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## PREFACE.

(BY THE EDITOR.)

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THE following work was originally intended as a sketch of the life and character of the great Saint whose name it bears, chiefly in connection with her own family and children, and less directly in relation to the religious Order, in the foundation of which she was the instrument of Providence. A very interesting French work, *Les Deux Filles de Ste. Chantal*, full of details, and beautifully written, though somewhat too large for translation, has furnished the writer with abundant material for this sketch.

But it was thought a pity not to complete the narrative of the lives of Marie Aymée, the Baroness de Thorens, and Françoise, the Comtesse de Toulonjon, by some account of that of Madame de Chantal herself, not only as a mother in the natural order, but also as the spiritual mother of numerous generations of souls so dear to God, and so precious to the Church, as the nuns of the Visitation are well known to have been. For the life and character of this great servant of God formed a perfect whole, and any true portrait of her must certainly regard them as such. Her characteristic among the Saints seems to be force or strength,—a characteristic remarkable in her from her

earliest years, and one which made St. Francis de Sales, upon his very first acquaintance with her, apply to her the description found in the Proverbs of Solomon which has been prefixed to this volume instead of a dedication. But this force and strength which thus marked her life must be studied equally in all the phases of her career,—as much in her bearing as a religious woman as in her conduct as a wife, a widow, and a mother.

The materials at the command of the writer of her life are abundant and easy of access: the masterly work of the Abbé Bougaud, *Histoire de Ste. Chantal et des Origines de la Visitation*, leaving nothing to be desired in that respect. M. Bougaud's work, indeed, seems likely to take its place as a classic among modern Lives of the Saints, and may well be considered as a model which the writers of such lives should be encouraged to imitate. While it sets the career of St. Jane Frances in its due relation to the historical circumstances of the period in which she played so great a part, and while it abounds in the fruits of the most loving and minute research into the documentary stores and local particulars which are so important in enabling us to understand the narrative of a life such as hers, it also evidences at every page great command of theological and ascetical learning, with a tender and devout piety, and a sagacious spiritual judgment, such as are not always found in union with the highest qualities of the historian as such. With so admirable a guide as M. Bougaud, the author of the work now placed before the English reader has had little difficulty in tracing the chief and most significant events of the life of St. Jane Frances, and in delineating the main outlines of that strong, simple, impetuous, ardent, and somewhat stern character, which the gentle influences of grace, and the prudent hand of St. Francis



de Sales, moulded into the perfection of mature spiritual beauty in the first mother of the Visitation. It was impossible, however, to draw the first named of these two great Saints without giving some kind of picture of the other; and the story has thus expanded into a life of St. Jane Frances, in which considerable space is given to St. Francis de Sales, and to the progress of the Visitation, as well as to those scenes of family history which it was at first intended to make the chief object of study.

Any one acquainted either with the complex history to which reference has now been made, or with the latest literature of the subject, will easily understand why a volume like that now presented to the reader can only pretend to give a cursory account either of the life of St. Jane Frances or of the development of her Order. The work is not half as large as either of those from which it has been chiefly drawn; and even these do not contain all that might be said on the subject. In truth, St. Francis de Sales and his spiritual daughter, notwithstanding the beautiful works which recent French writers have consecrated to their memory, are as yet but imperfectly known, and the materials which exist for a more perfect account than any which have as yet appeared are considerable, and will still require much industry and perseverance to arrange them and set them before the public. The Convents of the Visitation at Annecy and elsewhere contain numberless papers which have hardly yet been fully examined. The case is still stronger with regard to the letters of St. Francis, although in the lately published Lives of that great Saint more use has been made of these precious memorials than hitherto. M. Bougaud (*Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, t. i. p. 231) tells us that he does not know what edition of the Letters to quote, 'car les nombreux autographes de Saint

François de Sales que nous avons eus entre les mains nous ont persuadé que Saint François de Sales *est encore a découvrir.*<sup>1</sup> He tells us that some letters are wanting, some abridged, others patched together; proper names are omitted, everything historical and personal has been suppressed. He adds: 'Il serait grand temps que quelque savant fît pour Saint François de Sales ce que M. de Monmerqué a si bien fait pour Madame de Sévigné.'<sup>1</sup>

Under such circumstances, even an imperfect picture of so noble a life as that of St. Jane Frances de Chantal may well hope to be accepted, if it is truthful as far as it goes, and I believe that this merit, as well as many others, may fairly be claimed for the present volume.

H. J. C.

London, Trinity Sunday, 1872.

<sup>1</sup> He adds that the Abbé de Baudry had begun the work, but that since his death it has fallen through. M. Migne's edition, founded on M. de Baudry's papers, is the most complete.

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# *Life of Saint Jane Frances.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### *Girlhood and Marriage. 1572-1595.*

THE narrow streets, turreted houses, and picturesque squares of Dijon probably looked frowning and gloomy enough in the wintry January morning, when, now about 300 years ago,<sup>1</sup> in a rambling old house in one of the principal streets near the grand old palace of the Dukes of Burgundy, there lay in one of the bedchambers a fair young mother with a little girl, freshly brought into the world. The child was placed in the arms of her noble-looking father, who, according to the unshrinking faith of his time, reckoned the soul of his child far above her body, and insisted on having the tender little nursling carried away there and then to the parish church to be baptized. As it was the feast of St. John the Almoner, she received the name of Joan, or, as we commonly say, Jane; and notwithstanding the cold of the Burgundian winter, the child flourished, and grew up to fill a great place, not only in the world, but in the eternal kingdom of Heaven. The child's father was Bénigne Frémyot, who filled the post of president of the then famous Burgundian parliament. But we must go back some generations, to make out clearly who and what manner of man Bénigne Frémyot was.

His family scutcheon wore the somewhat high sounding legend, '*Sic virtus supra astra vehit*;<sup>2</sup>' and as if in harmony

<sup>1</sup> January 23d, 1572.

<sup>2</sup> Thus virtue bears above the stars.

with it, its possessors owed their chief distinction to their virtue. The Frémyots had indeed ranked as Burgundian nobles from the 15th century; but their greater advancement had been earned as members of that executive and legal body known in French history as the *noblesse de la robe*, who took so large a share in the proceedings of the French parliaments; who, whatever may have been their errors and shortcomings, played so splendid a part in the history of France; and whose destruction at the great Revolution has left a social gulf which seems likely to remain unbridged and unclosed.

After many generations of comparative obscurity, the Frémyots emerge as members of the famous Burgundian parliament; and after Oger (1445), we find them occupying the chief local offices of distinction at Dijon, the old capital of the province. During the latter part of the 15th century and beginning of the 16th, René Frémyot, then auditor of accounts, made good his title to the family motto by a life of singular beneficence and charity, so that he was known as 'the father of the poor, and refuge of the destitute.' His son John, who became possessed of the lordships, or what we should call the baronies, of Saulx, Thotes, and (in part) Barrain, also distinguished himself in the Burgundian parliament. It is worthy of note that, notwithstanding his many occupations, this good man regularly gathered his children and servants together twice a day, and gave them a short clear instruction upon the great truths of religion, as an antidote to the spreading poison of Calvinism. He had five sons, the third of whom, Bénigne—named after the apostle of Burgundy, St. Benignus—rose to higher honours and greater fame than any of his ancestors: he became advocate general, privy councillor, and president of the Burgundian parliament; but throughout his brilliant career he never forgot the motto of his shield, and was even more distinguished by the excellence of his life and the Christian greatness of his character than by his attainments and capacity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> It was publicly said at his funeral, where the Burgundian parliament was assembled, that while M. Frémyot was advocate general, as he was

Bénigne<sup>4</sup> Frémyot married Margaret de Berbissey, of a family still older than his own, inscribed on the parliamentary lists of Dijon in the reign of Louis XI.,<sup>5</sup> and which had intermarried with more illustrious blood still, the kindred of the great St. Bernard. Their first child was a girl, Margaret; and when he and his wife had been married rather more than two years, a second daughter was born to them, whom, as we have seen, they baptized by the name of Jane, in the January of 1572. But when this last little daughter was a year and a half old, the young mother was suddenly taken away, after the birth of a son, named Andrew. From the very beginning, therefore, the soft sweet tenderness of motherly cherishing, the indescribable impalpable caresses, which are to the young life as sunshine and dew to flowers and fruit, were wanting to little Jane Frémyot. They dropped unconsciously out of her life. Her character was naturally strong, firm, and full of force; and the perpetual influence of a mother's gentle presence in her childhood might have softened down a certain sternness of which we now and then see traces in her, and which it required much culture of adversity, much painstaking guidance, and very much prayer, to ripen into the full sweetness of the Christian saint.

