you could ever have hoped to take food daily even to one sick person? Who could have undertaken to supply them constantly with remedies, and have tended their sores and wounds? Even more, much more, which of you could have hoped to go freely in and out of houses in order to speak to people of their salvation, and represent to them the dangerous state in which they may be living? As for myself I must own to you I might well, with the grace of God, have hoped to do all this, but hardly expected to do it, whereas it is what you, as you know, are doing every day. . . . Though all Christians are obliged to serve God, and to do good to their neighbour, they have other occupations which distract them from this duty, but, my dear Sisters, God has shown you such special marks of His favour that He has called you to a profession in which you have nothing else to do. Although you are poor girls, and of yourselves have no means of doing good, nevertheless you are doing it, and can do it incomparably more than the greatest ladies in the world; because no sum of money they could give is equal in

value to the gift of oneself, and the good you do by the employment of every moment of your life, and exposing it even to great danger, for the love of God, in the service of the poor. You should appreciate very highly the grace of such a holy office. You should also owe your little company much honour and veneration for the manner in which our good God has formed it, and the means He has, in His great mercy and power, taken, to cause it to subsist in the exercise of a very perfect charity. Every time I think of this it causes me an amazement which I cannot describe, and it makes me confess that it is in the power of God, alone, to create great results from little ones, and often from none at all.

“My dear Saviour! Our Master and our Model; Jesus crucified! All these wonders come to us from, and originate in Thee. It is Thy love which, directed to the hearts of Thy dear servants, has kindled fire and flame in them for the exercise of charity—a fire which does not consume so much as burn with the zeal of Thy love and the desire that all creatures should share in this love after they have felt its effects in their own hearts in the good Thou hast caused them to perform.”¹

On another occasion, speaking of the love of their vocation, Louise said: “We should never think of the happiness of our vocation without making acts of love and thanksgiving for it.

“The first reason is its dignity, because it enables us to put in practice the two principal commandments of God, and it obliges us to give up all our time to works of charity, not only in outward services which we give to the body, but even more in the assistance we give to souls, by speaking to them of God and helping them to know Him and love Him to all eternity. . . . The greatest mark of love of our vocation which we can give is to

¹ *Louise de Marillac: Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 70.

practise faithfully its obligations, and to refuse all the satisfactions which the world, the flesh, and the devil put before us in order to draw us from it, always keeping ourselves on the watch on those occasions when they might endanger its loss.

“ We shall know if we truly love it if we suffer very willingly all the difficulties we meet with in order to maintain ourselves in it; if we love the humiliations which—for want of realising what is our greatest good—we meet with in the accomplishment of our vocation; if we take joy in calumnies and abuse, when we have given no occasion for what has and is said of us, and when our love of God is as great, or even more fervent, when we are thus treated.

“ We should put our vocation, in so far as it concerns us, before all others, being persuaded that God has called us to it for our greater good, and possibly as the sole means of our salvation. We should be satisfied with the practices that it enjoins, and look upon the desire to undertake others, even though they should in appearance be more perfect, as a dangerous temptation. We do not perceive that the enemy of our souls takes pleasure in seeing our minds occupied with vain desires, whilst we neglect the virtues of our state of life, which we are given the occasion of practising every hour of the day. Thus we lose the graces attached to the practice of these virtues from the desire of greater ones which it is not in God’s design to give us. . . . Let us guard ourselves, my Sisters, from such misfortunes; let us allow ourselves to be led by our superiors, confining our attention to the exercises and objects of our vocation, and to our Rules, and exert ourselves to be faithful to them.”¹

Speaking to them on one occasion of the difficulties they were likely to meet with in following out their

¹ *Louise de Marillac; Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 73.

vocation, she said : “ I must warn you, my dear Sisters, that you will not be without little crosses, some of which are caused by the enemy of our souls, some by your own nature, and others by the world ; and these you will have from your first entrance into the company. The devil will not fail to prepare pitfalls for you, and to make them more powerful he will represent to you the appalling difficulties of your different offices—both on account of the tempers and characters of the Sisters with whom your lot is cast, as well as from the changes of place which have so often to be made. . . . And on your part the separation from your relations, the banishment from your home and country, the change of your manner of living, so unlike that led by the world, and so contemptible in its eyes, may distress you greatly and make you despair of ever being able to accommodate yourself to them. A little patience, my Sisters ! All these thoughts are but clouds which for a time prevent you from seeing and tasting how good God is to those who are of a right heart.

“ Does it not take a little time for people who are engaged to be married to get accustomed to each other, even when their inclinations are in favour of it ? Do they not at first feel their separation from the paternal roof ? And do you find it strange that coming into the family of Jesus Christ in which nothing is shown you but the renunciation of your own will, but crosses, and practices trying to human nature, that you should find it difficult at first to accustom yourselves to them ?

“ Look upon these difficulties as coming to you from the hand of God in order to strengthen you in your resolution and your fervour. Embrace generously the cross He puts into your hands with which to follow Him, and be persuaded that this purpose will draw down upon you an augmentation of grace, a great progress in virtue, and a strong confidence that your trials and sufferings

will be enduring in this life and very meritorious for eternity." ¹

Speaking on the subject of the excellence of their vows Louise said : " The origin of vows is found in the death of our Saviour on the cross, by which He entirely discharged our debt to the Divine Justice ; it is a result of the promise He made, figuratively, when He said, ' And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.' Is not this promise, O my God ! literally fulfilled in all those to whom Thou givest the grace of binding themselves by vows ? for what remains to him who has made them ? Nothing whatever, except to belong to Thee by right of possession. No doubt my spiritual and corporal life belong to Thee since Thou art my God and my Creator ; but my will is free as it is thus Thou hast created it—as long as Thou leavest it to me. But by my vows I can offer it to Thee as homage, and make a sacrifice of praise and honour to Thee of it, and having thus given it to thee it no longer belongs to me but entirely to Thee. Thus all the actions of a person who has consecrated himself to Thee belong to Thee. Henceforth my heart should be careful that nothing proceeds from it that is unworthy of a God, and that I should never forget myself to the extent of taking away from our God what is truly His.

" Most Holy Virgin, thou art our example in all things, but more especially in what concerns vows. Thou art the first who didst consecrate thy virginity to God and thou didst merit by so doing to draw Him down to Thy bosom. Make me honour thee henceforth as my mother, and may I learn from thee the fidelity I owe to my God for the rest of my days.

" Vows give liberty to the soul to enter into familiar communication with God. He makes her enter into a manner of treaty with Him, in which she promises, and

¹ *Louise de Marillac : Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 77.

makes engagements, and God accepts and makes promises on His part to her. The soul promises and vows a love for Him which is the one most pleasing to Him : that is, to give herself wholly to Him without reserving the power of disposing of herself ; and God gives Himself in exchange to the soul, and shares all His possessions with her. What a marvellous thing it is, this stooping of our God—or rather what an admirable power is displayed in this exaltation of a mere nothing to so great a dignity ! Be Thou ever blessed for permitting man to bind himself in this manner to Thee, and for the grace Thou hast given him of inspiring him with the desire of doing so ! ”¹

Louise has many beautiful things to say on the subject of the vow of chastity.

“Chastity,” she says, “puts man in the position of subjecting his senses to the law of reason. It causes him to approach in purity to the state of the angels and return in a sense to the state of innocence of our first parents. It is a virtue, O ! my God, which honours the unity and simplicity of Thy being, and detaches the soul from all the affections which might divide her, and which puts her on the path of a close union with Thy Divinity. . . . There are two virtues necessary for the preservation of chastity : modesty and love of retirement.

“Modesty is both exterior and interior. Exteriorly it affects the movements of the body ; it stops the eyes from wandering, and prevents their dwelling on forbidden objects. It turns the ears away from listening to dangerous conversation ; it regulates all our words and our actions. But this exterior modesty cannot exist without the interior which consists in having our souls occupied with God, our understanding and our memory constantly directed towards the thought of Him, and our will aimed at loving and pleasing Him in all things.

¹ *Louise de Marillac : Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 79.

“The love of retirement detaches the soul from the world and prevents us mixing with it except when charity makes it necessary. It is in solitude that God takes pleasure in conversing with His Spouses and revealing Himself to them. Though Sisters of Charity are obliged by their various duties to mix with the world, they should always preserve an interior solitude of the heart, and they should abstain from making, or receiving, any visits excepting such as are forced upon them by their work.

“We also have a cloister as well as nuns, from which it is as difficult for the soul who is faithful to God to emerge as it is for the nun to leave hers—though it is not made of stones, but of a holy obedience, which should regulate all our desires and actions. I pray to our Saviour, Whose example it is which has shut us up in this holy cloister, that He will give us the grace never more to leave it.”¹

Nothing could be finer than the conference given by Louise on the virtue of holy obedience :

“Jesus Christ had so much love for obedience that desiring to make use of it for the Redemption of mankind He vowed it to His Father from the moment of His conception in acquiescing to His Will with that object, and in practising it faithfully all His life long till His death ; this leads me to think that He wishes to make use of this virtue for the sanctification of souls, and that He asks it specially of those whom He has called to His service. I resolve therefore to love it as a means of imitating the example of this Divine Model, and in order to apply to my soul the merit of the death He suffered out of obedience to His heavenly Father, I desire to live and die in obedience to His holy Will.

“Abraham’s obedience shows me how pleasing this virtue is to God ; the sin of Adam, on the other hand, shows me how displeasing disobedience is to Him. The

¹ *Louise de Marillac: Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 84.

one drew down on the family of the Patriarch the Source of benediction which was to come upon the whole world; and the other was the cause of all the pains and maledictions that have descended upon his posterity from that day to this.

“The disposition of a soul which accepts with holy indifference whatever God wills in her regard is truly angelic, because the angels in Heaven destined to the guardianship of souls await peacefully God’s orders—it being the same to them if they are employed in Heaven for the accidental glory of the Blessed, or in Purgatory for the consolation of the souls who suffer there, or on earth in order to communicate the holy inspirations that are necessary to men for their salvation.

“Obedience is so necessary that without it continual disorder would reign in families, particularly in religious communities, and more especially in the company of Sisters of Charity, on account of the liberty their different occupations oblige them to have in going from one place to another.

“One of the means which should help us, it appears to me, to acquire this virtue in the way God asks it of us and to esteem it highly, is continually to represent to ourselves that which the Son of God submitted to for our sakes in matters which are painful and trying to us—remembering that God in creating the world, having put all mankind under the law of obedience, it is one of the principal duties which He asks of all reasonable creatures. . . . And since there are many ways of fulfilling this duty, it has appeared to me that in order to practise it in the manner God wishes we should do so with great simplicity and humility. Again, we should obey those who have a right to our obedience as if it was God Who was commanding us, because the authority is from Him and it is out of love of Him that we should obey. A third condi-

tion of obedience is, not to try to induce our superiors to give us orders which would be conformable with our wishes ; but to wait till we are told what our superior thinks that God asks of us.

“ A fourth condition is that obedience should not only come from the heart but from the mind—that is to say, it should be accompanied with submission of the judgment ; what helps very much to make us attain to this is, not to be too positive in our opinions, and to give in and defer to others even in the smallest things.

“ It is by virtue of obedience that Sisters of Charity are ready to submit to changes from one place to another, to changes in the Sisters with whom they are associated, and of offices, at the order of those in authority ; and to be at all times ready to go wherever and with whomsoever they are told. This disposition of the soul is necessarily attached to the providential designs in the establishment of their company, without which they could not either give God the glory which His goodness desires to receive from it, nor could they render the poor the services which they have vowed to them.

“ If a Sister of Charity did not practise this virtue she would never enjoy that interior peace which is so necessary to please God ; for the changes which will, and must, constantly happen to her would be a continual trial to her inclinations and a cause of pain to her. And if attention was paid to her wishes, her example, it is much to be feared, would be a serious drawback to others, and be capable of causing great disorders in the company. Obedience asks such complete detachment of a Sister of Charity as to place of residence, that, not only she should be prepared to go to any place she is sent to, but that she should not even desire any in particular. Believe me, my dear Sisters, it is always a risk to make a choice of one's own, and dangerous to desire anything before God

desires it for us. I have known some who have asked to be moved, and it has cost them their vocation. Besides, what is it that we seek? Is it not to please our Sovereign Lord? Then let us wait that His will should be signified to us by our superiors, and let us honour by the changes of place and country that of Jesus, and of the Blessed Virgin from Bethlehem to Egypt, and from Egypt to Nazareth—not wishing to have any fixed abode, or home, on earth any more than they had.”¹

There was one virtue which the venerable Mother never ceased inculcating on her spiritual children and it follows naturally from her lessons on obedience, being the natural outcome and fruit of that virtue; and that is submission to the providence and ruling of God. “Your company,” she said on one occasion, “having been providentially formed, your lives should be entirely guided by this same Divine Providence. If you are entirely submissive, and abandon yourselves entirely to it, as God wishes you should, be assured it will never abandon you. Providence will be your strength in your weakness, spiritual as well as physical; your consolation in desolation; your sufficiency in want; your assurance in danger—as it has ever been since the establishment of your company.

“Our Saviour asks more confidence of us than prudence. . . . Do not trouble about what will become of you, nor let yourselves be deceived by vain apprehensions, which are merely obstacles to your salvation. Strengthen your hearts in that holy delectation which is caused by confidence in the Providence of God. What treasures there are, O my God, hidden in Thy Providence! and how sovereignly those who follow it by their obedience and submission honour it, and who do not anticipate its actions by their vain disquietude and fears! Yes, but (you may tell me) it is for God’s sake I am anxious. It is not for

¹ *Louise de Marillac: Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 89.

God's sake you worry—if you put yourselves in that state to serve Him—for He is a Master Who wills to be served in peace and tranquillity, and desires that His orders and commands should be awaited without impatience.

