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## LECTURE ON ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

On Saturday, March 7th, at 194, Queen's Gate, S.W., at 3 p.m., Miss Isabel Macdonald gave a lecture on St. Vincent de Paul. She commenced by saying that St. Vincent was often spoken of as "The Fisher of Sinners," but he was the fisher of "unfortunates" as well, and it is through his work in the latter connection that he has entered the field of Nursing History. St. Vincent de Paul was one of the most important figures in the religious and civil life of his time. His hatred of fanaticism, his great broad-mindedness, his kindly nature, together with the love which he bore to his fellow men, enabled him to get into very close touch with the lives of the great and the simple. The nurses present at the lecture particularly admired a picture of the head of St. Vincent taken from an oil painting. It seemed to portray so well the character of the man with the fine broad forehead, wide eyes, strong features and, shining in his countenance, a benevolence well mingled with the salt of humour.

He was born, this son of a peasant farmer, in 1576 and at seven became a shepherd boy. Those early years of peasant life may have been the origin of his often repeated remark that "God is with the simple"; some have said he learnt his Sainthood then. Slides were put on the screen showing his birthplace and various churches and other places connected with his childhood. His early inclinations to charity are indicated by the story of how he once, after many months, collected a sum amounting to thirty sous and, when he chanced to meet a beggar, he handed the whole of this money, which was to him a small fortune, over to the crippled beggar. When he was twelve years old, his father decided to consecrate him to the priesthood and slides were put on the screen showing the church where he was ordained and that at which he afterwards said his first Mass. A slide taken from a painting of the latter event was shown. Some pictures followed connected with his theological studies and his life after being captured by pirates and sold as a slave. Years afterwards, when someone commended him for his goodness to the galley slaves he turned to the speaker, in his simple way, and said, "But once I was one of them." There followed slides showing Henry IV, the Hospital of Charity, where the saint helped with the nursing, the Duc de Gondi, and pictures of people with whom his work brought him into contact; others were connected with the Association of Charity which he founded and with the Association of Ladies of Charity. But naturally the most interesting slides were those which applied to his great Foundation, the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. First came a picture of Mademoiselle le Gras who, with her splendid powers of organisation and her practical enthusiasm, was largely responsible for the success of this scheme for the nursing of the sick poor; various pictures were shown of the Sisters at work in different parts of the

world, for, since the foundation of the Sisterhood, those devoted women have been found wherever there arose war, pestilence and famine, and not a few of the hospitals of Europe owe their inception to the devoted "daughters" of St. Vincent. One slide earlier in the lecture showed the first martyr of the followers of St. Vincent—Jean le Vacher, of his Association of Charity; but who shall say how many unknown martyrs there may have been in the ranks of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul?

Numerous stories are told of St. Vincent's kindness to the sick and dying and in many cases their only hearse was his arms. He was also a great infant welfare worker and some beautiful pictures were put on the screen showing the children grouped about him or sheltering under his worn old cloak. In his work in the prisons and with the galley slaves he anticipated John Howard and Elizabeth Fry and, until his death, he was troubled with sores on his ankles, arising from the irritation caused by the chains put upon him when he took the place of one poor galley slave whom he believed to have been unjustly condemned.

A great man once asked him whether he came by these sores through this incident but, with his customary modesty, St. Vincent changed the subject without making a reply. He died in 1660 in his tiny room and there was never more widespread grief in Paris than when the news of his passing became known; the poor, the convicts and even the little foundlings wailed "We have no longer a father." In the storm of 1789 his small chamber was desecrated; until then it stood as he had used it with the straw mattress, the rickety chair and, hanging from a nail on the wall, the worn old cloak that used to cover what he called his carcase—it had sheltered so many little children too. In the room also was his worn rosary, his breviary, his old shoes and socks with holes in their heels; on the table there still stood the candlestick with the butt of the candle that burned during his last hours—all were pitched into the streets by the unruly mob. His bones have rested in many places; England had the honour to guard them for a time during the Great War and now they fittingly lie in the chapel of the Sisters, in Rue de Sevres, Paris.

St. Vincent de Paul had the power to make himself the soul of any movement which he founded and, while his work has borne ripe fruit in many directions in the life of France and its capital, there is nothing in which his spirit may be said to live so truly as in that great organisation of his creation—the Sisters of Charity. The Constitution which he gave to it, twenty years after its foundation, is as useful as it was in his own time and remains unaltered to-day, while his teaching to his daughters, as he called the Sisters, is read still and is full of a beautiful simplicity, fine vocational and ethical feeling, abundant inspiration and strong practical sense. A son of the soil yet an incomparable priest, organiser, philanthropist and scholar, the memory of him is still one of the greatest glories of France.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)