The sharp clear outlines of character developed by her mother's loss, and a good deal of companionship with her father and his friends, were often the cause of amusing scenes. Jane was well taught, and soon mastered a considerable amount of elementary religious doctrine, then much insisted on, because Burgundy was overrun by Calvinists. One of these happened

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for many years, all his 'conclusions' were confirmed by the court; a fact which remarkably proves the justness of his mind, as well as the extent and accuracy of his legal knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to lay down any inflexible rule as to the rendering of proper names from Latin and French and other languages into our own. We Anglicize the name of Jeanne into Jane, at the same time that we leave such names as Bénigne, Celse, Marie Aimée, in their original and foreign form. It seems better to use the form which we should probably use if we were speaking to the person designated, except in a few cases.

<sup>5</sup> Louis XI. created the parliament of Burgundy.

to be disputing with President Frémyot upon the doctrine of the Real Presence; and after listening for some time with great attention to the argument, Jane, not then quite five years old, went up to the gentleman with her face all crimson, and said, 'But, my lord, we must believe that Jesus Christ is in the Blessed Sacrament, because He said it Himself. If you do not believe it, you make Him a liar.' The gentleman looked down at his small adversary in great surprise; and after trying in vain in various ways to puzzle her, and being rather out of countenance at the wise and apt replies she made, he turned the subject in the way approved by custom with children by giving her a large packet of sugarplums. Jane took them gravely into her pinafore, and marching to the fireplace, threw them into it, saying as she did it, 'Look, my lord, that is how heretics will be burnt in the fire of hell, because they do not believe what our Lord says.' Another day, when the same gentleman was discussing some other doctrine with her father, Jane said to him, 'My lord, if you were to give the lie to the king, papa would have you hung. And now, look'—and she pointed to a large picture of SS. Peter and Paul—'you give the lie to our Lord so often, that those two presidents will have you hung!'

Her father, thoroughly appreciating her intelligent and powerful though brilliant mind, gave her the best education the times afforded. Jane learnt to read, write, sing, dance, play upon several instruments, and do many kinds of needlework. She made especial progress in the Christian Doctrine—what is now known by the general name of Catechism. Her mind seized upon and delighted in the definiteness and accuracy of dogmatic teaching, and every article and point of faith was of paramount interest to her from the earliest age. Her father's admirable example also very soon awakened her compassion for the suffering and poor, and she never could see a beggar in rags without shedding tears. Once she likened a poor man who was begging to our Lord when He said, 'The Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head;' and said, 'If I did not love the poor, I should feel as if I had left off loving God.'

When the time drew near for her First Communion and

Confirmation, Jane felt a strong wish to devote herself in some way to God's service; and after Confirmation, when she took the name of Frances, this longing became a perfect thirst. Sometimes she thought of giving herself entirely to the care of the sick and poor, and sometimes her ardent mind craved the privilege of dying for the Faith. And just about that time an event occurred which deepened the impression made upon Jane, and gave her a still stronger appreciation of the reward of a life of self-sacrifice. Her grandfather John Frémyot, the 'father of the poor,' was still alive, though very old, and living in complete seclusion from the world. One day the venerable old man called his children and grandchildren round him, like the Hebrew patriarchs of old, and told them that his span of life was complete, and that he was about to die. He then caused himself to be set on his mule, and with the same patriarchal simplicity went round to his various relations and bade them all farewell, saying that he was about to depart on his last journey. The next day he sent for a priest to say mass in a little chapel, the altar of which he could see from his bed; made his confession, received Communion and Extreme Unction; and then begged that mass might begin, as before the priest took the last ablution he should be drinking the new wine with our Lord in His eternal kingdom. And so it came to pass; for just as the priest was elevating the chalice, the holy old man lifted up his eyes with a look of earnest love, and saying, '*Quando consolaberis me?*'—'When wilt Thou comfort me, O my God?'—he departed as he had foretold, and went to his rest. The marvellous grace of this death made a profound impression upon the thoughtful and reasoning mind of Jane, who was now fifteen years old.

Soon afterwards her elder sister Margaret was married to John James de Neufchèzes, the Seigneur des Francs in Poitou. This was a great alliance for Mademoiselle Frémyot. The president did not even pretend to conceal the pleasure it gave him, both on account of the connection with his old friend Gaspard de Tavannes, uncle to the bridegroom, and because he was thus able to place Jane with her sister in Poitou. The



marriage took place in 1587. Both the religious and the political horizon of France were now darkened with storms, and Burgundy had become a kind of focus of agitation and coming civil war. Henry III., who had succeeded Charles IX., was childless, and the next heir, Henry of Béarn, afterwards the famous Henri Quatre, was a declared Huguenot. So the Catholic League had been formed under the sanction of Pope Gregory XIII., and was vigorously organized both by the king and the superior clergy to prevent the future accession of Henry of Béarn. It is deeply instructive to trace the course of the vast double-edged power of the League, which soon became too mighty for the hands which had called it into being. Jealousies sprang up between the king and various members of the League, which ambition, party rivalries, and religious hatred, raised to such a height, that the whole body turned against the monarch whom they were sworn to defend, and broke out into open rebellion. The Burgundian parliament, always turbulent and imperious, joined the insurgent party almost to a man, with the signal exception of its high-souled president, who refused to take his seat when the decrees were no longer issued in the king's name, and retired altogether from Dijon into the country. His heroic conduct roused the populace to a burst of fury, during which they pillaged the president's house, insulted his friends and adherents, and carried off his son Andrew to prison. The president, not in the least disturbed, managed to seize Flavigny, a mountain fortress, and there convoked all the faithful magistrates, declaring the parliament of Dijon removed to Flavigny. The leaguers in Dijon annulled the act, confiscated the goods of the seceders, and sent Claude Frémyot to his brother to say that if he did not immediately dissolve the royalist parliament, they would put his son Andrew to death, and send him his head in a sack. When the president received this cruel message he said, 'Better would it be for the child to die innocent than for the father to live in dishonour.' And he wrote a very noble and touching letter to the governor of the province, which is still extant, having remained in the archives of Dijon nearly three hundred

years. This letter, which is full of the antique greatness of Roman heroism mixed with Christian modesty and gentleness, had so much effect upon what we may call the parliamentary party, that they gave up their cruel design of putting Andrew Frémyot to death, though they still kept him in prison.

All party quarrels were, however, soon broken up by the astounding news of the assassination of the king. It is scarcely possible, without writing volumes on the subject, to convey the slightest idea of the state of France at that time, when the whole fury of subsequently succeeding revolutions seemed to be concentrated in one reign of unexampled wickedness and misery. League after league was formed; sometimes against the feeble and dissolute king, sometimes under his nominal guidance. There was the 'War of the three Henrys,' ending with the 'League of the Sixteen,' which finally forced Henry III. to fly from Paris on the famous day, which may be called the forerunning type or symbol of revolutionary Paris through all the succeeding years, the 'Day of the Barricades,' and join forces with Henry of Béarn or Navarre. It was while besieging his own capital with rancorous fury that the king was assassinated by an insane Jacobin monk, Jacques Clément; and with him the long roll of the house of Valois, which had filled the throne of France for two hundred and sixty years, was brought to an end.<sup>6</sup>

But although Henry III. was to be regretted neither as a king nor as a man, his loyal Catholic subjects were deeply grieved that the crown should pass to a Huguenot sovereign; and President Frémyot was so afflicted at the news, that in one night half his hair became snow white. Loyal to the last, he raised the king's standard at Flavigny, but at the same time made use of every means to induce Henry of Navarre to declare himself a Catholic. Accordingly he went to join his old friend Count de Tavannes and his army, where, while he was writing out the formal report of the oath taken by the troops on condition of Henry's becoming reconciled to the Church, a

<sup>6</sup> Beginning with Philip VI. in 1328, and ending with Henry III. 1589; in all, thirteen kings.

musket-shot split the drum he was using as a table. Turning round with an unmoved face, he asked for another drum, upon which he finished his writing.

Throughout all the excitements of these passionate times, President Frémyot showed that singular nobility of character which his daughter inherited from him. He seemed to be altogether free from personal motives or considerations of selfish advantage or loss. His loyalty was part of his religion, and was to be carried out, as true religion must ever be, at the cost of real sacrifices and continual self-denial. He steadily refused the offices by which Henry of Navarre sought to tempt him; and as soon as the king had declared himself a Catholic, and his power was secured, President Frémyot returned to the seclusion of his province and his beloved home, expressing a wish to become a priest, that he might devote the latter years of his life to God and His poor.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile Jane had gone to begin her apprenticeship in Poitou, and no sooner had she passed the Loire than her eyes were greeted by sadder sights than her life had ever yet afforded. The Huguenots, who had obtained possession of Anjou, Poitou, and Touraine, had either ruined or desecrated the churches; and wherever she passed she saw broken spires, ruined doorways, images with their heads broken off, and fragments of shrines and reliquaries strewing the roads. Even in her walks about Poitiers she continually came upon some ruined village cross, some mutilated image of a saint, or the ashes of a chapel which had been burnt. These sights, and the pain which they gave her, were never forgotten throughout her life; and they strengthened in her that deep rooted and living faith which, as

<sup>7</sup> On account of his having been twice married, M. Frémyot could never obtain a dispensation for holy orders; but Henry IV., in acknowledgment of his great services, gave him the rich abbey of St. Etienne and the archbishopric of Bourges, which, as he hoped eventually to become a priest, M. Frémyot accepted, and immediately went to live in the abbey. Both the abbey and the archbishopric of Bourges were made over to his son Andrew Frémyot, when he found that he could not obtain a dispensation for holy orders himself; but there is every probability that he remained at St. Etienne, and there received his children and grandchildren during his life.

well as her zeal for the spread of Catholic truth, and her horror of erroneous teaching, were some of her special characteristics. It is said that when in old age she heard the Lamentations sung in Holy Week, '*Vix Sion lugent eo quod non sint qui veniant ad solemnitatem,*' &c.—'The ways of Sion mourn because there are none that come to the solemn feast,' &c., her eyes would again fill with tears, remembering the desecrated churches and shrines of Poitou.