“ Try to acquire evenness of soul, and interior peace in all the painful trials you come across. Accustom yourselves to receive all subjects of annoyance from the hand of God Who is your Father, and well knows what is fitting for you, and permits you to be tried by His justice, sometimes to correct and punish you, and at others to testify His great love for you in sending you sufferings in order to apply the merits of those of His Son to your souls.”¹

Speaking one day of the merits of their vows, Louise said to them : “ The vow of poverty is the practice of the evangelical counsel given by the Son of God when He said ‘ Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ There are great mysteries hidden under those words. Thou, O my Jesus, dost testify it in saying that to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. What a wondrous thing to be so poor and yet at the same time so rich ! What is this poverty of spirit but detachment from all that concerns the affections, and a true and deep conviction that there is nothing we possess in all created things which is verily our own; thus we should make use of creatures without being slaves to them. Most lovable poverty ! give me grace, O my God, to understand it well, and to appreciate the riches that are concealed beneath it. I can see no other meaning for the word Kingdom of Heaven but that it signifies Thyself. Is it true, then, that thou dost belong to those who have nothing ? In truth Thou alone art all, and to possess Thee I will renounce all things.

“ The spirit of poverty is that of Jesus Christ. He

¹ *Louise de Marillac : Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 116.

said, speaking of Himself, 'The foxes have their holes and the birds their nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His Head.' Seeing His great love for this virtue I have conceived a great esteem for it and desire to imitate Him ; and as it is not in my power to practise it perfectly as He did, I have proposed to myself to make use, with great shame and confusion, of the over-abundance which I may have, and to endure without a word of complaint whatever is wanting to me. And I will try to strip myself of all, as far as I can, by a perfect submission to the Providence of God.

" I will therefore love poverty in all my possessions from the bottom of my heart, for the sake of the honour which I owe and ought to have, to the choice my Saviour made of it ; and should it happen to me, through His great goodness, to suffer from actual want, I will see His Divine Will in it, and lifting up my soul to Him I will have recourse to Him alone—considering in myself that from all eternity He has been self-sufficing, and that consequently He not only can be, but is, sufficient for us, and that being in a state in which we should have Him alone for our consolation we should lovingly accept the privation of what is wanting to us out of Him.

" You are particularly obliged to practise this virtue, my dear Sisters, from your profession to take Jesus Christ as your Model. If it should happen to you sometimes to be reduced to straits, ought not this state to be the cause of joy and consolation to you, associating you as it does with that in which He and His blessed Mother so often found themselves during His life on earth ?

" You bear the character of servants of the poor ; it would not therefore be just that you should give yourselves up to amassing goods, after having left all things, and that the servant should become richer than his master. This mark which your vocation gives you should make

you understand its duties, and that, as such, you should work not only for your own livelihood, but also in order to provide them with food.

“I have always looked upon poverty as forming the happiness of the company.”¹

Poverty was constantly the subject of Louise de Marillac's letters as well as of her conferences. More than once when her Daughters were engaged in making foundations at a distance she warned them against what might possibly lead to a breach of this holy rule of poverty. Thus she wrote on one occasion to a Sister: “What am I to say to you, my Sister, about this grand house you are living in? Does not the profession of poverty and lowliness which you make cause you misgivings on the subject? If such is the case make acts of humiliations, both interiorly and exteriorly, so that you should be ashamed to be seen, and esteem yourself least of all the world, as you have only your food and clothing, and these God causes to be given to you gratuitously.”

At intervals she would remind them that a life of labour was a necessary consequence of their vow of poverty.

“Have you,” she asked of one community, “taken in work from the townspeople? Don't forget the practice which exists with us of working for our livelihood. God has not taken from us the necessity of earning our daily bread to let us take our ease, but in order to make us work all the harder in imitation of His Son.”

Poverty was for this holy soul what it was for St. Francis of Assisi, a veritable passion, because she felt the ties between herself and her well-Beloved were ever being drawn, by its means, closer, and more lovingly. She practised it in her own person, depriving herself of all superfluities, and even on many occasions of the necessities of life—in times of public distress—in order

¹ *Louise de Marillac: Ses méditations et ses instructions*, t. ii. p. 82.

to give to the poor. For love of the poor is the necessary sequel to the love of poverty.

This loving devotion to the service of "our masters the poor" is constantly inculcated in both Louise's conferences and letters. On one occasion she writes: "Do you remember to say the prayer for the sick morning and evening, and the Benedicite and grace at meals? Do you take napkins to their bedside, and see that they are always clean? But above all, my dear Sister, have you a great love for their salvation?" Again, in another letter she impresses on them the loving care of their patients, asking them if they are careful to wash their feet and hands when they are attending to them. No services of the poor were too mean or degrading for her, and besides recommending these to her Daughters she set them the example by practising them first herself.

Even when her Sisters, much as she loved them, received ill-treatment instead of gratitude from those whom they were seeking to benefit, Louise could only see cause for rejoicing.

"My Sisters," she wrote, "if you only knew how much consolation I derived a short time ago by hearing how a Sister, having been struck by a poor man, had had the grace to submit to it without defending herself. The master was certainly rather rough, but it was well to suffer the injury, because we should endure all things from them."

Louise owned to her Daughters how she envied them their service of the poor.

"I think sometimes at this hour," she wrote to a Sister working at a hospital, "that I am amongst you all, engaged in giving our dear masters their supper. Heavens! what happiness you have; I am not worthy of possessing it except by desire. Courage then, my dear Sisters. Let us do all things joyfully with hearts filled with the love of God, Who can cause us to find roses even among thorns."

One of her Daughters after her death, recalling some incidents she had observed about her superior, said : “ Mademoiselle had such a great love and charity towards the poor that she wished they should always have the first slice of bread out of the loaf at the morning meal, and the first basin of the soup that was prepared for dinner.” And this custom has been perpetuated up to the present day in the Mother-house in Paris. We know how from the days of her early married life Louise had been accustomed to nurse and attend to the wants of the sick, so that it will not surprise us to read what another of her Daughters—Françoise-Paule Noret—said of her : “ Some poor prisoners who had just come out of prison came to the Mother-house, once, whose shirts had rotted into their backs, and whose bodies were eaten up with vermin ; she gave them some shirts belonging to her son, and alms, and instructed them, and sent them away comforted.” “ She was very skilful at poulticing sores,” said another Sister, “ and used to teach the Sisters under her to do the same.” Many instances could be named, both from Louise’s instructions and letters, of the minute interest she took in every detail of the Sisters’ service of the sick and the indigent. This care for the patients under their charge did not prevent her being very watchful over the health of the Sisters, especially when they were exposed to contagion, or when she had reason to think they were working too hard.

Thus she writes to Sœur Barbe at Bernay in the year 1654, to congratulate her and her Sisters on their courage in nursing the numerous cases of plague in the hospital : “ My very dear Sister, it has caused me much consolation to know that you refused to abandon the charge of the sick, and that the ladies have also persevered. I trust no harm will come to you from it.” She then prescribes remedies, and tells her she is sending a bottle of *orvietan*,

of which Sister Barbe is to take a small dose "the size of a pea" every morning. She also recommends special prayers to St. Roch "to preserve you from fear of the danger, and enable you to endure all that may happen with submission to God's good pleasure."

Love of God, and of their neighbour for His sake; fidelity to their vocation and to their three vows; and a great mutual forbearance founded upon the words "bear ye one another's burthens, so ye shall fulfil the law of Christ": these are the especial notes of Louise de Marillac's instructions to her spiritual Daughters. In none of her conferences, however, did she rise to a greater height than when she spoke to them on the mortification of their own judgment and their will:

"If you wish to aim at perfection you must struggle to die to yourselves. My dear Sisters, what a great matter it is that I put to you in these few words. Would that I could write them for you in my blood, or bequeath them to you in letters of gold, O my best friends in Jesus Christ! You must die to yourselves: that is, you must destroy all the movements and powers of your soul and your body which would put impediments in the way of the operations of Divine Love."

No wonder that armed with these inspiring thoughts her children went forth into the world prepared for any sacrifice: ready to work as long as life was in them, or to die, as St. Vincent told them they must be prepared to do, like sentinels at their posts. Or that their successors, that vast multitude numbering now more than 30,000 Sisters who are at this moment engaged in carrying God's message of love and mercy to every portion of the globe, should still turn to them to find in their teaching all that they require for their spiritual needs.

CHAPTER XX

M. VINCENT was in the habit of calling attention in his conferences to the edifying examples of members of the company of Sisters of Charity who had died in the interval since he had last had occasion to speak to them. We learn from these conferences, as well as from Louise de Marillac's letters, that death was very busy in their ranks in the years 1651 and 1652. And, as it would appear from the same sources, it was the very pick, the most zealous and devoted of these, whom the great Reaper gathered into the Master's barn.

Louise, writing to the community at Étampes in the terrible times of civil war, tells them sadly that they would find many gaps in the Mother-house, for "our Saviour has taken a considerable number from us." Again a little later, in a letter to the Abbé de Vaux, she writes that "we have very great difficulty since the war in finding girls suitable for our undertakings. This has for some years reduced us to great straits. I must tell you that at the present moment there are not more than three of the elders left to help to form the others. All the rest are either newly joined or broken down in health."

In 1653 matters were better. "The house is beginning to get peopled," she wrote on the 8th of February, and at about the same time she mentions that "the number of our Sisters has increased so much that there were thirty at the first table."

Besides the losses through deaths there were those through desertion, which, considering the sacrifices asked of its members, is scarcely surprising.

“Many who were fully formed have left the company,” remarked sadly the superior, who could never get used to such trials. To M. Vincent this weeding process was less distressing and he did his utmost to bring Louise round to his view of the subject.

“You are a little too sensitive about your Daughters leaving you,” he said on one occasion. “In the name of God try to acquire the grace of resignation to such happenings. God is conferring a grace on the company by purging it in this manner, and this will be one of the first things our Saviour will make you see when you get to Heaven. You should be well assured in spite of this that none of those whom He has really called to the company will abandon their vocation. What concern of yours are the others? Let us allow them to go; we shall not want for subjects.”

In a conference to the Sisters in which he mingled in almost equal proportions the oil of encouragement with the bitter herb of salutary warning he said: “You may be looked upon as premature fruits, for it is impossible to give you all the time that would be necessary in order to teach you all that you should know. Yet how is it that, in spite of this, with the small amount of experience you have, you should have done such great things if it were not that God has poured abundant graces on the company in these early years of its existence? For religious societies are in general more fervent in their beginnings, and are given greater graces than they receive later on. Thus, my Sisters, you should accomplish more without comparison, now, than you will do later on.” Then he went on to compare them with the Christians of the primitive ages of the Church.

The obedience of the Sisters of Charity above all moved him to joy. "Oh, celestial virtue," he cried out in his transport, "which renders man truly divine, which pours a light from on High on the souls which are desirous of receiving it, which dazzles by its brilliancy the eyes which contemplate you, and ravishes them with admiration at your beauty.

"Oh, my Daughters, if you exert yourselves to acquire this virtue you will be more brilliant than the sun in Heaven, and your company will shine in the same way as saints are represented in pictures, with aureoles round their heads."

And, indeed, it is impossible to read the history of some of these pioneers of charity, short and simple as they for the most part are, without partaking of their holy Father's admiration and of the consolation he derived from them.

We read of a Sister Martha of Auteuil, who came from a village near Paris, and entered the company in 1642, that being at a *Charité* at Hennebout the poor used to pursue her, as she went her rounds, with their sores; and sometimes with boils and abscesses that required lancing, and she attended to all who came to her with such patience and success that she earned the name of the "doer of miracles," and excited the jealousy of the doctors. "She had so much charity for the sick," it is said in the little notice of her preserved in the chronicles of the company, "that when she met any helpless ones on the road she used to carry them a considerable distance on her back. On one occasion she met two men who were fighting furiously and she managed to divide them, and then taking them to a statue of our Lady which was near she made them kneel down with her and ask pardon of God, and promise to live henceforth at peace with each other."

Another, of the name of Marie Lullen, who had served her apprenticeship as Sister of Charity at Mans, took all

her joy and satisfaction in the rebuffs and mortifications which were given her. "My Sister," she once was heard to say, smiling, "I must annihilate myself in order that Jesus may live in me." "My Father," Louise said of her, at a conference, to M. Vincent, "that Sister belonged entirely to our Lord; she was a privileged soul."

Another, whose name was Marie de Gennes, belonged to a good family. She was remarkable for her humility and her love of prayer, and it was related of her that her great fear was that she should be a burthen to the company. Her love of the poor was so great that she once admitted that she felt a greater sense of joy and satisfaction when she went the round of her poor people, even than when she received a visit from her beloved parents.

This love, which one is sometimes disposed to think is the special heritage of the spiritual Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, was shared by a Sister André. M. Vincent himself tells us about this holy soul. "When I was assisting at her death-bed," he says, "I asked her: 'Well, my Daughter, is there nothing in your past life which gives you cause to fear?'"

"'No, Father, none at all. Except, perhaps, in having taken too much pleasure in serving the poor. When I used to pass through the villages going to attend to the poor people it seemed to me I did not walk, I thought I had wings and that I could fly, such joy had I in serving them.'"

Sister Claude Parcolée had a vision of our Lord—Whom she found, and served in the person of the poor.

Sister Catherine Bonnelle had nearly lost her eye-sight, but she refused to make a pilgrimage to a shrine of the *Sainte Face* at Laon, though she had received an inward assurance that she would recover her eye-sight there, because she had not received her superior's permission to do so. She was cured there two years later.

Sister Nicole Bildet de St. Rémy, whose generosity and self-sacrifice were without limit, used to give alms she had collected for the poor to others to distribute because, she said, doing so gave her too much pleasure. She had charge of the galley-slaves, and they told of her that she never allowed a gang to be transported to Toulon without giving them a little money which she had begged right and left for them.

