

her work in philosophy in order, said her father, "to prepare her mind for more elevated sciences." Thus Louis de Marillac showed that he was a man with views ahead of his time in his conception of what is the real value and object of a study of philosophy and its effects upon the mind.

When she reached the age of fifteen, Louise de Marillac was extremely anxious to join the Capuchin nuns, but her confessor opposed this, chiefly on the ground that her health was not sufficiently robust; consolingly, and indeed prophetically as well, he told her "God, I think, has other designs for you." Her father died when she was twenty, and soon after she married Anthony le Gras. At that time, unless her husband were a baron or a knight, a French lady did not take the title of Madame, and so Louise was known as Mlle. le Gras. Her husband was, however, of a wealthy and respected family, a family held in high regard in Paris for the nobility of its ethical traditions and its splendid charity to the poor. It was this last aspect of the character of Anthony le Gras that enabled the relatives of Mlle. de Marillac to persuade her to accept his offer of marriage. As his wife she did not seek to lead a gay life nor to visit the Court, as her husband's position would easily have permitted her to do. Instead, she procured his consent to visit the poor. This was a form of philanthropy still unusual among the ladies of Paris, however enthusiastically at last many of them were willing to join themselves with the organisation of Mlle. le Gras and that deservedly popular priest, Monsieur Vincent de Paul. It was a matter of unmixed satisfaction to the former when Bishop Belley introduced her to Francis de Sales, whom she had long held in deep veneration.

The illness of her husband was a great and severe trial to Mlle. le Gras; she nursed him with much devotion, and he died when she was thirty-four years of age. Then it was that the Bishop of Belley introduced her to Monsieur Vincent de Paul. At the time Louise was anxious to give her life up entirely to good works; but St. Vincent insisted upon what proved to be practically a novitiate first. Also her son claimed much of her attention, for his education had to be supervised, and he was a lad somewhat weak in character and physique and was to cause her much sorrow and care. Long afterwards, when it had been proved that he was quite unsuitable for the priesthood, he eventually married and, largely through the influence of his very sensible wife, was able to retain a good position eventually found for him.

Louise entered more and more into co-operation with St. Vincent de Paul in his benevolent activities, and in 1629 she commenced that long series of visits to branches of his Association of Charity in different districts in France. There is abundant proof that her visits were a source of inspiration alike to those who administered the branches and the poor who benefited from them, while her vigilance in all matters pertaining to the work, served to raise the standard of what was done. These pilgrimages, which lasted for many years, were not without their fill of sacrifice, for Louise le Gras never enjoyed robust health. Often her journeys were made in farm carts without springs, and, moreover, she insisted upon living as simply as the poor whom she visited. As she travelled she took every opportunity to teach women in country places how to care for their sick, and, indeed, her mission might be said to have been one of pedagogy as well, for she organised classes for children and then sought to find people capable of carrying on those. For a long time the Association of Charity was confined to towns and villages in the provinces, but soon Mlle. le Gras urged St. Vincent de Paul to establish a headquarters in Paris. When the plague broke out she was one of the very few members of it who continued works of charity among the plague-stricken poor. After the abatement of the epidemic, she commenced another

piece of social work in going to the prisons to visit the poor galley-slaves in their miserable dungeons; she may thus be regarded as a contemporary of Elizabeth Alkin and a precursor of Elizabeth Fry.

But it is in the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul that we see the blossoming of the life of St. Louise de Marillac. The Association of Charity was a success in the country districts; it could not be regarded as quite the same success in Paris. St. Vincent had also conceived a kind of sub-branch of it named Les Dames de Charité, but in connection with both organisations there was always the difficulty that the ladies had their households to attend to, and their husbands objected to their absence when visitors had to be entertained, to risks of infection from the homes of the poor, while, on the other hand, it was almost impossible to achieve reasonable organisation; several relays of ladies might visit a hospital or a home on one day, while no one went near either on the next. Thus it was that St. Louise brought to St. Vincent the suggestion for what was ultimately the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. Mlle. le Gras was always insistent that the honour of having founded it should belong to the priest, but he on his part frankly owned that hers was the initiative ability and energy that carried it through. Indeed, he once refused to do a piece of work in connection with its ultimate organisation, telling Mlle. le Gras that he would leave it to her "so that I may not place my sickle in your harvest"; there could be surely no greater gallantry on the part of the priest to her whose ability had achieved so much of the work in hand.

The first Sister of Charity, after Mlle. le Gras herself, was also, as it turned out, the first martyr of the Sisterhood. Her name was Margaret Nasseau, a gentle peasant girl who had taught herself to read while tending sheep; later she seems to have become a kind of voluntary, itinerant school-mistress going round teaching other peasant women. St. Vincent had met her on his travels, and when Mlle. le Gras made her proposition, he at once suggested her as a suitable candidate for training. Consequently she came to Paris and joined Mlle. le Gras in her work of mercy; in her enthusiasm she took into her room a poor woman suffering from plague, whom she put into her own bed. The result was that this first Sister of Charity caught the plague and, when she knew she was ill, quietly betook herself to the hospital of St. Louis, where she died.

Mlle. le Gras established herself and her co-workers in a suitable house in Paris, and proceeded to train the latter to be efficient nurses among the poor. Many great institutions in history have had insignificant beginnings, and the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul is assuredly one of these. It was indeed a grain of mustard seed that grew into a great tree. As soon as the girls were considered sufficiently experienced, they were sent to fresh districts, and the demand for them taxed all the energy of Mlle. le Gras in the matter of filling their places in the Motherhouse.

(To be continued.)

FIXTURES.

On Thursday, March 7th, and again on March 14th, at 3.0 p.m., the Rev. Hugh Miller is to give us two lectures, the first on the "Archæology of the Bible," and the second on the "Science of the Bible." We have been told by people who have heard these lectures how very interesting they are and that the lantern slides are unique. At the request of one of our members we are endeavouring to arrange a Ramble to the General Post Office, and places of interest near it. For particulars please apply to the Secretary. On March 28th, we are to be given what promises to be a beautiful entertainment by the Poetry Society, commencing at 3.0 p.m.

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