Jane Frémyot was at this time sixteen, womanly in appearance and manner, and she found herself in some sort the spoilt child of the circle in which her sister lived. For the first time she met the voice and eye of admiration and flattery, and tasted the honeyed poison of frivolous and worldly counsel. The lady appointed to attend upon her as a kind of *dame de compagnie* was a most frivolous and imprudent woman, suggesting all kinds of foolish and artificial fripperies of adornment to her young charge; and what was worse, this woman was also suspected of trafficking in some kind of sorcery, not by any means unknown at that time; and, whether feigned or real, she certainly tried to induce Jane to enter into her wicked art, promising that by her means she should marry one of the greatest lords of Poitou. Notwithstanding her extreme youth, however, and the novelty of the circumstances in which she was placed, Jane does not seem to have suffered. The motherless girl bravely resisted the many voices of temptation, and putting herself, as a safeguard, under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin, she gave more time than usual to prayer and religious duties. The portrait taken of her at that age seems to make a kind of lasting protest against the excessive luxury of dress usual at the time, when pearls, chains, rows of gold beads, strings of buttons, studs, necklets and armlets, with lace and embroidery, almost covered the dress of the poor ladies who had to support the load. In this portrait Jane wears a modest, square-cut dress of some dark material, with a chemisette made to the throat, and under-sleeves ruffled at the wrists. Her head is covered with a velvet coif, and every part of the dress is absolutely without ornament.

Among the many guests who frequented her sister's house was a Huguenot gentleman, who concealed his opinions that he might win the affections of Mademoiselle Frémyot; and he did this with so much art, that even her brother in law treated him as a Catholic and one of themselves, whereas at that time Huguenots used to be altogether banished from Catholic society. Jane, however, very soon discerned the real man under the mask, and when he made his offer of marriage to M. des Francs, she astonished her brother in law by replying that she would rather go to prison for the rest of her life than make her home in a Huguenot's house, and would choose death rather than connect herself with an enemy of the Church of God. After this she refused another very brilliant marriage with a man who subsequently turned out very ill, and came to an unhappy end. In her dealings with these two suitors Jane showed a dignity, firmness, and maturity of judgment which could only have been possessed by a girl not yet twenty through the influence of solid principles of religion.

Not long after this last event, and while M. des Francs and his wife were arranging for their young sister another marriage with a neighbour of their own, Jane received a summons from her father to return home. It does not appear in her story whether her father had been acquainted with the trying circumstances she had gone through; but he had probably become aware that she was exposed to more difficulties in her sister's house than he approved, for he wrote to her that he was now altogether alone, and wished her to return to him; and although Jane naturally felt keenly leaving Margaret, from whom she had never yet been separated, and with whom she had always enjoyed the most perfect union, she immediately made her preparations, and started on her journey back to Dijon in the year 1591.

As it so often happens when the duty or act of obedience is performed, Jane quickly received her reward. Much pain and labour, and probably much thought and discussion, had been expended by Margaret des Francs and her husband upon Jane's marriage arrangements; and while all their plans came

to naught, she was met on her arrival at Dijon by her future husband. During the last warfare in support of Henry IV., M. Frémyot had become acquainted with the then head of the Rabutin house, a family which, either in good or evil, has left a considerable name in the world. Christopher de Chantal, the second baron of the name, still under thirty years old, had already fought eighteen duels, which Bussy Rabutin somewhat quaintly ascribes to his extreme gentleness and meekness of demeanour. Happily the campaign with M. Frémyot offered a nobler outlet to his valour, and he soon became marked as a man of courage and unshaken loyalty. He was also seen to be full of religious faith, thoroughly devoted to his duties, a man of considerable reading as literature was reckoned at that time, and also he both thought and spoke well, and was bright, witty, and attractive in society. This was the man chosen by M. Frémyot to be his daughter's husband. The world is now tolerably well acquainted with Madame de Chantal's character as it became when ripened by religion to its maturest aspect; but it is even now scarcely alive to the work which had to be wrought, before the softening influences of grace had fully brought about their end. At the same time, her character, as it was put together naturally, was a very fine one. At the age of twenty she had the same solidity of mind and judgment, the same clear and truthful estimate of the value of character and events, and the same inestimable gift of giving to each act, duty, and obligation of daily life its due weight and proportion, as gradually developed their effects in her life, till it was complete in its labours and self-sacrifice.

The civil war in France was now raging towards its climax. As President Frémyot had a heavy price set on his head by the insurgent forces, he had withdrawn from Dijon, and the marriage contract, or settlement, was drawn up at a village called Epoisses, and signed at Baron de Chantal's strong castle of Bourbilly, where, contrary to all ordinary formalities, the marriage also was celebrated.<sup>8</sup> The old Baron de Chantal, M.

<sup>8</sup> The copy of this document is still preserved at Annecy.



Frémyot, and M. des Francs were present, and the ceremony was probably performed by Prior Frémyot, of the Val des Choux, an uncle of the bride. By the settlements Jane was to have two hundred crowns a year to spend, with Bourbilly as her dower house.<sup>9</sup> She was also to receive jewels from her husband to the amount of six hundred crowns, and a carriage and four horses. On the other hand, M. Frémyot gave his daughter 50,000 livres, or about 2500*l.* of our money, a very considerable sum in those days.<sup>10</sup> This was in 1592.

Instead of wedding journeys and sight-seeing honeymoons, Jane de Chantal spent her first marriage months in much retirement, fervent prayer and reflection upon her future life, with a continual exercise of obedience and devoted attention to her husband's wishes, especially in the matter of housekeeping and the management of their joint property. The estate had been kept in order by the young Baron's mother, and she had now been dead nearly a year. Meanwhile the château had been partly rebuilt, and the old Baron was fantastically extravagant. His servants plundered him, and his tenants paid no rents. We must add to these causes of ruin the state of the country, and the long continued ravages of the wars. The young pair found their estates in debt more than 3000*l.* of our money, and were often obliged to restrict their expenditure to the barest necessities of life.

When Jane had been married just three months, Henry IV.

<sup>9</sup> Bourbilly must have been a fertile estate, for fifty years later St. Chantal's celebrated granddaughter, Madame de Sévigné, thus writes to her daughter, Madame de Grignan: 'My dear child, I have just arrived at my forefathers' old castle, and find my beautiful meads, my little stream, and my pretty mill exactly where I left them. The trees before the door have been lopped, which makes a very pleasant alley. . . . Every place seems bursting with corn, and yet there is not one word about even a half-penny to spend. If you happen to be in want of wheat, I could offer you some of mine, for I have 20,000 bushels of it to sell. I am crying out famine over my wheat-sacks, but nevertheless I am secure of 14,000 livres, and have had a new lease made without abatement.'

<sup>10</sup> The value of the French livre during the reigns of Charles IX. and Henry IV. is very uncertain. It is reckoned, later, at two shillings, but at that date from tenpence to a shilling.



summoned the Baron de Chantal to Paris ; and the day before he left his young wife, he took her out under the great trees at Bourbilly, and while they walked slowly up and down, he explained to her the whole state of his affairs, and placed the management of the property entirely in her hands. Jane besought him to appoint some older and more experienced person in her place ; but he gently pointed out to her that she and no other must be his representative and second self, which is the true wife's duty ; and that in this way she could most faithfully and thoroughly serve God. And then, seeing how much she shrank from the burden, he went on to tell her some facts of his own mother's life, and how she had saved his father's property from ruin, administering his affairs with such wise economy as to set them in perfect order, though she was suffering terribly from a cancer, of which she never spoke even to a doctor for several years. At last, when it became necessary, according to the ignorant medical practice of the time, to have it burnt away with hot irons, and the doctors wished to bind her hands as a precaution, she had said to them, ' Reason and conscience are the strongest chains that can bind a Christian woman. Do not be afraid ; I am used to help myself in suffering by looking at the Crucifix.' And then, he said, she had endured the dreadful torture without uttering a sound, though it soon afterwards caused her death.