It was said of another, Sister Gabrielle, daughter of Bernard Cabaret, who was a large landowner and a man of some importance, that she wept for a whole year before her parents allowed her to join the company. There were no bounds to her zeal after she became a Sister of Charity, and she was known to have crossed rivers in full flood at the risk of her life to succour the poor—protesting the while that she would die happily serving them. The poor of the parish of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet used to crowd round her when she went out and called her a saint. Her portrait, painted in her youth, is still in the possession of the community in Paris.

Sister Jeanne Bonvilliers was another pure and beautiful soul, of whom it was told that she accused herself as of an extraordinary fault that she had twice in the same week lost sight, in her thoughts, of the presence of God.

Sister Barbe Bailly was of a different stamp, being more of a Martha than a Mary. She was superior of the community at Bicêtre when it was used as a hospital for foundlings. She had twelve sisters and over a thousand children under her charge during the worst days of the war of the Fronde. She was afterwards sent to Poland, where she remained seven years. At the end of that time she was recalled to Paris. She showed such marked talent for organisation in the management of the hospital of that city that it drew upon her the notice of the celebrated architect Mansard, who consulted her in the

disposition of the rooms when making his plans for the Hôtel des Invalides. These were not, however, her only merits, as we read of her that she had a heart full of love for God and her neighbour.

Sister Marguerite Chétif and Sister Mathurine Guérin both entered the company in the same year (1648), and were remarkable for their gifts and their piety, and both were destined to leave their mark upon it.

Sister Marguerite Chétif was appointed by M. Vincent as first superior in succession to their venerable foundress. The heavy duty devolved, therefore, on her of guiding the company through the trying time when it lost—within six months—both founder and foundress. No greater praise could be given of her than that she justified his choice.

Sister Mathurine Guérin (who afterwards succeeded Sister Marguerite in the same office) was a native of Moncontour in Brittany, where her father held a responsible position under the lord of Langourla. She was only seventeen years of age when she asked for admittance into the company. One of the first places she was sent to was Liancourt, where she had to undergo great trials. She was recalled later on to the Mother-house and was employed as secretary by Louise till within a few months of the holy superior's death. She was specially distinguished for her sensible and lucid mind, her warm heart and generous nature, and (we read) she possessed a firmness of character which was only equalled by its kindness.

Short as is the sketch we have been able to give of these holy souls, who may truly be described as belonging to the "salt of earth," they yet bear tribute to the training of their venerable superior. We learn from the testimony of one who was called to give his opinion in the process of Louise de Marillac's cause, with a view to her being

raised by the Church to a place on her altars, that this training was of a most intimate character :

“ One of the most striking characteristics that I have observed in her life and correspondence is the perfect understanding which existed between her and her Daughters. This characteristic is the more striking owing to the fact that the line of demarcation between the classes was drawn much more rigidly in those days than in the present time, and that it was then most unusual for a woman of Louise de Marillac’s birth and intelligence to put herself on the level of absolute equality with poor peasant girls.”¹

Another writer who, according to her latest biographer, was personally acquainted with her, remarks: “ It is easy to conceive how the coarseness of manners (*grossièreté*) of these good village girls, especially in the early commencements, was opposed to one of her delicacy and refinement. But in spite of this natural repugnance she never refused any who came to her. She even kept those specially by her in whom these defects were the most marked—going so far as to cause one who had a very nauseating complaint to share her room.”²

To understand the spirit of mortification of this holy soul, and to realise the degree to which she trampled human nature under foot, one must turn to the example of Him Who on earth “ pleased not Himself ” and upon whom Louise’s life was so closely modelled.

It was this Divine example to which she was ever drawing the attention of her Daughters, as it was from their crucified Saviour from Whom she was ever encouraging them to draw their inspiration.

We read in one of her conferences burning words, rising straight from her heart, to this effect: “ O my Jesus! Thou teachest us from Thy cross the forbearance I should

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 510.

² *Ibid.*, p. 511.

have for my neighbour, and the service Thou wouldst have me render him. My Sisters, listen to the explanation of the honourable name you bear. And Thou, my Love, speak! Thy servants are listening to Thee. What was Thy first word after the torments of the first night and day of Thy cruel Passion? Was it not the word of the great forbearance: 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.' My Jesus! Infinite Goodness! Thou seest that the passions of men obscure their judgment and is the cause of their ignorance. What a lesson to us, teaching us with what forbearance we should treat those who seek to injure us!"

Perhaps one of the points which strikes one most in Louise de Marillac's life is her individual care and interest in the lives of each one of her spiritual children. It was said of the holy founder that he spoke to them as a general leading his troops to battle—encouraging them with heated words to secure the palm of victory; or, at other times, especially in his later days, weeping with them over those who had fallen. How different was Louise's point of view! She was in closest contact with each one of the Sisters individually; she was acquainted with all their trials and shortcomings; accordingly her exhortations to them take more often the form of words of warning than of congratulation over victory achieved. Her biographer says of her that her special care was to form them after her own spirit—that is, above all, to the interior life, the supernatural life, the life in God, which is the source of all religious and charitable life. It is to this she alludes in her "Notes": "Our interior intercourse with God should consist in the recollection of His Divine Presence, adoring Him in all things, taking His love and His fear as the motive of all our actions; looking at Him with the interior eye of the soul in all the successive affairs of life; making use of all objects as a means of

raising our souls to Him, and considering, adoring, and loving always His Divine Will as being ever merciful in its ends. We should have recourse to Him, and count only upon Him, and desire Him alone as our sole consolation ; and in order to do this we must accustom our souls to be closely united to Him—occupying them constantly with the thought of Him, abandoning ourselves to Him, showing Him hearts filled with confidence in Him, and reflecting that He having sufficed Himself from all eternity should, and might, suffice us. To effect this we should make use of ejaculatory prayer.” God first ; God in all ; God alone : that is the summing up of these words of direction and exhortation, in which Louise sought to pass on the secrets of her own interior life to her Daughters.

This appeal to them to see God in all their actions, to let Him be the Soul of their souls, is one to which Louise continually returns in all her letters, varying it according to the character and temperament of her correspondent. And they are to find Him in their fidelity to their Rules. “ Do you love your way of life ? ” she asks one Sister. “ Do you reckon it better for you than all the hermitages and Orders—since God has called you to it ? Do you consider yourselves united together by the secret leading of Divine Providence for each other’s satisfaction ? Do the strong support the weak, and each of you one another, amiably, and with great good will ? Do you remember that obedience should be the cloister, in which our desires, as well as our actions, should be enclosed ? I implore our Saviour, whose example it was that brought you into this holy enclosure, will cause you never to break it.”

Louise’s recommendations to her Daughters to respect and obey the ecclesiastical authorities under whom they were placed were nearly as strongly worded as those in which she tells them to submit to the ruling of Providence,

and for the same reason, namely, that they were to see God in the person of their priest or bishop. Thus she writes to warn the community of Angers that she is afraid that "Sœur Cecile has been taking advantage of Mgr. d'Angers' kindness to be a little too free with him." To Sister Georgette at Nanteuil she writes anxiously on the same subject, though in a different sense, telling her: "It distresses me to hear you are not getting on with the parish priest, who is a learned man, leading a holy life, and to whom we are under great obligations for the charity and good will he has always shown to the Sisters. I have communicated the contents of your letter to M. Vincent . . . and he has charged me to tell you that you are to treat him with all the respect which we owe to him."

Another subject that constantly crops up in her letters is on the duties of the Sisters in charge (*Sœurs Servantes*) to those under them. She impressed upon the Sisters very strongly that when it is a question of choosing them they must never be led by inclination or prejudice, but only by what they consider are God's interests, and what will be to His greater honour and glory. The marks for which they should be chosen are the love of their vocation, the spirit of the company, the exemplary practice of what they recommend to those under them, and submission to their first superiors. Above all those in authority should be unselfish, and should look upon holding office as a thing to be feared. "Let those who are in charge of others look upon themselves as the baggage mules of the company." At another time she wrote that "there should be such equality amongst us, when the company is established on a solid footing, that it might be considered a good plan for the Sisters to take it in turn year after year to be in charge."

It is almost unnecessary to dwell on the care and tenderness which Louise lavished on any of the sick members

of her community. Sister Françoise Noret tells how she never failed to visit them daily if she was capable of getting out of bed herself, and that she used to rise frequently in the night to go to them if they were dying. She was accustomed to send her own dinner to those who were ill, reserving little or nothing for herself. If she was unable to go to them she used to send the Sister Assistant to them to give them messages of consolation and sympathy. "One day," another Sister relates, "she came to see us at Bicêtre where two or three of us were laid up with illness, and no sooner had we seen her than we thought we were cured."

"Such was the substance—according to the testimony of one of her Daughters who had most opportunity of studying her—of the principal traits of Louise de Marillac's own character, as well as of the one with which she imbued her spiritual family, and which formed in them a generosity of soul which under a simple exterior amounted to true heroism. An enlightened superior as well as an indulgent mother, her first object was to correct the faults of their bringing up without robbing it of its simplicity. This spirit of simplicity was hers, as it was to be that of the Institute. It was one of truth, single-mindedness, and purity of intention; looking at God only, and at Jesus Christ in His life of humility, obscurity, and poverty; and the faithful imitation of His charity to the most abandoned of His suffering members. This spirit was one also of strength; of constant effort to attain solid virtue, and of avoidance of what only bore the appearance of it; of mortification of body and soul; of absolute subordination of self-will to the will of superiors in order that the soul, being detached from all things, should be occupied with the interests of Jesus Christ and her neighbour alone, to the exclusion of her own. Above all it was a spirit of limitless confidence in Providence and its

Divine guidance. It was this which caused Louise to soar above all dictates of human prudence in temporal concerns, such as foundations, good works, and even vocations. 'I do not know whether I am mistaken,' she wrote on one occasion, 'but it seems to me that our Lord would always rather have us act with confidence than with prudence, and that this same confidence would be the cause of our acting prudently in our affairs without our being aware of it.'"¹

This confidence in God which Louise possessed in a most marked degree was rewarded by God by astonishing favours. We see continual instances in her life of the good works undertaken by the company being on the point of breaking down, and of Providence ever coming to the assistance of the holy founders and enabling them to surmount their difficulties. It would be tedious to enumerate the many instances in which foundations which had been made by Louise on the strength of promises received were left without any visible means of support. At Brienne,² in spite of the engagements made by Mme. de Brienne, the Sisters were left penniless for the space of two years. At Condé we read the same story. A memorandum of Louise's, notes, that at the latter place in the year 1651 they had received 77 francs out of the 200 that was due to them; and the following year only 61 francs out of 172 that they had been promised. Fontainebleau, where they were under the very eye of the Queen Regent, and occasionally visited by her, was no better off, or rather a good deal worse, as Louise writing to the superior there asks her to let her know how often she had received the Sisters' pension for that foundation, as "we can get no money, and have received none for two years."

¹ *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, p. 513.

² *Ibid.*, p. 494.

Notwithstanding these "broken reeds" in the shape of benefactors, we learn from a conference given by M. Vincent on the 8th of September, 1656, that the general affairs of the company were satisfactory. After recommending to them the care of the goods of their communities he remarked: "Up to this time Mademoiselle has successfully conducted the affairs of your company—by the grace of God—and so well has she done so that I do not know a house in Paris which is in the state yours is in. All complain of debt. . . . Behold the blessing God has given to the good government you have been under. . . . Thus you have every reason to thank God who has preserved you in this state, and this is owing, after His Divine grace, to the good government of Mademoiselle."

It was about this time, or very shortly afterwards, that Louise de Marillac began the enlargement of the Mother-house. A memorandum in her writing is extant, belonging it is surmised to the year 1655, in which mention is made of these additions. They were to consist of a school-room, a surgery (*salle de pansement*), and a dormitory above the parlour, also of an infirmary on the second floor. A letter from Louise to the architect who was to carry out the plans runs as follows:

"Monsieur, the perfect confidence I have that you will pay attention to my entreaty with regard to our little plan causes me to recall to your recollection that it is imperative that it should be as cottage-like and as little spacious as possible. I know that it will be not without difficulty that you stoop to such simplicity, as you have the habit of making these designs in a fine and lofty style. But if you will reflect that in order that the company may last it is necessary it should be poor and humble, in every respect, you will clearly see that it is God's will that it should be so."

On the 1st of June, 1656, we find this note: "To offer to our good God the resolution we have taken to continue the additions to the house."

Mathurine Guérin, Louise's secretary, gave the following account after her death of this episode in the holy superior's life: "As she had no special funds for building the house she began it with great confidence in God's goodness, and she remarked that every time she required money to pay the workmen, a sum, little or big, came quite unexpectedly, so that she admired the providence of God. She did not, however, fail to ask for alms towards the building, and when she met with refusals she thanked God."

The new buildings were finished by Easter in the year 1658, and at the same time permission was obtained from the City Procurator, "in consideration of the services given by the Sisters of Charity," to allow them eleven *lignes d'eau* from the public fountain for the use of their house; a privilege doubtless much appreciated by the Sisters, the absence of a water supply within the convent grounds having been previously a source of grave inconvenience to them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE civil war between Turenne on the one side, at the head of the King's troops, and Condé in command of an army composed of all the disaffected in the country, and largely supplemented by Spanish mercenaries, broke out again after a short lull in the month of May 1656.

Again a strong appeal was made by Anne of Austria to M. Vincent to send Sisters to nurse the soldiers who had been wounded in the campaign. Valenciennes had fallen into the hands of Condé and his Spanish auxiliaries on the 16th of July, and Turenne's army had suffered cruelly in the assault, and in subsequent engagements.