This account, and her husband's last grave sweet words, made the deepest impression on Jane de Chantal, and as soon as he had gone she set about carrying out his wishes in every way she could. She began by restoring religious observance. The mass in the house had been discontinued when her mother-in-law died, and Jane immediately had it reëstablished at such an early hour that the farm-servants as well as those in the castle could be present. After breakfast, the young baroness would then take her spinning-wheel or her knitting and sit down among her maids to work, when she would talk to them kindly, instruct them in the truths and practices of religion, and try to cultivate in their coarse untrained minds some growth of the love of God and of practical religion.

Every evening she assembled them to give some account of their day's work, and said night prayers with them. On Sundays she went with them to mass at the parish church, and led them in singing the plain devotional melodies which it was the excellent custom of that time to sing during mass. It is characteristic of Madame de Chantal that she always bestowed unusual pains upon the *Credo*—her favourite act of faith—and that she took care to practise with those who had good voices, that she might secure the specially good and distinct singing of the *Credo* on Sundays.

The farm-servants were treated nearly like those in the house, and their mistress took care to see them all once a month, when she gave or renewed her orders, and then heard from them what they were doing, and if they were satisfied and happy. She was unflinching in writing down the orders, both as making them more exact and because it helped to make them more attentive and careful. Madame de Chantal accustomed herself to ride a good deal on horseback, and went over some part of the property every day to oversee what was going on, when her suggestions and bright, friendly, courteous greetings were joyfully welcomed by all her people. She never parted with her servants if she could possibly avoid it, and although she was strict and very exact, none of them ever wished to leave her; for Bourbilly became noted through all the neighbourhood as a real Christian home, in which a thoroughly religious, united, and happy family made their dwelling.

Nor could it be otherwise; for Jane was the centre and guiding spirit of the whole home, and did her spiriting so gently, that although it was far from customary for ladies then to be industrious, people were charmed by her conversation and ways, and overlooked the fact of her bringing her needlework or little work-table to the reception rooms. But although she welcomed her rich neighbours courteously, and always treated them with great sweetness and observance, not setting herself up to teach, she was far more in her element with the poor who thronged her gates. As soon as the castle dinner was served, Jane went down to the courtyard, helped to fill the

porringers with soup, cut bread, and served the infirm and aged with swift attention, with sweet loving words, and the brightest of her smiles; and if any out of her list were absent, or if those who came, or 'Dame Jane' the housekeeper, could tell of any newly sick neighbour, Madame de Chantal had packages of food, medicines, or clothing made up, and set off with them to the cottages; so that it became a common saying with the poor at Bourbilly that it was a good thing to be sick, that the baroness might come and see them.

It was the ordinary and most unpleasant custom of that day, when every baron, by the mere right of his jurisdiction, exercised the faculties of both magistrate and judge upon offences committed within his own property, to confine the offenders in the dungeons of the castle. M. de Chantal, like other barons, also had his executive powers and his dungeons; and whenever a prisoner was brought in, Jane was thoroughly miserable till she had begged his forgiveness. If it was some petty offence, her husband willingly granted her request, and the poor peasant was immediately set free; but if the crime was more serious, or M. de Chantal thought it necessary for the sake of others to punish, his wife used to visit the captive, talk to him in her kindest manner, and when the servants had gone to bed she would go down, and take him out of his damp airless hole and let him sleep in a comfortable bed. She often playfully scolded her husband for doing justice so speedily, when he would sometimes say: 'It may be very true, but you are a great deal too good.'

The habits Jane had taken up when her husband first left her for the court, grew and strengthened throughout her married life, and laid the foundation of all that was hereafter to come; for she was of that character which thoroughly fulfils the fact of going 'from strength to strength.'

Each year after her marriage she gave birth to a child, which died almost immediately; and her sister Margaret des Francs, her earliest and beloved companion, also died in 1593, leaving three little children, whom Jane brought to Bourbilly. After these early sorrows, however, Madame de Chantal had four

children, a boy and three girls, who grew up to give her much joy and occupation in the midst of bitter grief and anxiety. All that is known of their babyhood is that their mother offered them immediately after their birth to God, and had them dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. She also nursed them herself. They grew up and played under the great trees at Bourbilly, which was a beautiful and picture-like home. The castle was fortified by a strong curtain wall and four flanking towers, defended by a broad moat with a drawbridge, and an avenue of splendid old trees led up to the drawbridge. The little river Serain fertilized the breadth of lovely meadows, and turned several corn mills on its way. Beyond the green meadows sloped vineyards, and in the distance forest was seen stretching for miles, and filling with its purple outline all the space to the horizon.

At least a dozen other castles were within easy reach of Bourbilly. One of these was the dwelling of M. de Crépy, sometime president of the Burgundian parliament, whose daughter, Madame de Chantal's favourite companion, afterwards became abbess of Puy d'Orbe. M. de Tavannes also lived near, and was more at Bourbilly than at his own home. He is well known as the author of delightful Memoirs, in which, while relating with clearness and childlike enthusiasm the account of the battles he had himself fought and the towns he had taken, he continually pauses to repeat, 'Praise be to God!' When Henry IV. had made all the use he could of this brave and devoted supporter, he treated him with the most ungrateful and slighting neglect, which De Tavannes always excused, saying that his master was too much occupied to think of him. Among the other visitors at Bourbilly was a gentleman named D'Anlézy, Baron de Chazelles, who was destined, before long, to bring all the happiness of this home to an end. Meanwhile the autumn and winter time, when M. de Chantal was not at court or with the army, were made as gay and charming as possible by his wife. She knew that her husband liked society and had a special gift for hospitality and the courteous entertainment of his neighbours, so that she encouraged the visits

of the neighbouring barons. The mornings were spent in hunting and shooting parties, and when the banquet was over, Jane gathered her guests round the enormous fireplaces in a vast saloon, whose faded ceilings and half-effaced scutcheons are still to be seen, like ghosts of the past, in the old castle of Bourbilly.

But while providing for the recreation and comfort of her husband and his friends, Jane held as firmly as ever to the religious observances of her household. Without making proclamation, or upholding some stiff code as 'her principles,' she avoided all parties and pleasure expeditions on Sundays and holydays, that her servants might not be hurried or driven through the services of the Church. On holydays, just one half hour before the gentlemen were to start for hunting or shooting, a priest was punctually vested for mass, so that no one had any excuse for evading or neglecting the obligation; and on Sundays, when the castle was full of visitors, she never failed to say pleasantly that she was going to mass at the parish church, and would be glad to take any or all who liked to go. Sometimes her husband, who, like many other men, was more under the influence of the world and its tongue than of strong religious feeling, would politely represent that their guests could hear mass in the castle chapel without putting themselves to the trouble of going to the village. At such moments, instead of showing the least disturbance or change of temper, Jane would sweetly represent to him how their example would benefit the peasantry; that she so much preferred saying her prayers on Sundays with all their poor people; and by her pleasant manners and persuasion she ended by always winning even the most indifferent of her guests to her side, and made the cause of religion pleasant and acceptable to those whom worldliness and a careless life had caused to stray from her paths. In this way did the daughter of the Frémyots illustrate the family motto: '*Sic virtus supra astra vehit.*'

## CHAPTER II.

### *Life at Bourbilly. M. de Chantal's Death. 1595-1601.*

IT was now 1595, and the stream had completely turned. The large towns, the villages, the great mass of peasantry, always specially slow in France to embrace new ideas, had become leavened with enthusiasm for Henry IV. His name and his praises were on all lips, and the white banner was unfolded from the castle walls and turrets of the most obstinate defenders of the League. The very citadel and core of the insurgents, the Burgundian parliament, had surrendered, and the gates of Dijon were just opened to the triumphal entrance of the king's troops. The advance guard came clattering in through the high, narrow, picture-like streets of the old city, and their leader, Marshal Biron, went to lodge in President Frémyot's hotel. About ten days afterwards came the greater show of the king's personal entrance into his once rebellious Burgundian capital, when the streets were crowded with enthusiastic citizens, packed in lines and rows, singing, shouting, shaking white banners and scarves, and hanging carpets and tapestry from their windows. The king rode slowly in at the head of his barons and generals, clad entirely in white, and mounted on a splendid charger. His noble countenance and royal bearing seemed to take the popular mind by storm, and as he passed they drowned the martial music with their cries, and rained flowers and wreaths on his head. In a little while Henry left Dijon, unaware that the Spanish troops had crossed the Saone, and thinking at the most that he was making a reconnaissance of their position. He took with him the Baron de Chantal. The king's party on a sudden fell upon the enemy, and the short but fiery fray



of Fontaine Française took place. In this memorable little battle Henry IV. threw himself upon the Spaniards with a mere handful of followers, and soon found that he was fighting for his life. Full of the fire of valour, he yet directed the movements of his little troop with perfect coolness, and was seconded by the bodyguard of Burgundian nobles, who amazed him by their heroism. Biron was wounded, De Lux had his horse killed under him, Montbard was only saved by the king's warning cry. Even when Henry impetuously commanded them, 'Back, my lords! I want to shine myself!' the Baron de Chantal was still at his side, and once he made so brilliant and determined a charge, that the Spanish troops broke and gave way. That very night, as soon as the victory was won, Henry publicly acknowledged his obligations, settled a pension for life upon him, and insisted on his following him to Paris, and remaining always with him as one of his chief friends and advisers. The next thing we hear of him, however, is his obtaining leave of absence to go to Bourbilly. On the king's return through Dijon, which happened not long afterwards, Madame de Chantal might have shared with her husband all the brilliancy of his success and splendid position. She might have entertained the king personally in her father's house; and if she had appeared there in her young matronhood, beautiful, dignified, and full of the grave sweet courtesy which distinguished her bearing, all that little Burgundian world would have acknowledged her the idol of the hour. She knew well that her husband would not have disliked to see her shining at his side in the splendour of his fresh meridian, though he was far from desiring that his pure-hearted, stainless wife should pass her life in an atmosphere so fraught with danger to women.