It was on the 29th of July that M. Vincent assembled the Sisters at St. Laurent in order to announce to them that two from their number had been chosen to go to the seat of war to nurse in the hospitals.

"My dear Sisters," he said, "it is you then whom Providence has chosen for this important work! Who would have thought it possible? Would you have believed it—your fathers or mothers would they have dreamt of such a thing happening, that God should have thought of you, my dear Sister, living in your home in Champagne, and you at Poissy, and put you into a company in order to serve Him, though poor peasant girls; and that in spite of your ignorance and rusticity you should have been regarded by God with favour and chosen by Him for such great undertakings. What is this! A queen thinks of you, and asks for you with

incredible kindness in order to employ you in this holy work! Oh, my Daughters, how you should humble yourselves, believing you are quite unworthy of this favour, as in truth you are!" After reminding them that their mission was to repair as far as they could the injuries men had inflicted on their fellow-men, and to preserve lives which men had done their utmost to destroy; or if this was impossible to dispose them to good deaths, he addressed himself specially to Sister Martha, who was to be the superior, and then to the Sister who accompanied her, recommending them the strict practice of their Rule, great modesty in their relations with men, and a holy union. "When you arrive at your journey's end, after having adored our Lord in the Sacrament of the altar in the church, you will go and wait on His Majesty's nurse. You will tell this good lady that you have come to receive her orders and learn from her what service God wishes you to render to the poor, so that you may follow in all things the advice she and the gentlemen give you."

No mention was made in this conference of the Sisters' destination, but a letter has been preserved from Louise de Marillac dated the 3rd of August, in which she acquaints M. Vincent with their safe arrival at La Fère. This town was situated on the confines of the seat of war, the centre of hostilities being the towns of Valenciennes, Cambrai, and Condé, and was therefore a convenient situation for the base hospital for wounded soldiers. There was also a large orphanage in the town, and later on, when, no doubt, the number of Sisters was increased, they appear to have given their services to both hospital and orphanage.

M. Vincent at a conference a year later, on the 5th of August, 1657, alludes to them in these words: "I recommend your Sisters at La Fère to your prayers. They are a

cause of edification to the whole town, and the letters I have received about them mention them not to me only but also to the Court, with the greatest esteem. I will leave you to guess what is said of them in Heaven, and how God looks upon these souls who have no other wish but to please Him, employing all their time, their strength, and their health, their lives even, in the service of the sick."

In the year 1658 the Queen asked for five more Sisters for the Hôtel Dieu of the same town. We find in Louise's correspondence mention made of the Sisters being appointed to another hospital at Bernay in Normandy, where a small foundation in charge of two Sisters had been in existence since 1650. Their work there was at first that of the ordinary country parish kind, but in 1656 the inhabitants started a hospital and handed over the management of it to the Sisters. Louise writes to congratulate them, adding at the same time a word of warning: "Your letter of the 3rd of July acquaints me with the fact that a hospital has been providentially provided for the use of the poor of your place. May God be for ever blessed. But," she hastens to add, "I beg you to take care, my dear Sister, that there should be nothing in the establishment of the hospital at all contrary to the simplicity and humility of Sisters of Charity, or that would interfere with the exact observance of their Rule."

Writing a little later to the same community, after giving them various directions, she reminds them of the spiritual side of their labours in these words: "My dear Sisters, I beg of you to remember that one of the principal obligations of your Rules is to perform your actions in a spirit of lowliness, obedience, and charity." Apparently the installation was on too grand a scale to meet the views of the humble superior. Also she was uneasy at the Sisters, and their patients, being withdrawn from the

special work of the company: that of house-to-house visiting. "Who will occupy the house," she asks, "and what will become of the work of the Ladies of Charity if the poor people on whom they wait are obliged to go to the hospital? You will see that the poor who have sunk in the world will be deprived of the support hitherto afforded them, in having their food prepared for them, and remedies administered; and the small amount of money given will not be employed to supply their wants. We are obliged (*e.g.* by the Rule) to resist this by humble remonstrances given in all charity."

A small foundation had been made in 1655 in a very inaccessible part of Normandy at the earnest request of the Duchess of Ventadour, who, besides being superior of the Association of Ladies of Charity in Paris, was a great personal friend of Louise. So far was the village, Ste. Marie-du-Mont by name, from any habitable region that Louise complains that there was not even a carrier in the district and she had been three months without getting any news of them; and she appeals to Sister Barbe Angiboust at Bernay in the same county to see if her efforts should meet with better success.

"I wish," she wrote, "you could write to each other with the object of getting some information about them. From what I can learn from them they seem to have had some very difficult tasks. It is by trials of that sort that one can testify one's fidelity to God, and it appears to me that they have been equal to the occasion, for which I give thanks to God with all my heart. . . . We are indeed deeply indebted to the Divine goodness for the spiritual assistance given to our Sisters, from whom we are separated by these long distances. Ah, what a great thing it is to lean only on God and to love Him with all one's heart."

Writing in October of the year 1656 to Sister Barbe, Louise informs her of another foundation which had

recently been made at Arras, to which Sisters Radegonde Lenfantin and Marguerite Chétif had been sent.

These two Sisters, with another "good girl" who accompanied them (but in what capacity we are not told), started in August for the scene of their future activities; but on the way the girl fell ill, and Sister Radegonde—who relates the incident—says: "The fever increased, so that we had to stop at Amiens, where after a fortnight she died. I cannot tell you the care taken of her by Sister Marguerite, and the fatigues she underwent, on the journey and during her illness in nursing her—discharging all the most trying duties towards her with the utmost cheerfulness. After the funeral we continued our journey to Arras, and having arrived there we had no idea where to go, not having been given in charge of any one, but a good woman out of charity took us in and lodged us for a fortnight. We were some weeks going from one house to another, getting a bed or our meals wherever we were able; never during all this time did I hear a word of complaint from my Sister Chétif's mouth; on the contrary, she suffered all these discomforts with inexpressible joy, and a calm and serene face."

Before long the Sisters settled down to their usual work of nursing the sick and comforting the afflicted, of which there was no lack in this town which lay so near the seat of war.

"We found," Sister Radegonde goes on to say, "a great number of poor people who had been abandoned by all the world, some of whom were eaten up by vermin and highly infectious. Sister Chétif never spared herself, and never showed the slightest repugnance in cleaning up all the filth she found in the rooms, and persons, of these poor people, which turned one sick even to be witness of them . . . and yet she was very sensitive to such impressions. I have seen her vomit several times whilst

poulticing a girl's leg, which was in such a state of corruption that it was breeding worms. And this did not prevent her rendering this same service several times, though she would not allow me to do it once. We were in charge of the sick of eight parishes, two of which were very large; the work was so hard that the poor Sister was sometimes quite prostrate."

Sister Chétif makes no complaint of over-work in her letters; she, however, mentions that the inhabitants of the town welcomed their services. She also speaks of the amusement to which their dress gave rise especially, sad to say, when they went to church on Sundays. Every eye was turned upon them, and faces were wreathed in smiles, and they had, naturally, been a little upset by it. "Would it not be possible," she asks, "for them to be allowed to wear some piece of stuff (*cape ou serge*) over their toquois, so as to make their dress look more like the costume of the country?"

To this concession M. Vincent, however, would not consent; for how could he admit a diversity of habit which would depend on the part of the country in which the Sisters were placed? "Would it not be better," he wrote, "to edify the people by your modesty, than to hide your faces under a piece of cloth from want of a little humility? Thus if you suffer humiliation from this cause you should give thanks to God for the opportunity He gives you of trampling pride under your feet."

The Superior-general asked the same plainness in the Sisters' living as he did in their dress; thus when the priest of the Mission asked permission for them to take beer, which was the drink of the country, he answered that the Sisters were contented with some decoction of sweetened water which they prepared themselves. "The Sisters of Charity should live in great simplicity in all things," he told them once in a conference.

The foundation at Arras, we learn from the same source, brought great consolation to the holy founder's heart, "seeing that the whole town" (he told them) "is edified by the behaviour of the Sisters of Charity who take the greatest care of the sick under their charge and observe faithfully the Rules of their little company. For which graces I give thanks to the Divine goodness."

Sister Marguerite Chétif felt very deeply the separation from the holy Mother, and in more than one of her letters alluded to this trial. Louise, though she reciprocated this affection with one who was in all respects a kindred spirit, reminds her in one of her letters of Him Who is alone worthy of all our love. " 'My God, let all be done according to Thy good pleasure; ' 'My God, I am all Thine': that is what you and I should say from the bottom of our hearts. . . . It is thus that He separates souls from all earthly affections in order to fill them with His heavenly love. What a consolation it should be to us to feel ourselves under His special guidance. This gives me cause to rejoice with you that it should be so."

When one of the Sisters died, as a result of her heroic efforts in nursing the soldiers at Sedan, M. Vincent, whilst lamenting her death, rejoiced over her devoted service of God and her neighbour. "This Sister," he told the community at the Mother-house on the 5th of August, 1657, "is Jeanne Christine Prévost, whom the Queen had sent to nurse the wounded soldiers. Who would have believed that Sisters of Charity would have been chosen by God to go to their assistance? Men go there to kill, and you to give life. O Saviour of mankind! be Thou for ever blessed for the graces Thou has bestowed on this company!"

Writing later, on the 6th of October, to one of his missionaries, M. Vincent sends this message to them:

“Tell our Sisters what consolation it has been to me to hear of their admirable conduct, and of the assistance they have given to the poor of Stenay and Sedan, which has given universal satisfaction. Mademoiselle Le Gras is much consoled by it.”

The Sisters were asked for at this time in all directions: the Archbishop of Toulouse pressed M. Vincent to make a foundation in his diocese, and the Bishop of Bayonne asked for them in the south of France. We read also of the Duchesse de Ventadour being very desirous of settling the Sisters in the mountainous district of La Coreize, where she owned a large property. Louise mentions that the Duchess “had even proposed to establish a seminary of the Sisters, there being much work for them in the province owing to the ignorance of the people.” Nothing came, apparently, of this proposal; Louise excusing herself from making the foundation from paucity of subjects, and on account of the priests of the Missions having no branch establishment in those parts.

Besides the numerous foundations in France, those made during the years 1654 and 1656 in Poland must have been a considerable drain on their resources. Letters exchanged between M. Ozenne¹ and M. Vincent in 1654 show that the Queen, Louise-Marie, had opened a new house for the company in Varsovia. Later on (in 1657) she put the Sisters in charge of a very important institute, that of St. Casimer, which, at first destined for an orphanage, became later on the Mother-house of the Sisters of Charity of the Polish province. Though the Sisters began to get recruits from the country in which they had now taken root, and were prospering greatly, it was some time before it was self-supporting in point of members, as we learn from the Annals that twenty Sisters of Charity were sent

¹ M. Ozenne had succeeded M. Lambert as head of the priests of the Missions in Poland.

out from France to Poland between the years 1652 and 1660.

The trials undergone by the Sisters, when sent to nurse the wounded at the seat of war, likewise left its track on the community at the Mother-house, many returning in bad health, and some only to die.

Amongst the former number was Sister Anne Harde-mont, who, whilst nursing soldiers at the siege of Mont-médy, suffered severe injury from a fall from which we are told she never fully recovered. In spite of broken health Sister Anne was put in charge of two other Sisters (Sister Avoye being one) and sent to the hospital of Ussel at the urgent request of the Duchesse de Ventadour.

M. Vincent addressed these Sisters, as was his wont, before their departure: "Remain in peace, my Daughters," he said, "and abandon yourselves utterly in your holy work to Divine Providence. I must warn you that the people of the country to which you are going, though good and much given to practices of piety, are sunk in the deepest ignorance. And in this consists the excellence of your employment, because it will give you an opportunity of doing your utmost to make them know and love God. What work could be greater than this?"

He then went on to say the best method of instructing the people was to teach the children their catechism in the presence of their parents. He said he recommended this from his own experience.

The Sisters had a good deal to go through on their first arrival at Ussel owing to the slowness of those who had charge of the installation at the hospital. Louise writes to them in her usual strain, recommending patience: "Delay is no doubt painful to people who would wish to see God's designs realised speedily, and who, having given themselves to God with all their heart, desire to work

for Him with all their strength. But, my dear Sisters, if we would please our good God we should look not so much at what we want to do ourselves, as what He wants of us, and in order to do this you should devote yourselves with great zeal, sweetness, and charity to the service of the few people whom you have got the care of. Our Saviour will know well in His own good time how to give you more to do."

Their day not being fully occupied at first, the Sisters found time to meditate, converse, and even sing together. This gives rise to a warning from their superior: "I must beg Sister Avoye that when you sing in order to divert yourselves when you are together, to be careful that you are not heard by people outside."

It appears that some ladies in the town had wished to make use of the Sisters' services. This Louise forbids. "You will answer them that the Sisters are there to nurse the sick poor only, not ladies who are able to provide themselves with the assistance they require."

It is noteworthy that almost the only occasion on which M. Vincent administered a rebuke it was to this same Sister for the scant courtesy she had displayed in a letter to Louise, in answer to an admonition she had received from her superior.

"In the letter you wrote to Mademoiselle," he remarks, "you have once or twice been wanting in the respect you owe her. I am sure your heart was not at fault, but the words you used to justify yourself were too free. Good heavens, my Daughter, if you have no reverence for your superior for whom would you have any! She makes no complaint, but I feel it is my duty to say this in order that you may in future treat with her as you would with your good Mother to whom you are very dear. Write to her therefore humbly and affectionately, as it is right a Sister of Charity should do."

Sister Marguerite Guérin relates a little incident in connection with a foundation which took place in the year 1658. It was at the invitation of the saintly Bishop of Cahors, who wished the Sisters to take charge of an orphanage in his episcopal city. At the last moment when all was arranged, and the Sisters chosen for the work were on the eve of departure, the one who had been appointed Sister Servant, and from whom (Sister Marguerite tells us) great things were expected, gave up her post and left the company. "Notwithstanding all this," she says, "I do not remember seeing the venerable superior in distress or losing her tranquillity. In answer to a Sister who spoke about it she replied that God knew what was expedient for the company, and that she always admired the view held by our much honoured Father, who said that God purged the company of what might be for its injury."

M. Vincent prepared the Sisters before their departure for Cahors for the trials they were likely to meet with there—warning them that the gay spirits of the southern people of France might turn them to ridicule. Also he told them that Mgr. de Solminihac being very austere in his own life, might be expected to be strict in his dealings with others.

He concluded by saying: "My dear Sisters, you would do well to represent to yourselves from this moment all the difficulties you will meet with in the work you are going to undertake. If I said otherwise I should deceive you. Did not our Lord say to His apostles: 'I send you as lambs amongst ravening wolves.' Go then, my Sisters, in confidence that our Saviour will always support you with His holy Spirit."

M. Vincent had done well to prepare the community for hardships, as we know from a priest of the Missions, M. Fournier, who corresponded with Louise on the subject,

that his surmises were fully justified. M. Fournier began by congratulating Louise on the fact that "her Daughters rivalled one another in their fervour; the Sister Servant, Marie Martha, was fired with the desire of mortifying herself for the love of God, never wishing to be better treated than the orphans and always choosing whatever was worst in the way of food." As for the meals given to the orphans, M. Fournier mentions that it consisted chiefly of black bread and a little bacon or dripping, or similar coarse food. There seems to have been a competition between the Sisters as to which would do the most to honour Christ crucified, and he begged Louise to interfere with this extreme ardour for the practice of penance which threatened to undermine their healths.

Louise did her best in the rule of life which she drew up for the use of the orphans, and the recommendations she made to the community, to make up by kindness to them for the austerity of their fare. She gives the children the name of "little Sisters" and parcels out their day in exercises of work and prayer suitable to their infant intelligence.

Again, in 1658, we hear of a renewal of the fighting, which continued two years longer (though with occasional amnesties), between the royal army and that under command of Condé, who had now found a powerful ally in Don John of Austria, who was at the head of the Spanish troops.

Once more, accordingly, we read of M. Vincent assembling the community at the Mother-house at a conference, and telling them that they had been asked for by the Queen Mother to nurse the wounded soldiers of the royal army. The battle of the Dunes had just been fought, with the result that six or seven hundred wounded soldiers had been crowded into the hospitals at Calais; it was there that the Sisters were to be sent.

The prospect was not attractive—to human nature at any rate—as besides the risks to life in these crowded hospitals a frightful epidemic had broken out, in consequence no doubt of insanitary conditions. Even the young King had not been spared, and for some days his life had been in considerable peril from it. We see the result of these forebodings in the graver tone of the speeding words of the Superior-general to the Sisters who were sent to the front.

“ My dear Daughters, consider that wherever you may be sent God will ever have you in His care. Even though you should be in the midst of the armies, do not fear that any evil can happen to you. Has any misfortune happened to any who have preceded you in this work? Such a one has she not died of it, you will ask? And even should she have lost her life in this act, oh, what a great good it will be for her! for she will have died arms in hand, and how rich she will be with the greatness of her sacrifice when she goes to meet her God!”

A fortnight later Louise refers to these events in the following words: “ The Queen has requisitioned six of our Sisters to attend to the sick and wounded in the army who are being brought to a hospital at Calais. We were only able, however, to send her four, as four more were required for the foundation at Metz.”

Sister Claude Muset, who was one of the four sent to Calais, recalled many years later the effect produced upon her by M. Vincent’s thrilling words. “ I had,” she testified, “ a great repugnance to having to go and nurse the soldiers, but after hearing him speak in this way of the greatness of the work of charity which the Sisters were asked to exercise in nursing the wounded, I felt this dislike changed into joy, and I set off gaily from Paris for Calais, where we found the greatest misery and disorder whilst working to succour them under the direction of the

King's late housekeeper, to whom we had been recommended by Her Majesty."

These four Sisters had been selected, not without reason, as being the strongest and most robust of the company; but ere long the news reached the superior that one of them, Françoise Mauseaux, had died, and that the other three were attacked with the prevailing epidemic and had to be taken to the Dominican Convent to be nursed. No sooner were these events announced than volunteers came to offer their services to replace their fever-stricken Sisters. M. Vincent alludes to them in the following terms when speaking to the priests at St. Lazare: "The Queen having done us the honour of asking us for more to send to Calais, four are starting to-day in response to the invitation. One of them, who is about fifty years of age, came to me Friday last to the Hôtel Dieu, where I happened to be, to say that one of the Sisters had died at Calais and that she offered herself, if I approved, to fill her place. I said: 'My dear Sister, I will think it over.' And yesterday she came here to receive my answer." This Sister was Henriette Gesseume, who had previously volunteered to go to nurse the wounded at Sedan when the war of the Fronde was at its height—"like a soldier" (Louise said of her) "who rushes to his post at the sound of the bugle-call."

M. Vincent concluded by saying: "Behold, my Fathers and Brothers, what courage these women show in offering themselves as victims for love of Jesus Christ and their neighbour! Is this not admirable? For myself I know not how to describe it, except by saying they will be my judges at the judgment day. Yes! they will be our judges unless we are equally disposed, as they are, to give our lives to God."

The situation of the Sisters at Calais could hardly have been more deplorable. They were (as M. Vincent testified)

but four women to wait upon, and nurse, five or six hundred sick and wounded soldiers. The delays owing to imperfect means of communication, of which both sides complained, prevented the news of the death of a second Sister reaching the Mother-house till after the departure of the relieving party. A touching letter from one of the two survivors (Marie Poulet) laments that "God seems to have afflicted us in all directions, as besides the loss of our Sisters no letters which have been written from the Mother-house have reached us." She evidently believed her own end was near, as she begged that the news of her death might be conveyed to her brother at Richelieu, so that he might pray for her, and asked pardon of M. Vincent and the holy superior for any faults she had committed against them.

A Franciscan, Fr. Coulommiers, who had attended the Sisters in their illness, joins his entreaty to theirs, that Louise would send them a few consoling words; for, he writes, "they have well deserved it by the good succour and charity they have exercised towards their sick patients. They would be grateful as true Sisters of Charity for a little word of sympathy from their Mother's hand. I can give you the assurance that they have devoted themselves to their good work with the greatest good will, to the edification of all."

M. Vincent with touching words and tears in his eyes bade God speed to the four Sisters—including Henriette Gesseaume—who were being sent to Calais; and concluded by saying: "Oh, how happy are those who have lost their lives in such a blessed cause; and, my dear Sisters, the others are very ill, and who knows what God's designs are with regard to them! Let us give ourselves wholly to God in order to accomplish His Divine Will. . . . Go, my Daughters, go and take the place of her who is dead. Go to martyrdom, if it should please God to dispose of

you thus. Our dear Sister is receiving at this moment the reward of martyrdom. You also will have the same crown if you are as fortunate as she was in dying at the post of duty." He then put the question to himself what would happen to the little company if they were often to lose its members in this way. To this he made answer: "The Sisters' deaths will be the cause of others coming, and will gain the grace to sanctify themselves for those who are left." He ended the moving scene, which brought tears to the eyes of all, by giving them his blessing and telling them "that they were about to perform the most heroic action possible, which was to die for love of Him whom we love most of all."

Sister Henriette Gesseaume was put at the head of the four Sisters sent on this occasion. She wrote to Louise on her arrival to tell her that the news of the death of the second victim (Sister Marguerite) was broken to them on their way to Calais by the postmistress, but that they had not been in any way discouraged by it. She tells her that they found a great number of wounded soldiers sleeping on straw on the bare earth "so that it was a sad sight to see them"; the accommodation doubtless in the hospital being quite insufficient for the number of sick and wounded. The same Sister writes a month later on the 10th of September to announce the recovery of Sisters Marie and Claude but the illness of the three who had accompanied her. "It must be the result of your and our Sisters' good prayers that God has done me the grace to preserve me in good health who am the most feeble and miserable of all."

The Sisters remained at Calais till the epidemic ceased and their services were no longer required; we find Louise writing whilst it lasted to recommend remedies against the infection, lamenting also at not getting news of them.

A foundation was made almost at the same time at

Metz; this was also done at the Queen, Anne of Austria's, request. M. Vincent relates how "deeply concerned the Queen was at the deplorable state of that town, and as soon as she saw me she exclaimed, 'Monsieur Vincent, what can we do for Metz?'"

At the conference which he gave before the Sisters' departure he warned them that they were being sent to a country where there were many heretics and Jews:

"You are going then to make known to all, to the Catholics as well as to the Jews, and heretics, the goodness of God. Because when they find that the good God has raised up a company of persons who devote themselves to the service of the poor, though they do not belong to their religion they will be forced to own that God is a good Father. Go then to make known the sanctity of the Catholic religion to heretics, and even to the Jews, who caused the death of our Lord." He also told them to fight the spirit of avarice which reigned there, even in the hearts of the clergy, and to do this by the evidence of their disinterestedness in serving the poor. He likewise pointed out the means of animating piety amongst the ladies of the town. Above all he recommended them to keep ever close to the focus (*foyer*) of charity which was our Divine Saviour. "He who sees a really charitable soul sees a beautiful thing! Charity is like a flame which rises on high! When it is found in a soul it lifts it to God, and it attracts God to it, so that if the beauty of this virtue was visible to our eyes we should be lost in love and astonishment." He concluded by telling them to preserve a modest humility: "If you are asked on the road whither you are going do not say you are going at the Queen's bidding. No! that would be contrary to humility. If you are pressed to say why you are going, our Sister Magdalen will answer for you, as briefly as possible."

The Sisters being expected at Toul, the Mayor and various dignitaries went to meet them at the gates of the town. They were obliged to accept an invitation to the house of the former but Louise requested that they should not eat at his table, "it not being the custom for poor girls to eat with great people."

The same year M. Vincent was pressed to send Sisters to the south of France to Mgr. Fouquet's diocese of Agde, also to Toulouse, to Vaux; and to various other places; some of these invitations the founders had to refuse, not having subjects to send. Not all of the foundations had been successful, though the ones which were not so were in an insignificant minority. We find from Louise's letter that she was in much anxiety for some years for one which had been made at Chars. The territorial rights of this district had passed from the hands of the Marquise d'O, at whose invitation the Sisters of Charity had been installed there, into those of the Duke of Luynes, who was an ardent supporter of the "new opinions," as Jansenism was then called. The first thing he did on succeeding was to get a priest into the parish who shared his views. We hear of the trouble occasioned by this appointment in the minutes of a Council held by M. Vincent with the heads of the company in April 1651. He remarked: "Since M. de Luynes and M. le Curé belong to the new opinions there may be difficulties, and we cannot allow our Sisters to have differences of opinion with the priest. We must therefore make a choice of an extremely prudent Sister."

The superior's choice fell upon Julienne Loret, known for possessing that quality in a marked degree. She remained there two years which, from the advice, warning, and encouragement given to her by Louise, were clearly years of trial and anxiety. She was succeeded by a Sister Marie, to whom like careful instructions were given.

The Sisters were to remember that the parish priest should be looked upon as absolute master in the conduct of his flock ; and " if you think, my dear Sister, he is displeased with you, ask his pardon very humbly. As for the rumours which accredit him with being a Jansenist, never, never speak of them."

We are made aware by a confidential communication of Louise to Madame de Herse later on how intolerable the situation had become. " The curé," she writes, " had re-introduced various customs which have fallen into desuetude in the Church : such as publicly refusing holy Communion to the Sisters from the altar rails . . . and threatening to make them do public penance at the door of the church, besides turning them from obedience to their Rules . . . finally reproaching them, as for a matter for which they deserved censure, for not giving corporal punishment to a girl of twelve or thirteen years of age, as he had desired them to do."

On the 6th of January, 1659, Louise de Marillac announced to the Sisters that the community had been withdrawn from Chars.

Jansenism was at that time pursuing the cruel work proper to all schism of dividing the hearts and minds of men. It dissolved many close friendships, amongst others a very tender one which existed between Louise and the Duchesse de Liancourt ; she and her husband became such ardent adherents of the Port Royal doctrines that in later years all intercourse between her and the holy superior ceased. This was a source of great sorrow to Louise, who saw in the Duchess a noble soul led astray by the noxious spirit of the age—one which cast such a fatal blight at that time over the fair face of the Church of France.

The last foundation made by Louise was that of Narbonne in 1659. We learn by a letter from M. Vincent

to the Archbishop of Narbonne the day of their departure, as he wrote as follows to that dignitary: "According to your orders we are despatching to-day, on the 12th of September, three Sisters of Charity to help to carry out your pious designs. They will have the honour of accompanying your sister the Mother superior of the Sisters of Ste. Marie at Toulouse." We have a letter from Louise to the travellers, dated two days later, which was intended to catch them up, by a more speedy means of transit, on the road: "Having found out that I could still speak to you on the road, I did not wish to lose the occasion to assure each one of you that the distance which separates us in body, can never interfere with the presence and union of the soul, between those whom our Lord has bound together in the ties of His holy love." She ends by saying: "I must tell you of the consolation I have had in thinking of you, before your arrival, *in your cloister on the road* as much as you were in the streets of Paris."