But Jane knew too well the poisonous sweetness of the cup to drink long draughts of the world's flattery of success. She came to Dijon just to welcome her father and her husband, and to assure herself of their welfare, and then returned to Bourbilly alone. It was probably then, in the deep loneliness which pressed upon her as the gray old castle received her into its walls; when she walked alone under the hoary trees of her



old avenue, and spent her long days with no other companionship than her children and her sick poor people; it was then, feeling the passionate craving for the presence of the husband who filled still more and more of her life as it went on, that Jane de Chantal's eyes were opened to fresh truths, the first link of the chain of marvellous graces she was hereafter to receive. For it became manifest to her, as it has become to others advancing in spiritual knowledge, that it is far easier to be even heroically active than to bear the blank of utter repose. Men then follow in their degree the course of the prophet Elias, who, when sacrificing on Mount Carmel, and proclaiming the might of the living God, and asserting it by the miraculous witness of his own acts to assembled Israel, was upheld by every strength that can supernaturally sustain the energies of man. But when that great drama was ended he was found fleeing before the fear of man, and sleeping in very hopelessness and discouragement under the terebinth in the desert. And it was out of that very discouragement and distress that he was awakened to behold the utmost manifestation of God's glory, and to learn the clearest indications of His will.

It was thus that, while silently fulfilling her monotonous round of duties, and diligently seeking God's will in prayer, Madame de Chantal discovered that she had sometimes put the gift before the Giver,—had so set her heart upon it as to obscure His presence, and in her natural joy at her husband's visits had shortened or disturbed her prayers, and lost her taste for the duties of charity. She had no sooner become clearly aware of this, than she opened her whole heart to God, and resolved with tears and sorrow that henceforth He should be first in her heart and life, her sole portion and her great reward.

Not long afterwards, the king wished to send M. de Chantal upon some errand which he could not in conscience carry out; and although Henry tempted him with the reward of being made a marshal of France, he respectfully but resolutely declined the command. He well knew that in refusing this service he should irreparably offend the king, and lose all the favour which he had hitherto enjoyed; and at once, in the height of his re-

putation, and at the age of thirty-five, accepted the ruin of all his brilliant prospects for life. The heroic sacrifice was cheerfully made; and as M. de Chantal left Paris and returned to Bourbilly, he knew well that all his courtly friends were lamenting his folly and his extinguished career.

This was in the year 1601, during one of those frightful famines that so often tread upon the heels of war, when whole provinces have been drained of their inhabitants, the villages pillaged and burnt, and the land left untilled and waste. The dearth of all kinds of food was so terrible, that thousands of the peasantry died in their houses, and those who were able to go in search of food were seen devouring weeds and nettles, and fighting for the half-putrid remains of birds and animals. The description of this and other like famines in France during this century are so horrible, that they almost surpass the imagination of human suffering. Madame de Chantal's charity and pity were then keenly aroused, and in concert with her husband she invented every means of mitigating the misery that surrounded them. She gave out that every day bread and soup in certain quantities should be doled in the courtyard, to each family a ration—for even benefactors could not afford to be profuse then; and the peasant population came to Bourbilly for these supplies from nearly twenty miles round. Baron de Chantal had a second gateway made in his courtyard at that time, that those who came and those who went might be divided. But even this wise precaution was neutralized by some of these poor famishing creatures, who devoured their portion behind the castle walls, and going round, came back again to receive a second. When this was found out, Jane could not make up her mind to have them rebuked or punished, making use of those touching words which have so often since been repeated by those who have been defrauded in applications of charity: 'O my God, I am a beggar every moment at the door of Thy mercy, and what should I say if I were driven away by Thee after the second or third time? More than a thousand times hast Thou kindly borne with my importunity, and shall I not bear with the importunity of Thy creatures?'

Having her husband's full sanction, Jane fitted up a great part of the castle as a hospital for the famine sick, and especially for such poor starving women who had young babies, to whose husbands she sent every day a pound of bread as long as they remained in the castle. It was on this occasion that the great oven called 'the poor's oven' was built, which was still standing till quite of late years, and was visited by hundreds of travellers, who made it a sort of pilgrimage to visit the scenes of St. Jane Chantal's life and story.

Of course all these good works did not altogether roll upon noiseless wheels, for the special servants of God are not generally accustomed to smooth travelling. When the bountiful supplies of food in the castle stores began to lessen and disappear, and the servants, like every one else, were put upon an allowance of food, they began to cry out loudly against the improvidence of their mistress, and to declare that she would spend all her husband's means upon greedy and undeserving poor. There is no doubt that it must have required some considerable amount of faith not to fear famine; for at last there remained only one barrel of flour and a small quantity of rye in the granary, and it was midwinter, and the crowds besieging the castle gates were larger than ever. After bearing the grumbling of the servants for some time in silence, Madame de Chantal went to judge with her own eyes what provisions could be spared; and when she saw the one solitary barrel of flour, she felt lifted up with unshrinking faith, and turning with a radiant face to the astonished servants who accompanied her, she bade them heap up their bowls with flour, and give a bounteous dole to the crowded courtyard. It is credibly recorded that for full six months the entire household of Bourbilly and the neighbouring poor were abundantly fed from this single barrel of flour; and when the next harvest time came round, and the corn was stored, that same barrel was still full. The same miraculous supply was renewed time after time throughout the famine, so that it became well known to the servants that the granary and storerooms would sometimes be swept out clean one day, and the next would be filled with fresh supplies of corn.

In the midst of these troubles and labours, when the fruitful blessing of the poor was poured out in its fulness on the house of Bourbilly, M. de Chantal was taken very ill. His wife then gave herself up entirely to nursing him, and according to Bussy Rabutin's account, 'spent her days at his bedside and her nights in the chapel,' where, either kneeling or prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, she besought God for her husband's life.

It was a deeply touching and solemn moment for both those lives. On the one hand, the young noble husband, whose warlike career had been one series of brilliant heroism, and who had been early withdrawn by his own act of self-sacrifice from the glare of a court in which his somewhat too facile and impressionable character might have led him to overstep the limits of conscience, was now laid upon a sick bed, where his eyes opened fully to the greatness of eternal life and to the priceless Love which had prepared for him a place therein. And beside him, and continually hovering softly round him, was the wife, with her fresh calm ministering, and whose ever present love was to him the closest likeness and representation of the Eternal Love which now dawned fully upon him. For all Jane's thoughts and movements and actions were entirely bound up in her husband; and while she was absorbed in ministering to his pain and his wants, it is beautiful to observe that under this 'shadow of the Most High,' his awakened soul soared to higher flights, and it was the husband now who proposed to the wife that if either of them was taken by death, the remaining days of the survivor should be consecrated to the service of God. But Jane could not bear even to hear of separation, and always turned from the subject.

Nor did he die of that sickness. The golden cord was loosed, though she knew it not, and lay unbound about his feet; but the dial had gone back for a while, and M. de Chantal returned to farther preparation for death, and to a brief time of that united happiness which is the sweetest foretaste of Paradise. Together they prayed and read, or played with their children, or strolled under the trees of the avenue, interchang-

ing their inner thoughts and higher hopes and joys in a way which only a Christian husband and wife can realize. This blessed time of solitude and rest was broken in upon by the arrival of M. d'Anlézy, who came from Chazelles to ask whether it would not be good for his sick neighbour to see a little of his friends, and take some more stirring exercise. His proposal was acceded to, and the two gentlemen went out with their guns and dogs, attended by several followers to beat the game. Bourbilly was well placed in this respect for an invalid, for no sooner was the drawbridge raised than there remained only a steep green ascent to come into thick woods, which, in the French fashion, were cut into formal alleys crossing each other. What it was that happened during that memorable expedition no one can now say; but it is most probable that M. d'Anlézy caught his gun in the bough of a tree, and that it went off without his knowledge. The beaters heard a gunshot, M. de Chantal uttered a sharp sudden cry, and fell to the ground, badly shot through the upper part of the thigh. When the horrorstruck servants rushed to him he was saying,

‘I am a dead man! My dear friend and cousin, I forgive you with all my heart. It was an accident.’