Though M. Vincent had told the Sisters in his parting exhortation to them that the Archbishop to whose diocese they were being sent was "a great servant of God and one who had a lively desire to give the utmost assistance to the poor," it does not appear that he, or those under him, showed much consideration to the Sisters. On their arrival they were very uncomfortably lodged with some other women whose behaviour to them was so outrageous that (as one of the Sisters assured her superior) their lives were actually in peril. Louise did her utmost to console and encourage them, telling them to remember that "God is with those in tribulation, and you should take this work as a participation of the cross of our Saviour." Better days were in store for the community, as on the 24th of July, 1660, M. Vincent remarked at a conference: "I have had letters recently from Narbonne, telling me great things about our Sisters. Sister Françoise has been sent

to a town a long way from where they live, Mgr. de Narbonne having commissioned her to learn an excellent method taught there for the instruction of youth. She has learnt it, and makes use of it to the great satisfaction and edification of every one."

The prospect of an even larger, and a more remote, field for the work of the company than any they had yet faced began to open out for them in the lifetime of their holy founders. The missionaries from St. Lazare had been at work in the Island of Madagascar since the year 1550, and, as M. Vincent told the Sisters at a conference, the priests were very desirous of their assistance in the work of converting the natives. A Sister at Nantes (Nicole Haran by name) wrote at once to volunteer her services on hearing of it, and M. Vincent answered her in the following terms:

"I give thanks to God for the impulse He has given you of wishing to go and serve Him in Madagascar. I do not know if He will take you at your word, but I do know that your zeal will not be displeasing to Him, and that you do well to offer yourself to Him, to go or remain, as He should ordain, since you desire to will all that He wills."

Nothing came of this project, but undoubtedly the minds of the holy founders—of Louise as well as of M. Vincent—were quite prepared for such an expansion, and on one occasion the latter said to them: "The day will come, my Sisters, when God will send you to Africa and to the Indies." We know from Louise's correspondence with Fr. Holden, who had been educated at Douai with a view to working in the English mission-field, that she was thoroughly acquainted with the spiritual wants of Great Britain. Fr. Holden was a native of Lancashire and had been chaplain for a time to her uncle, the Keeper of the Seals. In one of his letters he gives Louise a moving account of the sufferings endured by the Catholics

of the British Isles at that time from the iron rule of Cromwell. He was of the number of those who early prophesied a great future for the company, as we learn from a letter of his to Louise written in 1640, in which he exclaims: "Heavens! Mademoiselle, I wish your Daughters realised the greatness of their vocation! If the world was capable of understanding it you would not have room for all the princesses who would join their ranks."

In the year 1560 the Sisters of Charity numbered about 350; they had 70 establishments of different descriptions and varying numbers in France and Poland.

CHAPTER XXII

Who can doubt that Providence makes use of the infirmities of advancing age, in the natural order, to allure the soul of man from the enjoyment of earthly things to the contemplation of those which do not pass away? Behind this curtain, which nature interposes between man and the pleasures he can no longer enjoy, God reveals Himself to the believer. And if this is so in the ordinary course of God's providence, no less do we see it in the case of those who have responded in a heroic degree with His inspirations; in other words those whom He has called to be His saints.

The Venerable Louise de Marillac was no exception to this rule. All through her life she had been a sufferer, and the approach of old age brought her no immunity from physical and mental pain; on the contrary, it deepened both.

Her health, always delicate, became perceptibly worse in the autumn of the year 1655. So severe was the illness from which she suffered that she wrote to M. Vincent on the 22nd of October with regard to it: "If this is the key which is to open the door to the next world to me I have much need to learn how to prepare myself for it. This is what I depend upon your charity to help to give me, so that I may not suffer shipwreck at the port." Apparently she was no better in the spring, as on the 17th of May M. Vincent wrote: "Mlle. Le Gras was very nearly taking

leave of us. She has been at the last extremity, and is not yet quite out of danger, though she is now a little better."

On the 10th of June she wrote to a Sister: "It has not pleased God as yet to blot me out from the face of the earth, though it is so long since I have deserved it. One must await the order of His Providence with submission." In the month of September she had a fall whilst getting out of bed—an accident caused doubtless by extreme weakness. She not only suffered acutely at the time from it, but the result was a permanent injury to her arm, which was the proximate cause of her death four years later.

It was after this illness that she wrote the following lines in her note-book, which came to light after her death: "When recovering from my last severe illness I asked of our very honoured Father M. Vincent in what dispositions I should take up the resolution of starting life afresh. He told me that I should do so in the spirit of self-renunciation and with the resolution of denying myself all personal satisfactions."

It would seem as if already Louise had reached the point at which further self-sacrifice was impossible, owing to the fact that she had already given up everything in life to which human nature is tempted to cling. But to the saints there are always heights of sanctity unattained, and no doubt it was so with this holy soul.

On the occasion of a conference given in the year 1656, in which M. Vincent had held forth on the good use of admonitions, Louise had knelt down and asked of the Superior-general very humbly that the duty should be assigned to a Sister of pointing out her faults to her. To which M. Vincent had promptly responded: "Certainly, Mademoiselle, it would not be fair that you and I should be the only ones deprived of this advantage. It would be a good thing if one of the Sisters received any

complaints made of you, and should tell them to you, after having asked God's help in prayer to see if they were just."

This office was confided to the prudent Sister Jeanne Loret, and we have her testimony of the way she exercised it: "I have seen her humble herself to the extent of begging me insistently to acquaint her with her faults, which I had the greatest difficulty in doing, not being able to discover any though she had ordered me to do so, and I had paid attention to it."

Perhaps one of Louise's greatest trials was that M. Vincent would never allow her to lay down her charge of head of the company of Sisters of Charity. For the last time in 1658, when the three years of office of the Sisters had expired, and it was necessary to have another election, she had begged M. Vincent not to renew her term of office. In the Pentecost of that year she wrote to him as follows: "The Rule is laid down, my much-honoured Father, that the superior is to be elected for three years at a time, and so far it has been for life. If your charity would judge it fitting that it should now begin to be elective it seems to me this would be a very wise measure."

M. Vincent knew too well what the value of Louise's services to the company were to accede to her prayer. Though it was one to which Louise was urged by her surpassing humility, yet it would be foolish to ignore the solid basis of fact on which her earnest plea to be relieved of this heavy burthen was grounded. Needless to say that her inability to follow the rule of the Sisters of Charity, to rise at four o'clock, to share in their active work, even to wear their habit, though due to her infirmities, must have deepened this sense of her unworthiness (her *fainéantise* as she more than once called it) and was a trial which only her absolute submission to the Divine Will enabled her to bear.

It would seem as if this sense of unworthiness increased with her as years went on; thus we read that at the Friday conferences she was always the first to go down on her knees before the Sisters to accuse herself of her faults. Sometimes she would lie flat on the threshold of the refectory so that the Sisters had to pass over her. The same disposition to see only defects in herself, and all she did, caused her to write on one occasion to M. Portail to beg of him to excuse her stupidity in being unable to explain her meaning. "I have such a feeble mind," she wrote, "that I fail to be able to make you understand the meaning of what I want to say, without making use of phrases which your charity will change as you think advisable."

Another time she told one of the Sisters that every morning she placed her superiority at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, and then resumed it again, after inflicting on herself some strokes of her discipline. Besides this perfect detachment from her own feelings—whether of pride or ambition—she practised an astonishing detachment from all earthly comforts or gratifications. The dress she wore was, if possible, more coarse and patched than that of her Daughters, her room was even more poorly furnished, her meals as plain, unless when obliged by her doctor to take special food or remedies. On one occasion we are told that during a very severe winter an attempt was made by one of the Sisters to substitute a warm article of underclothing for the thin and much-mended one that she habitually wore. But as soon as Louise noticed the difference she begged to have the former one returned, saying it was quite good enough for her.

She not only practised poverty herself, but she never ceased recommending it to her Daughters, telling them that it should be looked upon as the badge of their company, without which it would never prosper. In the

beginning it was composed of poor girls, and those who joined it afterwards were only received on condition of their making themselves poor like the others. We are told that at a Council that was held to consider the admission of a postulant who had money, the question was put whether it was desirable to admit persons who were well off or not. Louise, when appealed to, answered: "Up to this time it has been the custom not to look for them, and Providence notwithstanding has never failed the company, and as long as it continues thus God will bless it."

Another day in order to try two of the Sisters she asked them: "If a time should come when, in consequence of charitable donations, the company had money to spare, what should be done with it? Would it be better to provide against future wants, or make use of it in order to lead a more comfortable life, and not have to work so hard?"

One of the Sisters answered that on the contrary the money should be spent on the poor and to help the Missions. To this Louise heartily agreed, saying, "What a great joy it would be not only to give our labour but our goods to the poor; or rather it would be giving them what was already theirs, as all we reserve for ourselves should be what was strictly necessary to support life."

Poverty and detachment from all earthly ties are the virtues which cause us to resemble our crucified Master and which unite us most closely to Him, and they were virtues which Louise possessed in an eminent degree. From early youth God appears to have sought to detach her from her most legitimate affections, in order to take entire possession of them. For many years her engrossing love for her son was the source of acute pain to her; but the Divine Lover of her soul, having allowed this crucifixion of the heart to do its work in her, so that nothing

of the purely human element was left, rewarded her in the last decade of her life with peace.

Occasionally we come across allusions to Michel and his wife and little daughter in Louise's letters, and they are all of the same calm and consoling nature. We are told that the child was specially beloved by her grandmother and "was the joy of the whole community," with whom she went by the name of "the little Sister."

In the month of January 1652 we find Louise writing to Sister Julienne Loret: "Thank you very much for your excellent cakes; the community will think of you when eating them. As for the '*petite Sœur*'" (who had evidently been expected to share in the good things) "her teeth are not up to eating them yet."¹

A passing anxiety of Louise's is recorded on two occasions later. Her son was attacked by the prevailing epidemic in 1654, and she asks the prayers of the community for him, and a year later he suffered from deafness, and again she has recourse to prayer. She mentions him as follows in a letter to M. Vincent: "I implore your charity to pray that my son may be cured of his deafness through the merits of the abuse and opprobrium which our Lord endured in His mortal life, if this is not contrary to His Holy Will." With the same intention she makes a Novena to our Lady, and asks permission of her director to go to Communion daily during the nine days. In a subsequent letter we learn that Michel recovered his hearing. Louise wrote in the year 1658 to Sister Christine at Montmirail: "I thank you for the affection you have shown to my son's little family. His wife is in good health. His little girl has been dangerously ill, but through God's goodness she has been restored to us. They are now gone to the country. I beg you to pray to God for all their wants and principally for their salvation."

¹ *Vie de la Vénérable Louise de Marillac*, Mgr. Baudard, p. 509.

There is another allusion to Michel and his family, almost the last, in the year 1658, which is interesting as putting Louise in an entirely new light.

We are told that a family altercation had taken place between her daughter-in-law and some near relations, and she was asked to come down to Champlan, the country place of the parents of Gabrielle, to take part in a meeting which was to witness the reconciliation. The journey must have been an effort to Louise in her state of health, but no doubt the joy of being with her son and his family at this happy moment compensated for everything. The portrait of her, engraved by Duchange, enables us to picture the holy foundress to ourselves at this period of her life. Her face at that age—between sixty and seventy—was thin, and her whole figure emaciated; whether her features at an earlier period had any claims to beauty we are not told; her eyes appear large, and her expression was one of extreme goodness and benignity. In all her portraits (for two if not three still exist) she is represented as wearing the heavy widow's coif, which had become such a necessity to her that she was unable to exchange it for the cornette of her Daughters.

Whether the visit to Champlan lasted a few days only, or longer, we are not told, but a letter from M. Vincent encouraging her to make it gives as a reason that it will have the effect of "uniting even more closely the hearts of all the family."

If an explanation was required for this little episode in Louise de Marillac's life it would be given in these words. This was probably the last time she left Paris.

The year 1658 seems to have terminated for Louise somewhat sadly, in consequence of the loss of one of her most cherished Daughters, Sister Barbe Angiboust, who died on the 27th of December of that year. Louise wrote about her in the following terms to the Sister Servant at

Brienne : " You know, my dear Sister, that it has pleased our good God to take our dear Sister Barbe Angiboust to Himself on the feast of St. John the Evangelist at seven o'clock in the morning. Her piety during the whole time of her illness, her conformity to the Will of God, her patience at seeing herself die at the feet of Christ crucified, make one recognise the goodness of her life, and the love God bears towards those who serve Him faithfully."

Sister Barbe died in the hospital at Châteaudun, and the community, there, mention that during her illness she used to collect the little children belonging to the hospital round her bedside, to talk to them about their duty, and what they should do in order to live as good Christians. She was prevented by the form taken by her illness from receiving the blessed Sacrament when dying, nevertheless at her earnest desire the sacred Host was brought to her in order that she might adore It.

Louise mentions Barbe also in a letter to M. Vincent, in which she asks him to have a requiem Mass said for "our defunct Sister as having been a long time in the company and very faithful to her vocation; all the Sisters should be present at it, and I think it would be a great consolation and encouragement to them in well-doing."

Such was the history of Louise's last years on earth : a warp and woof of mingled joy and sorrow. If the sorrows predominated may we not be permitted to think they were chiefly on the surface, and that in peace and joy of the heart Louise met with the reward which our Lord promised, especially, to His disciples, of which He said " no man shall take from you " ?

We know that at times He lifted her soul up to that region of ecstasy in which it was given to her, as to many of His saints, to taste of the " torrent of His pleasures." In an undated letter of Louise's which her biographers

place about the year 1654, Louise wrote to her director of such an experience :

“My heart is still radiant with joy at the light which our good God seemed to throw upon the meaning of those words: ‘God is my God,’ and of the perception which came to me of the glory given to Him by the Blessed in consequence of this truth—thus I could not help speaking to you to-night to beg of you to help me to make use of this rapture of joy, and to teach me what I can do tomorrow . . . the day of the renovation of my vows.”

M. Vincent’s answer, which was written at the back of Louise’s letter, was very characteristic of the austere ways by which he led the soul of his holy penitent :

“God be praised, Mademoiselle, for the caresses with which His Divine Majesty honours you. They are to be received with reverence and devotion, and with a view to the crosses which He has in store for you. His goodness is accustomed to prepare the souls He loves, thus, when He desires afterwards to crucify them. Oh, what happiness it is to have such a paternal Providence over us! and how much it should serve to increase your faith and confidence in God and make you love Him more than ever. Do this, Mademoiselle. The action you are about to perform to-day will have much to say to you on this subject. I share in your consolation, as I propose doing in your cross by means of the holy Sacrifice which I hope to offer up to Him this morning, between eight and nine o’clock.”¹

Some of the most beautiful of Louise’s instructions to her Daughters were based upon her own spiritual experiences. The trials of her early life bore fruit in words of consolation to those amongst their number who had gone through similar trials.

“We mistake greatly, my Sister,” she wrote on one

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 77.

occasion, "if we think to acquire perfection by our efforts, and by our continual watchfulness, and care to unearth all the movements of our soul. It is well once a year to apply ourselves to a searching examination with much mistrust of ourselves, and recognising our own futility: But to submit our souls to a continual Gehenna by perpetually sifting our motives and a minute examination of our thoughts is a needless, not to say a dangerous, process. This is what I was formerly told myself, and I repeat the advice to you. I beg of you, my dear Sister, to join with me so that we may help each other with our prayers to obtain from God the grace to walk with all simplicity in the path of His holy love, without heeding all these subtleties—lest we should resemble people who in searching for the philosophical stone instead of enriching themselves lose all their fortune."

Louise's devotion to the sacred Passion was unailing, and one of her devout practices was to spend the hour between two and three o'clock daily in Lent, and every Friday throughout the year, in meditation on the sufferings of our Saviour, concluding them with the words: "Christ was made obedient for us unto death, even unto the death of the Cross."

She had a very loving devotion as well to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and we find the following words amongst her reflections: "Having read in the gospel the parable of the Sower, and not being able to recognise any good grain in myself I desired to sow in the Heart of Jesus all the productions of my soul, and my bodily actions, so that I may benefit by the hundred-fold increase of His merit, and may work no more except in Him and by Him."

We have constantly drawn attention in these pages to Louise's profound devotion to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. He was to her the Master who admitted her to the secrets of the knowledge of Divine love. "If

I am happy enough, O my God," she wrote amongst her "Thoughts," "to receive Thy Divine Spirit, I hope to have no longer any life but Thine, which is all love, no life except to go to Thee by this path, no satisfaction but that of willing and loving Thy good pleasure."

Of Louise's filial love for the Mother of God we have already spoken; she never ceased recommending this devotion to her Daughters and often spoke of Mary to them as their "only Mother."

St. Vincent de Paul said of her truly that "she made no use of her memory except to think of God, or of her will except to love Him."

The relations between Louise and her saintly director seem to have insensibly mellowed, if we may be allowed the expression, with the lapse of years. On Louise's side there was ever the same confidence and profound submission, but we see on the holy man's side an increased gentleness in the tone he assumes towards his penitent with regard to her many trials, and to the anxiety she could not suppress about his health,—an asset of such infinite importance to her and the little company. Thus in one of his letters in answer to hers, in which she implores him to make use of certain remedies, and at the same time assures him of her prayers, after saying he had taken the remedies, he remarks: "But I prefer to think that it is by your prayers I have been cured, and by the Novena you have had said for me. Never has the exercise of charity appeared more amiable and estimable to me." He would have her count always on his unalterable wish to help her in all her difficulties: "You need never fear, Mademoiselle, that there should ever be any change in my heart with regard to the service you desire from me. Death only would prevent my being your devoted servant in the love of Jesus Christ."

We read in M. Vincent's life that his infirmities in the

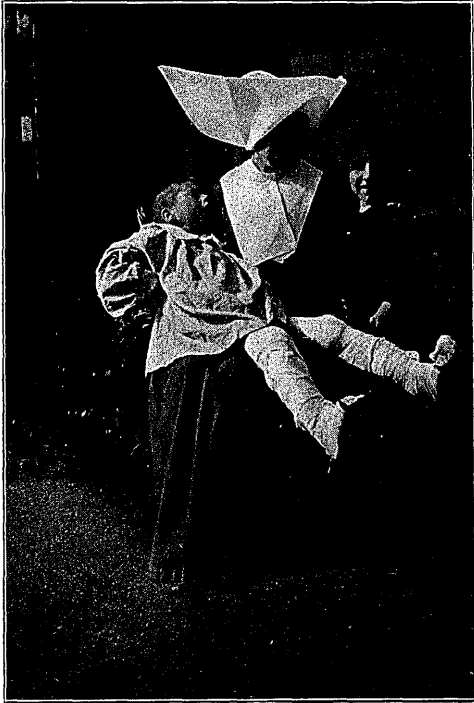
commencement of 1659 confined him almost entirely to his room. In spite, however, of his crippled state he still from time to time managed to get as far as the Mother-house and give a conference to the Sisters. The subject of the last, which took place on December 14, 1659, was the indifference the Sisters of Charity should show on the subject of the destination and charges assigned to them. He wound up his discourse with this prayer: "O, Saviour of mankind, permit not that the Sisters should be wanting in this virtue; I ask it of the bowels of Thy mercy, and the merits of Thy Precious Blood. I know, O Lord, that the greater number of them resemble the angels in the disposition they are in to go wherever Thou wilt that they should be sent, and it is on this account that this insignificant little company is everywhere so highly esteemed. I beseech Thee to preserve them all in this spirit, and I ask it of Thee by the intercession of Thy holy Mother, and those of our dear Sisters who are now in Heaven."

Louise's health also failed more and more during the course of the same year. Her infirmities, which had increased very much from the effects of her fall, obliged her to make use of Sister Mathurine Guérin as secretary. But she did not keep her long, as La Fère requiring a superior Louise sent her there, making this sacrifice, as she had done so many others, *ad majoram Dei gloriam*. A letter she wrote soon after Pentecost Sunday acquaints us with the fact that since Eastertide she had had one relapse after another. During these days of painful seclusion when she was unable to assist at the community exercises, she always kept herself informed of the punctuality with which they were performed, and expressed her joy at hearing the Sisters, from her room, going at the regular time to their prayer in the oratory. We read from the sketch left of her by Sister Bailly that her

humility would never allow her to ask for the privilege of having Mass said at the house, though many attempts were made to persuade her to ask for it. In the month of August, 1659, she wrote to M. Vincent to express her great desire to assist at his Mass on the feast of St. Louis, her patron saint, so that she might obtain pardon for her sins, and that the members of the company should receive the grace they required in order to be strengthened in their vocation.

On the 20th of December Louise wrote to Sister Anne Hardemont that her holy director "had less time than ever at his disposal, for though he was unable to leave the house on account of the painful condition of his legs he was none the less overwhelmed with business." To him she wrote on Christmas Eve: "Permit me to say to you, my much honoured Father, that my inability to do any good prevents my having anything pleasing to offer our Lord except the renewal—unworthy as I am—of my vows; unless it is the privation of what His goodness has vouchsafed me for the last thirty-five years. I accept this for love of Him, in the manner ordained by Providence, hoping for the same succour for my interior life from His goodness and your charity."

M. Portail, who had been associated for many years with M. Vincent in the management of the affairs of the missions and those connected with the company of Sisters of Charity, was at this time in a dying condition. It was in answer to a letter from Louise, lamenting the state of his health that the Superior-general wrote the following letter: "It would appear as if our Saviour was going to undertake the guidance of the little company: it belongs altogether to Him, I firmly believe, and He has the right to make what use He pleases of it. As for me, my greatest desire is to desire only the accomplishment of His Divine Will. I cannot express to you how far advanced



AT ST. VINCENT'S HOME FOR CRIPPLES, EASTCOTE.

our sick friend is in this holy practice, and it is on account of this that it looks as if our Lord is about to take him to a place where he will be able to continue it, more happily, for all eternity."

In a letter of Louise's to M. Vincent dated the 4th of January, 1660, after asking him for his blessing to help her to be faithful to God for as long as it will please His goodness to leave her on earth, she asks him to accept a picture (no doubt painted by herself) of Christ surrounded by thorns, "the thought having presented itself to me that the only possible alleviation of the innumerable sufferings in which you are plunged would be this example. Permit me to ask you, for the love of God, if the swelling of your legs is rising, if your pain is diminishing, and if you are quite without fever. I am very anxious to hear news of you, whatever it may be. It seems to me that our Lord has put me in a state when I can endure all things joyfully."

On the 10th of the same month Louise writes to Sister Marguerite Chétif at Arras as follows: "I beg of you, my dear Sisters, to redouble your prayers for our much-honoured Father's preservation; his sufferings have kept him in his room for a month, so that we see nothing more of him, and the visits he receives and business matters have increased to such an extent that it is with difficulty we can get an answer from him to our letters. See in what a state it has pleased Divine Providence to place us; may His good pleasure be ever accomplished!"

Finally in another letter dated the 2nd of February, she says that M. Vincent's legs being no longer able to support him he is unable to say Mass except very rarely. M. Vincent was then eighty-four years of age.

The following letter, addressed to Sister Jeanne, head of the community at Châteaudun, was the last of the

venerable superior's which has been preserved; it was probably also the last she ever wrote:

“MY VERY DEAR SISTER,

“I doubt not that you are exceedingly busy, nor that you are taking great care to help our Sisters to work at their perfection. Tell me, I beg of you, all about them, and above all I wish to know if whilst engaged in exterior work their souls are occupied, for the love of God, in watching over themselves in order to surmount and master their passions, refusing their senses what might cause them to offend God. Without this you know that exterior actions, even though performed in the service of the poor, will never be perfectly pleasing to God, nor bring us recompense, not being united to those of our Lord who worked ever in His Father's sight. I know, my dear Sister, this is ever your practice, and that you experience the peace of a soul which leans thus upon its well-Beloved.”¹

In these beautiful words we see a summary of Louise de Marillac's teaching to her Daughters.

Two days later she was attacked with fever, and inflammation of the left arm which had been so severely injured in her fall. On the 13th of February M. Vincent wrote to one of his priests that “she is so ill that we do not dare to hope for her recovery. What adds to our grief is that M. Portail is also dangerously ill. They both received holy Viaticum the same day.”

We are indebted to Gobillon for an account of Louise's last illness, and it is supplemented by letters and notes left by the Sisters Barbe Bailly, Julienne Loret, and Françoise-Paule Noret, who were with her to the end.

So great were Louise's sufferings that when she saw her son and his wife and child, who were summoned to

¹ *Louise de Marillac (Lettres)*, t. iv. p. 325.

her bedside, the piteous cry escaped her: "Ah! my children, how one has to suffer before dying!" Then having received the last Sacraments, she turned to them and blessed them, saying: "I pray the Father, Son and Holy Ghost by the power He has given to fathers and mothers to bless their children that He will give you His benediction, and that He will detach you from earthly things and attach you to Himself. May you live as good Christians!"

Then addressing the Sisters of Charity who were assembled round her, she blessed them also, and recommended to them the love of their vocation and fidelity in their service of the poor.

M. Portail died on the 14th of March, and M. Vincent makes the following allusion to this loss—which he felt very deeply—and to Louise's illness, in a letter written two days later: "These are indeed heavy blows to your little company. But, coming from the paternal hand of God we must receive them with submission, and trust from His mercy that the Sisters of Charity will profit by this visitation. It is He Who has called them, and He Who will continue to maintain them. He never destroys His works, but He brings them to perfection; and as long as they are firm in their vocation and faithful to their practices He will bless them evermore—in their persons and in their work."

On the 27th of February he wrote again to one of his Missionaries as follows: "At the time of M. Portail's death, Mlle. Le Gras was at the last extremity, and it was a question which would go first; but she is still alive and is better, thanks to the goodness of God, Who did not wish to overwhelm us with a double affliction."

The sufferings of the venerable superior at this time were very severe. She asked to have relics applied to her arm of St. Charles Borromeo and the holy Bishop of

Geneva—having a great devotion to both these saints. She experienced some relief when this had been done, and for the following three weeks her fever left her, and the inflammation likewise diminished. M. Vincent announced this improvement in a letter dated the 3rd of March to Sister Mathurine Guérin: “Thanks be to God, Mademoiselle is better. It was necessary to make three large incisions in her left arm; the last was made the day before yesterday. She suffered a great deal, as you may imagine; and though she has no longer any fever, still she is not entirely out of danger, on account of her age and her weakness. Everything is done to try and preserve her, but it is God’s work—Who having preserved her for twenty years contrary to all human expectations, will go on doing so as long as it is expedient for His glory.”

Whilst she was undergoing this respite several of the Sisters consulted her on various points. One of them reports: “As I told her I wished very much to know what she would ask of God for me and my Sisters, she answered that she would beg of Him that they should have the grace to live as true Sisters of Charity, in great union and cordiality, and that those who did so would have a great reward. But as for those who did not . . . she stopped and never concluded the sentence.”

On the 9th of March the fever returned and gangrene declared itself in the ulcerated arm. She received holy Viaticum for the second time on the 12th of that month. Her mind on this occasion, we are told, was clearer than on the former one, and she employed the night before her last Communion in loving ejaculations to her Lord and Saviour Who was about to visit her. Sister Barbe records that she asked for a picture, to which she had great devotion, of St. Mary Magdalene receiving the holy Eucharist before her death, and that she kept it

by her to the end. The priest who attended her on her death-bed, after administering holy Communion, exhorted her to give her last blessing to the Sisters of Charity who were assembled round her.