And poor M. d'Anlézy frantically replied that he must shoot himself, that he never again could face Madame de Chantal, and that it was best for both of them to die.

‘Dear friend, dear cousin,’ said M. de Chantal with difficulty, fixing his glazing eyes upon him, ‘I beseech you commit no sin! God has struck me by your hand. Do not forget Him.’

He could say nothing more, and was carried carefully by the weeping servants to the nearest cottage. There he revived a little, and was the only one of the group who kept his presence of mind, sending off four men to the four nearest villages for a priest, and a fifth messenger for his wife, but strictly enjoined him to say nothing but that he was wounded in the thigh. Madame de Chantal had lately been confined, and was then still actually in bed; but as soon as Jane had heard the message, and sending for the man, had seen his face, she exclaimed,

‘This is nothing but a gilded pill!’ and immediately had herself dressed and taken to the village where her husband lay.

As soon as he saw her come in, he said,

‘Darling, God’s decree is just. We must love Him and die!’

‘No, no! you must be cured!’ she passionately replied.

Her husband faintly said,

‘It is of no use to try.’

Fresh from the weakness of recent childbirth, and expecting nothing so little as this dreadful occurrence, it is not surprising that Madame de Chantal lost all her self-control, burst into hysterical sobs and cries, violently reproaching M. d’Anl zy for his carelessness and folly. Her husband gently strove to soothe her and lead her to recognize God’s hand in the blow. The priest then came in, and M. de Chantal made his last confession.

As the doctors came hurrying in, Jane met each one, questioning him and studying his face as he examined the wound. At last, no longer able to restrain her feelings, she exclaimed,

‘Gentlemen, you *must* save M. de Chantal!’

Her husband smiled faintly.

‘If the great Physician does not cure, they cannot do it,’ he said.

With the poor knowledge and apparatus of the times, when medical science was in a surprizingly barbarous state, the doctors lost courage, and hesitated to extract the bullet, so that poor M. de Chantal lingered in agonizing pain for nine days before he sank. During the whole time his faith and love and unshrinking trust in God grew deeper and brighter every day. It was not a little thing for a young man in the prime of a vivid and enjoyable life, just tasting the full sweetness of home in the society of a loving wife and four charming little children, promising still greater interest and joy for the coming years; yet this heaped-up and full measure of loss Baron de Chantal accepted without a single murmur or the weakness of even one complaint. The day before he died he solemnly repeated his conviction that his death was purely accidental, and that he



freely forgave him who brought it about ; and added a clause to his will disinheriting any one of his children who might nourish any idea of dealing revenge. And then, having set the house of his soul fully in order, he received the last sacraments with great joy, and calmly went to his rest.



### CHAPTER III.

#### *First Years of Widowhood. 1601-1602.*

THE husband departed, but the wife remained. He Who counts the very hairs of our heads doubtless knew which of these two chosen souls was the most fit to bear that cruel wrench, that sharpest stroke which cleft the united life, and tore the half away, while the other maimed and bleeding half was left to brace itself to the daily work with all its wounds unhealed. Jane de Chantal's strong and deeply but calmly passionate nature now began to awaken to its full strength, and gave her warning once and for ever of the force it possessed for evil and for good. She refused to take either food or rest, and spent many hours together kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, buried in a passion of grief and forgetfulness of everything that was passing in the outer world. Her mind was so fixed upon him who had left her, that she could neither speak, nor see, nor hear, nor even feel, nor reason. When she fell on the ground, worn out with fasting and kneeling, and her servants would lay her on her bed, she slipped out of it again, and knelt on the floor. All kinds of rest as well as of food seemed abhorrent to her.

This condition of outward passiveness, approaching to the state of a body in a trance, and of inward struggle, lasted for full four months; and during the time Madame de Chantal afterwards described her feelings as divided between ardent desire to get away from every one she knew and live in a perpetual pilgrimage in the Holy Land, and a sinking of the soul into the lowest depths of depression and grief. But at length the great instincts of motherhood resumed their power and awaked her to act for her children's needs, and to return to some sem-

blance of ordinary life. And the next portion of her history, as she says herself, was divided between inward peace and intense suffering. She had gone down into the deep waters, and they had flowed over her soul ; but during the passage of the floods she had anchored her soul for ever upon the strong rock which lay beneath, and thenceforward it was never moved.

Nearly her first action was to seal her faithful love to her lost husband by a vow of perpetual chastity ; and when this was taken she made a review of all her goods, clothes, &c., gave her wedding gown and rich dresses to the Church, and made bundles of the whole of her husband's clothes for the poor. She then remodelled the entire household, pensioned off all the servants that were not absolutely necessary, and made a fresh minute regulation of her life. The time which had been spent in any kind of recreation, in watching the sports of her husband and his friends, and in visiting, was now devoted to prayer, reading, looking after the poor, and teaching her children. Madame de Chantal now, for the first time, felt the need of a good director, for a great change had taken place in her soul. The presence of God was more vivid, and she received many distinct suggestions for her guidance or for making some fresh sacrifice. Often she could not tell whether the voice speaking within her soul were a Divine voice, or that of imagination or temptation, and she deeply felt the need of something more than mere occasional guidance. Without having any distinct knowledge of the subject, Jane began to pray very earnestly for a holy director who might make known to her the fuller Divine will, and she set her servants and orphans and children to pray for her.

It was afterwards known that a kind of manifestation was made to her about this time as to who this director should be. She had resumed her useful habit of riding alone about her property and of looking after the workpeople herself, and was on horseback one day, slowly passing the outside of a copse, when she saw at some little distance a person who looked like a bishop, walking towards her in his cassock, rochet, and biretta. His countenance was serene and heavenly, and some assurance in it of great inward peace seemed to give instant relief

to her grieving heart. At the same moment the suggestion was given to her soul : ' This is the guide, well beloved of God and man, in whose hands you will place your conscience.' She rode quickly to the spot, but found no one there. At that very time, by one of those remarkable but not unfrequent ' communications of mind with mind,' of which St. Thomas of Aquin speaks, the Bishop of Geneva was rapt in ecstatic prayer in the old Castle de Sales, when he saw a young widow whose face was unknown to him, and as if a curtain had been updrawn he seemed to see a new religious congregation arise, of which that young widow was to be the mother, and himself the guide and instructor.

Madame de Chantal did indeed now sadly need a strong helping hand. Her father wrote to her, seriously rebuking her for letting her grief have its sway when she had four young children and so many interests to watch over. He urged her, by her obedience as a child, to set everything at Bourbilly in order, and to make her home with him at Dijon. She acceded to his wishes immediately, though sorely grieving to leave the scene of her married happiness, of her lifelong grief, and her husband's dearly loved grave. But she knew that the road of obedience is marked by blessings, and set off with her children to Dijon, where she resumed her old place in her father's house, and was welcomed by all the friends whom she could bring herself to see, and whose unwearied kindness and religious tone of mind was of essential service to the stricken woman, who had met no equals at Bourbilly since the day of her great sorrow. In cheering and ministering to her noblehearted father and in teaching her little children, Madame de Chantal passed the first year of widowhood in much inward peace. But still no director had presented himself, and she silently prayed for this gift more and more.

One day she joined with several of her friends in making a pilgrimage to Notre Dame d'Etang, about six miles from Dijon, where a well known Friar Minim was to say mass. This friar had a reputation as a skilful director of souls. The other ladies soon gathered about Madame de Chantal, and began

to speak of the miracles wrought at the shrine, also diverging to the sanctity of this special friar. Their tongues ran upon his various gifts in dealing with souls; and during the talk the secret longing in Jane's heart became so great, that she sought the friar in the confessional after mass. This religious priest, of the Order of St. Francis of Paula, to whom she then addressed herself, was learned and pious, and had done great good in Dijon and its neighbourhood. There was every reason for Jane to hope that he would direct her to greater peace and perfection than she had hitherto known, and the fact that his appearance did not correspond with the vision which she had seen of her future guide was not enough in itself to render it imprudent in her to have recourse to his advice. Whether he understood her soul or not, the direction which he gave her may have been—indeed St. Francis of Sales afterwards said it had been—good for her soul at the time,<sup>1</sup> but it was not that which was ultimately to lead her so near to God. This director let her indulge her desire for bodily mortifications, fastings, watchings, discipline, and the like, and this at a time when her strength was much exhausted by her sufferings after her husband's death. In the same way, considering her ardent and active spirit, he encouraged her to go through a number of long prayers, meditations, and spiritual practices, which fatigued her head. He spurred her on, where it might have been wiser to moderate her. Her disquiet and scrupulousness increased under this treatment; and then to cure her by obedience, the common remedy for many such troubles, he let her put herself under strict obedience, and bind herself to him by four vows, which seem to have been made successively, as her troubles appeared to require such remedies more and more. The first was a simple vow of obedience; the second, not to speak to others as to the details of his direction; the third, never to leave him; and the fourth, to speak to no one but himself of

<sup>1</sup> See Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, t. i. p. 178 (éd. 7me). He quotes a letter of St. Francis, in which he says: 'Ce fut Dieu qui vous embarqua en la première direction, propre a votre bien en ce temps-là.'

her interior state. The time came, as we shall see, when these bonds had to be broken.

After some stay at Dijon, Madame de Chantal went back to Bourbilly, where the gray turrets and spires, the green meadows, and the hoary trees, vividly recalled to her lost happy days, and caused her to shed many sweet and bitter tears. Again she wandered with her little ones up and down the avenue, or rode about her farms and vineyards in the broad sunny noons, watching the labourers gathering the grapes and loading the carts, with jest and laughter, just as they did when she watched them with her husband in the happy years which now seemed folded away into some far off past, for ever gone. She might well then have put her thoughts into the great poet's words :

‘ But who shall so forecast the years,  
And find in loss a gain to match,  
Or reach a hand through time to catch  
The far off interest of tears?’

Yet in the very depths of her loss gain did come to her ; and as she was one day weeping and praying in the castle chapel, she saw herself surrounded by a great crowd of virgins and widows, and heard a heavenly voice saying, ‘ This is the generation that shall be given to thee and to My faithful servant ; a chaste and chosen generation, and I will that it should be holy.’ This manifestation comforted Madame de Chantal greatly, though she had not the least idea what it meant.

Not long afterwards she received a very perplexing letter from her father in law, who lived in an old castle called Monthelon, near Autun, telling her that if she did not give up her peaceful home at Bourbilly and live with him, he would marry again and disinherit her children. It was a proposal doubly unwelcome,—first, because the beauty and solitude of Bourbilly had become a source of great rest of mind, and she was doing a solid good work among her own poor people ; and secondly, because the old Baron de Chantal led an irregular life, and Monthelon was not a fit place in which to bring up her children. Jane could, with the utmost reasonableness,

have alleged this in excuse for declining the offer ; but she was never in the habit of slipping out of difficulties, or of choosing the smooth paths of life. She decided, after reflection, that it was her first duty to devote herself to her father in law in his declining years, and that if she did this, and strove to set right what was wrong in his house, God would preserve her children from harm.

Madame de Chantal then collected all the furniture, bedding, and stores that could justly be given away from Bourbilly, and distributed them among the peasants who lived on the place, and having so arranged the castle as to leave it shut up and in charge of a proper person, she got into the carriage with her children, to set out on her journey. But she found it surrounded with a crowd of lame, blind, crippled, and deformed, both young and old, who closed round the carriage and prevented the horses from moving, lamenting and crying out that their mother was about to leave them, never to come back again. It was a most touching and painful sight, and the cry they uttered was a true one ; for though Jane did come back from time to time, when the harvests or vintage were being gathered in, it was for a few days only, and as soon as she could she gave up Bourbilly to her son, and never again made it her home. The pilgrim of love, who, after following out the course of this great woman's life, feels the strong wish to visit its various scenes, will certainly turn his steps toward the peaceful meads of Bourbilly, where the two gray fragments of its ruin still rise about the crystal stream that winds through the rich grass. He will sit upon the broken and weedgrown doorsteps so often trodden by Madame de Chantal in her going out and coming in among the poor ; and then, wandering through the ruins, will mark the ancient hangings, and mouldering cornices, and broken marbles decaying on the walls. The chapel, whose lofty east window so long stood up sharply cut against the sky, has now been restored by the present noble owner, M. de Franqueville, and moves the pilgrim with strange interest as he thinks how often Jane knelt within it, rapt in suffering and in prayer. He will walk under the hoary



oaks, which still spread their doddered and mossgrown limbs over the sward upon which she and her husband walked, while learning to serve God, and beginning the culture of their life, and whither she again returned, leading her little children by the hand, and teaching them how to grow in Christian strength. There is a deep secret of strength underlying the soothing charm in such a pilgrimage to the homes or shrines of God's servants on earth, and in tracking their footprints at home we best master the feelings of their hearts and minds, and best learn, from their difficulties and victories, how to live and how to overcome.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The whole neighbourhood of Bourbilly is fragrant with recollections, traditions, sayings, and reverence of *la Bonne Dame*, and in the *Confiteor* the country people have been accustomed to say, after 'Sanctis Apostolis Petri et Pauli,' *et à la Bonne Dame*, meaning St. Jane Frances de Chantal. The traveller from Paris to Dijon will be well repaid by halting at Montbard, and driving thence to Bourbilly.



## CHAPTER IV.

### *Life at Monthelon. St. Francis de Sales. 1601-1605.*

IT was towards the end of the year 1602 that Jane, now a deeply veiled widow, with her four pretty children, was driven one cold wintry day into the gloomy courtyard of the old castle of Monthelon. The castle was deeply moated and scarped with bastions, but some of its blind old towers seemed mouldering into ruin. No rivulet was seen, as at Bourbilly, dancing and sparkling through the green meadows, nor was there any beauty of ancestral trees to be a perpetual delight to the eye. Above the dark old portal and about the carved effigy of the arms of the family ran the legend '*Virtus vulnere virescit*;'<sup>1</sup> and as Jane de Chantal fixed her eyes upon this first unsmiling welcome, her heart may surely have sunk with some premonitory warning of the seven suffering years she was to drag on under its shadow.

The old baron was a true Rabutin, frank, brave, and generous; but devoured by restless vanity, and marred by an almost insane violence of character. His father's family pride had been so uncontrolled that he had the multitudinous blazons of the Rabutin shield stamped upon his furniture, beds, plate, carriages, harness, and on the inside and outside walls of Monthelon, and ended by actually causing them to be worked upon his clothes. The son had deeply imbibed this insane folly, and his fits of temper, violence, and caprice, frequently made his household tremble for their lives. But even this was not the worst evil with which Jane had to contend; for, like other uncontrolled men, he had allowed himself to be enslaved by an unworthy woman, and his housekeeper with her five

<sup>1</sup> 'Virtue grows green by wounding.'

children had taken up her abode in the castle, where she reigned supreme, preying upon and wasting the baron's income. Under such a combination of circumstances, it is exceedingly difficult to imagine how Jane de Chantal could make up her mind to remain at Monthelon, or why her father in law wished her to do so. He may have disliked or felt ashamed of his state of bondage; but when Madame de Chantal gently strove to open his eyes to the waste of his income, and the disorderly state of the castle, she was met by such an unmeasured burst of rage and brutal insolence, that she never again attempted to interfere. The housekeeper thenceforth openly showed her enmity and her low triumph, and for all the years that Jane remained at Monthelon, she never gave a single order, nor was she allowed in any way to be regarded as the mistress of her father in law's house.

She largely profited by this apprenticeship in subjection and selfcommand, and perhaps even more largely by the absolute surrender of her earnest desire for active good works and a large circle of occupations. She succeeded in showing the most continual and unvarying forbearance towards the wretched creature who flaunted in her place, associated her children—which was more difficult—with her own four little ones, taught them and played with them, and even at times washed and dressed them herself, for they seem to have been constantly neglected by their mother. To the baron she always behaved like a dutiful and respectful daughter.

When she had been about a year there, Jane was affiliated to the Order of the Capuchins—that is, she was made a partaker of the spiritual benefits flowing from the good works done in the Order. This step shows that she was highly esteemed for piety and devotion, and had a particular affection for the poverty and mortification practised by the children of the seraphic saint of Assisi.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, t. i. pp. 104, 105, gives the letter of affiliation in a note. He speaks, however, in the text of his work, as if this affiliation were the same thing as admission into the 'third Order' of St. Francis, and expresses his surprise that the historians of St. Jane Fran-

The time was now ripe for the answer to her many prayers and desires. In the autumn of 1603 the Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales, was invited to preach the coming Lent sermons at Dijon, and, as soon as the invitation had been accepted and everything was settled, M. Frémyot wrote to his daughter and begged her to come and stay with him during that time. Jane felt her heart bound at the prospect of hearing and seeing the Bishop, whose name and fame had now been so widely noised abroad. Her arrangements were at last made, and she reached Dijon on the first Friday in Lent, a few hours before the evening sermon.