“My dear Sisters,” she said, “I cease not to ask God’s blessing upon you, and I pray that He may give you the grace of persevering in your vocation in order to serve Him in the manner He asks of you. Be very careful of your service of the poor; and above all to live together in great union and cordiality—loving one another in imitation of the union and life of our Saviour. I beg of you to take the Blessed Virgin as your only Mother.” She ended by saying that she died in sentiments of the highest esteem for their vocation, and that were she to live till she was a hundred she would not cease from recommending the love of it to them.

For three days Louise lingered on. They were days of unceasing pain, which she endured with the angelic patience which she had shown in all the trials and sufferings of her life. Though she judged the incisions made in her arm would be useless for the prolongation of her life, she submitted to them without a complaint, saying: “It is quite just that where sin has abounded, suffering should also abound.” She added afterwards that “God was executing His Divine justice in her person, and that in doing justice He was also doing mercy.”

One day when she was in great agony she said to the priest who was beside her: “Might I presume to say that God takes pleasure . . . ?” “Yes,” he replied, in answer to her unfinished question, “God takes pleasure in seeing you merit in your sufferings.”

Another day the Sister who was in attendance upon her exclaimed, in reference to her numerous wounds: “Oh! Mademoiselle, God wishes you to suffer in all parts of your body.” Understanding this to mean that the

Sister wished to congratulate her on her resemblance to her crucified Saviour, she answered, "I am not worthy of it."

The last sacrifice God asked of this holy soul was the privation of M. Vincent's assistance on her death-bed. His health made it impossible for him to leave his room, and when she asked for a few words of written encouragement he sent instead a message through one of the priests of his congregation, that she "would go before him, and he hoped to see her again before long in Heaven." Louise took this message with extraordinary tranquillity, we are told, remaining inseparably united to God's good pleasure, and manifesting by it her entire detachment from all earthly ties, and that her sole desire was to possess Him in heaven.

The care of the little company, and above all of the poor under their charge, was in Louise's thoughts to the last, and we read in these same records that "all through her illness she was kept informed about the poor who were numerous in the parish, and to whom food was distributed from the house." During all this time she continued giving her orders as if she had been in perfect health.

From the 13th to the 15th of March, the day of her holy death, Louise's malady went on increasing. She was visited by many of the Ladies of Charity to whom she was bound by ties of sympathy and affection, and one of them, the Duchesse de Ventadour, got permission to sleep at the Mother-house when Louise's end was seen to be approaching, and remained with her to the last.

Early on the morning of her death, fearing that her Daughters were getting exhausted with their fatigues in nursing and sitting up with her, Louise told them to have patience as it would soon be over, and that she

would warn them in time so that they need not fear to leave her. As her end approached she prayed frequently aloud: repeating verses from the psalms, especially the words of David, *Respice in me et miserere me, quia unicus et pauper sum ego.*

At one moment the fever mounted to her brain and her mind wandered, and whilst in this state she called out: "Take me away from here." The priest who was praying by her bedside, holding up a crucifix to her, said, "Do you see the Cross? Jesus Christ did not ask to be taken down from it."

"Oh! no," she answered, returning to consciousness, "He stayed there. Then since my Saviour wills it! . . ." A little later the thought that she was about to appear before the judgment seat of God appeared to weigh her down, but the priest, in order to inspire her with thoughts of the mercy of God, repeated the verse of the psalm to her: *Ad te levavi animam meam, Deus meus, in te confido*—and she instantly completed it, answering *Non erubescam.*

Even when entering into her agony, Louise did not forget the sufferings of others, for we are told that hearing one of the Sisters approach her who had gone through much trouble of soul, and to whom the death of M. Portail was a cause of distress, she said these words to her: "My Sister, I pray God that He will take away your trials."

Seeing some Sisters, who had charge of the foundlings and had come to take farewell of her, kneeling at her bedside, Louise bade them rise, and though it was with difficulty that she could speak she managed to utter the words: "Adieu, my Sisters, have great care of the service of the poor."

At eleven o'clock she told them to open the curtains to let the Sisters know that her last hour was approach-

ing, and her agony began. The "Recommendation for a departing soul" was said, and Louise showed her consciousness by unmistakable signs, and joined in the prayers, with her eyes constantly raised to Heaven. The priest then said: "Will you not give a last blessing to your Daughters?" They were kneeling all round her. She was barely able to speak, but with an effort she said, "I wish very much all our Sisters had been here—but you will tell the others. I pray," she added, "that our Lord will give you the grace of living like true Sisters of Charity in union and peace." A little later the priest asked her if she was ready to receive the Apostolic Benediction for the hour of death which she had obtained from Pope Innocent X. for herself and her Daughters. At first she answered: "It is not yet time." A short time afterwards she said quickly: "Now, now." The priest pronounced the blessing and she received it with much devotion—striking her breast three times. The curtain, at her desire, was then drawn, and a few minutes later she breathed her last; so peaceful was her end that those who were kneeling around her were not conscious of the exact moment at which she gave up her holy soul to God.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Venerable Louise de Marillac was sixty-eight years old at the time of her death. She was buried in the chapel of the Visitation, in the church of St. Laurent, where she had been accustomed to pray. She had expressed a wish to be buried in a cemetery near St. Lazare, but M. Vincent judged it more fitting that her body should not be separated in death from those of her Daughters who had preceded her to the grave. Louise had left strict injunctions in her will as to the manner of her funeral; they were to the effect that no more expense should be laid out upon it than upon those of her Daughters, and she protested that if "they made any difference it would be equal to declaring her unworthy, being dead, of appearing a true Sister of Charity and servant of the members of Jesus Christ, though there was no quality she esteemed as more glorious for herself than this one."

This recommendation was carefully observed, as well as her wish that a plain cross should mark the site of the grave with the words "Spes unica" upon it. No motto could have served better to describe her life, and as it was attached to the wall which adjoined the graves of her Daughters it became a badge or motto common to their graves as well as to hers.

The venerable superior's remains were exhumed a hundred years later (A.D. 1755), and moved to the Rue St. Martin, at the petition of the heads of the company

—the Mother-house having been transferred there from St. Laurent. On two subsequent occasions they were moved. On the fourth they were taken to the Rue du Bac, where they now repose.

Louise de Marillac's will contained various charitable bequests to the company and to the Congregation of priests of the Mission; the sums she left were small, as she had already given away most of her patrimony in her own lifetime. To the little granddaughter she left an annuity of eighteen livres a year "to be employed in giving a dinner to the poor of the parish in which she happened to be living, at which dinner she was herself to wait upon them." She concludes by a prayer to God that she and her son might be among the number of those who would glorify Him for all eternity.

M. Vincent sent a brief announcement of Louise's death to all the houses of the company. He asked their prayers for her and M. Portail, and told the Sisters to offer up the first Communion after the receipt of his letter for them, and "that it would please God to be Himself the guide of your little company. Renew on this occasion," he adds, "the good resolution you made on entering it to live and die as true Sisters of Charity." In a letter written to M. Cazot, superior of the missionary priests at Toul, he wrote as follows:

"Mademoiselle Le Gras died on the 15th of this month. I recommend her soul to your prayers; though perhaps she has no need of this, as we have all reason to hope that she is enjoying now the glory promised to those who have served God and the poor in the manner she has done." To Sister Jeanne de la Croix he wrote: "There is reason to hope that this dear departed one, *who is at present with God*, will obtain from His infinite goodness an increase of grace and blessings which will lead you to an ever greater state of perfection." And

to Sister Marguerite Guérin: "I have been consoled to hear that you and your companion lean, after our loss, on our Saviour alone, in whom you will find all that you could desire. God be praised, my Sister, that He alone is the foundation of all our hopes."

M. Vincent allowed some months to elapse before taking any steps to replace Louise. On the 24th of May he wrote to Sister Marguerite Chétif: "You have not yet got another superior. We have chosen M. d'Horgny for director in M. Portail's place. Sister Jeanne Gressier, who assisted the dear departed one, occupies the post of Assistant in the House, and she is responsible for what goes on outside it. It seems to me every one is satisfied, and that all goes on well—thanks to the grace of God—both in the town and in the country. And yet you thought all was lost; but the company having owed its beginning and its increase to the goodness of God, we have every hope that He will sustain and perfect it, to which end your examples will contribute."

It was not till the 24th of June that the saint was able to assemble the Sisters to talk to them about their departed Mother. He was now completely crippled and could not move without assistance. He had to be carried from his room to a parlour in St. Lazare, where he had convoked them to meet him. The occasion was one of deep solemnity; M. Vincent began by invoking the Holy Ghost, and then he expressed his pleasure at assembling his Daughters once more around him. He also spoke of his regret at not having been able to visit their superior on her death-bed. "It was God's good pleasure that it should be so," he said, "and I believe He permitted it for her greater merit and sanctification." He then invited the Sisters to recall what they could of the holy life and practices of their blessed Mother. A touching scene ensued, for grief was in every heart, and the

enumeration of Louise's virtues, her charity, her patience, her zeal for souls, her love of the poor, was constantly interrupted by tears. One of the first Sisters who was interrogated could say nothing—grief overmastering her utterance; when, towards the end of the meeting, she had regained her composure, she asked leave to say a few words. They were as follows: "As regards the virtues practised by this blessed Mother, they would be sufficient to fill an entire volume, and it would require higher and more enlightened minds than ours to describe them."

M. Vincent likewise was deeply moved. He added his testimony to that of the Sisters of the virtues and holiness of the life of their deceased superior. He proposed this thought as a watchword to his spiritual children—one that would serve as a guide to them through life: "I am a Sister of Charity; accordingly I am a Sister of Mlle. Le Gras and should resemble her." He concluded with these words: "I pray our Saviour—unworthy sinner though I am—that He will give you His blessing through the merit of the one He gave His Apostles on taking leave of them. I pray that He may detach you from all things of this world and attach you to the things of Heaven."

M. Vincent gave another conference on the 24th of July to consider the question of a new superior. He began, as he had done before, by praising the virtues of their first superior. "We have," he said, "a beautiful model who is now in heaven. Our duty is to make a living picture of it." And then after the Sisters and he had recalled many traits in her character he repeated many times: "Oh, what a beautiful picture! O my God, what a beautiful picture"; and again "Courage! The holy Mlle. Le Gras will help you; she has been present and heard all that we have been saying."

He then proceeded to discuss whom they should choose as superior: "Where shall we take her from? From amongst you, my Sisters. We must set to work to pray, and let every one get rid of all personal feelings. Ah, my God! Where shall we take a Sister to replace a Saint! My Daughters, if any one amongst you has any ambition to be first let her say to herself: 'I renounce it.'" Having discussed the matter at some length, M. Vincent recommended them not to talk about the election to each other, but to speak much about it to God. Then addressing himself to his kind Master he exclaimed: "We do not wish for a superior nor for her assistants from the hand of man, but from Thine alone, O my God!"

M. Vincent again assembled the Sisters on the 27th of August, and he then told them that a little time before their holy Mother's death she had said to him: "'As it was you, my Father, who with the permission of Divine Providence chose me, it appears to me that it would be advisable that the first superior after me should not be named by plurality of votes, but that she should also be appointed by you.' She then went on to say, 'As for me, I think Sister Marguerite Chétif would be a very suitable person,' and she gave me her reasons for thinking so. And as we stopped there—I concurring—I think, my Sisters, we should abide by her opinion."

Accordingly, Sister Marguerite Chétif was recalled shortly afterwards from Arras and appointed to the vacant post, which she filled admirably, thus justifying the opinion held of her by the holy founders.

This was the last public occasion on which the man of God assembled the Sisters of Charity around him. Three weeks later he breathed his last, seated in his armchair, without agony or death-struggle, having blessed his two families of the Missionary Fathers and the Company of

Sisters of Charity. The last words on his lips were the words of the psalmist: *Deus in adiutorium me intende, Domine ad adjuvandum me festina.*

The words which St. Vincent de Paul used prophetically a short time before his death, "He Who has begun this good work will Himself perfect it," were fulfilled to the letter. Within eight years of the death of their holy founders the Company of Sisters of Charity received the canonical approbation of the Holy See. Since then they have gone on increasing in number, and spreading from Europe to India, and America, and China, and to every part of the globe, and wherever they have gone, with a most peaceful penetration, they are recognisable as much by their identity of spirit—the spirit of their holy founders—as by their white cornette, fit emblem of the beauty and purity of their lives.

Within a few years of St. Vincent de Paul's death the process of his canonisation was begun, and much of the testimony brought forward to prove the eminent sanctity of his life threw light on the heroic nature of the virtues practised by the Venerable Louise de Marillac. It was not, however, till two centuries later, in 1886, that Cardinal Richard appointed an ecclesiastical tribunal to collect evidence with a view to Louise's canonisation, which led to the formation of a Commission by the Sacred Congregation of Rites for the introduction of her cause. Leo XIII. appended his signature to this on the 10th of June, 1895, which besides giving her the title of Venerable prepared the way to further steps in the process of her beatification. Two hundred and eighty-nine Cardinals, archbishops, and bishops and heads of Religious Orders have pleaded in her behalf with the Holy See, and it is the earnest hope of her children that before long their prayers may be granted and that she may be raised by the Church to her altars.

Several miracles which have attended prayers addressed to her or which have been worked at her tomb, have attested her power before God. Perhaps one of the most striking manifestations of the Divine favour is one recorded by Gobillon in these words: "It seemed as if God wished to show forth the glory of His servant by the extraordinary effects produced at her grave. From time to time a kind of sweet vapour appears to rise from it, shedding a perfume similar to that of violets or the iris. And what is more surprising, is, that the Sisters of Charity who come to pray at her tomb, have returned from it so penetrated with this scent that they have carried it with them to the sick Sisters in the infirmary. To this I can give my testimony from the experience I have had of it several times, and on no occasion have I been able to attribute this manifestation to any natural cause."

THE END

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