Every detail of the first meeting between these two famous saints, whose mutual influence and services were so momentous, is precious. Madame de Chantal went early to church, where she had no sooner beheld the noble and serene face of Francis as he took his place in the pulpit than she recognized the manifestation given to her during her evening ride of one in a bishop's rochet and cassock, who was to become her future guide. Filled with joy at seeing the director so long prayed for, she had her chair placed directly opposite the pulpit, that she might see and hear him with ease.

The Bishop also was struck by the young calm face in widow's weeds upraised with such fixity of interest in every word he uttered, and after the instruction he asked her brother, the Archbishop of Bourges, who she was. The archbishop smiled as he replied that it was his sister, Madame de Chantal. This archbishop was no other than Andrew, whose head was once to have been sent to his father in a sack, and to whom the archbishopric of Bourges and abbey of St. Etienne had now been transferred by M. Frémyot.

Francis de Sales was very soon on more intimate terms with the venerable president and his family. Throughout

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ces have not mentioned this step in her course. There is no mention at all of the 'third Order' in the document, and, unless some other proof of the supposed fact can be adduced, we cannot wonder at the silence of the historians.

Dijon every house was open to him, and his society was sought, not only for spiritual instruction, but on account of his knowledge, his delightful conversation, and the exceeding charm of his presence. Everywhere he was welcomed, fêted, and honoured in every kind of way, but he felt himself nowhere so much at home as in the president's delightful family. Sometimes he sought M. Frémyot, whose grand simple character suited him exactly, and to whose dignified age he showed the reverence of a son. Sometimes he went to visit the Archbishop of Bourges, who rapidly became his intimate friend. And then too there was the added charm of the young widow, with her calm sorrow-stamped face and lofty noble character, whose silence was so intelligent, and whose words full of meaning, as she modestly moved about the house, or sat at work listening to the conversation, or teaching her eldest boy and girl,—for the children had come with their mother to Dijon.

Jane was soon at ease with the Bishop, and he exercised an influence over her almost immediately, testing and gauging—if we may say so—her strength and courage, and the temper of her soul. Very small details of their conversation show this. One day at dinner, when the Bishop had his usual place next her as mistress of the house, he observed that her dress was more fashionably made than usual. Taking an opportunity when he could not be overheard, the Bishop said to her in a low voice: ‘Madame, should you like to marry again?’ ‘No, indeed, my lord!’ she instantly replied. ‘Then you should pull down your flag,’ he said, smiling, but in such a way that she could not take offence. Madame de Chantal perfectly understood him, and when she took her place at dinner the next day, her dress was docked of certain little trimmings and coxcombries which had given it the appearance of smartness. On another occasion the Bishop saw some lace edgings on her chemisette, and once more he spoke: ‘Madame, if you wore no lace, would not your dress be equally white and clean?’ The lace was cut off that very evening by Jane’s own hands, as well as some fancy tassels to her collar which had also caught the Bishop’s watchful eye; and after these hints, which

Madame de Chantal interpreted exactly as he intended, striking at the spirit of worldliness and not this or that petty detail, his future daughter began to bend her whole grand earnest mind to a thorough subjection of her life to the law and spirit of God. She looked up with a wise reverence to her new guide, finding in him every day a greater range of spiritual knowledge, a deeper foundation of virtue, and a greater perfection of that charity which filled his whole being and exterior with so indescribable a charm.

And the Bishop at once discerned the noble and solid qualities in this young widow. He wrote of her that she brought vividly to his mind St. Paula, St. Angela, and St. Catharine of Genoa; that her large understanding and deep humility equally astonished him; and once he wrote of her in these words: 'She is as true and simple as a child, with a solid and excellent judgment. She has a grand soul, and her courage in great religious undertakings is above that of women.' And again: 'I have found at Dijon what Solomon could scarcely find in Jerusalem. Madame de Chantal is indeed the "valiant woman."'

Throughout the whole of this time of continual and intimate intercourse, and of what may be called a thorough mutual influence and understanding, Jane had never made a single confession to the Bishop, or applied to him for any direction of her conscience. His guidance and her obedience had been strictly limited to external acts. She often felt, on leaving the church where he had preached, or after his other more special instructions to devout ladies at the Ursuline convent, that she must kneel at his feet and pour out to him in full all the desires, fears, hopes, and wishes of her soul. She saw one after another of her friends seeking his counsel and coming away satisfied and at rest, and she was continually hearing from them of the help, strength, and efficient guidance they received from his wise and experienced teaching. She alone remained unhelped and unfriended, for her vows still bound her with a fourfold chain.

It so fell out, and certainly now by no chance, that her director was called away at this time by some duty; and Ma-

dame de Chantal was thus able, without self-reproach, to make her confession to the Bishop. She did so, and immediately felt such extraordinary peace that all her mental troubles seemed at an end. The next week she again opened her mind fully to him, when his mind became filled with light for her guidance, and he spoke to her at great length. Soon afterwards, Madame de Chantal and several of her friends accompanied the Bishop to the shrine of Notre Dame de l'Etang, and while kneeling before the image of our Lady, the Bishop felt himself again filled with devotion and the spirit of prayer, and earnestly poured forth supplications for the guidance of the widowed mother, who, he felt sure, would become an eminent servant of God. Before he left Dijon he told her, with that frank dignity which belonged to him, how much his mind was occupied with her and her future life. Then he had her four little children brought in, gave each of them a caress and his blessing, and took an affectionate leave of the venerable president, who could scarcely bear to let him go.

When he was about to leave, the Bishop found all Dijon waiting in the square to thank him and bid him farewell. Men of all ranks and degrees were there, holding the horses, crowding round the carriage, kissing his rochet, cassock, and hands, and crying out: 'You must not go, my lord; you must not leave us! Stay with us, my lord!' Then, making a way through the throng, came the mayor and councillors in procession, begging the Bishop to accept a rich gift of plate they had brought him, and a splendid sapphire ring, as some little testimony of their gratitude for all the good he had done the old town of Dijon. But he courteously refused to take any present whatever, adding, that he only wished to carry away the hearts of Dijon with him to Annecy. Jane watched the carriage as long as she could see it, and the—unwonted—tears in her eyes, and the expressive grief of her noble face, showed what she felt on losing the guide she so sorely needed, and had just begun to prize. The Bishop discerned in her countenance all that was unspoken, and when he stopped to change horses he wrote her his first note.



‘ I think God has given me to you, and I feel more sure of this every hour. I ask of His Divine Goodness to place us both in the Sacred Wounds of Jesus Christ, and to let us give back there the life we have derived from them. I commend you to your good Angel ; do the same for me, who am entirely yours in Jesus Christ,

✠ FRANCIS, Bishop of Geneva.’

After this tender little firstfruit of his fatherly care, which exactly responded to the needs expressed in Jane’s face at parting, the Bishop wrote her a full long letter, very courteous and delicate, in which he urged her to fulfil in every possible way the duties of widowhood, that blessed and holy state which is so dear to Almighty God, and to make a special study of her spiritual progress, and a courageous advance in virtue. He insisted upon the necessity of enlargement of the heart, and of freeing it from all constraint which stifles it ; bade her avoid scruples, hurry, and anxiety of mind, which above all things hinder a soul on the road to spiritual perfection. Finally, he enjoined her to cultivate especially the personal love of Jesus Christ, and to cherish a great devotion to the Church. ‘ Praise God a hundred times a day,’ he says, ‘ for the blessing of being a child of the Church, as Mother Teresa did.’ This letter came just when it was most needed, for Madame de Chantal was again in great mental torture. She reproached herself bitterly for having broken the vow made to the Friar Minim, and thought that after all the pains and trouble he had taken with her, she could never make up her mind to leave him. She went through such mental anguish that, as her usual director was still away, she applied to a Jesuit, Father de Villars, for advice upon the subject. After hearing all she had to say, Father de Villars told her that it was the will of God that she should put herself under the direction of the Bishop of Geneva, which was suited to her soul, while that of her present director was not. ‘ The Bishop,’ he said, ‘ has the Spirit of God and of the Church. God wishes something great from you, in giving you this earthly seraph for your guide.’ This assurance, as



Jane said afterwards, took as it were a mountain from her soul. Her director returned soon after, and did not blame her for having spoken to Francis, nor forbid her to write to him. He only urged the necessity of having but one director.

She now wrote regularly to the Bishop, who carefully collected and docketed her letters, under the conviction that her name and work would one day be recorded in the Church. Most unfortunately these letters afterwards came into the hands of their writer, whose humility was so alarmed at the possibility of their ever being made public that she burnt them. Thus a complete, fearless, and most lucid record of the progress of a great soul in search of nearer union with God was for ever lost. Madame de Chantal, however, did not yet feel herself entirely at liberty to give up her old director, and her doubts gave her such torture that Father de Villars again intervened, and urged her in the strongest terms to put herself at once under the Bishop's guidance. Jane therefore took fresh courage, and at last wrote to him, and distinctly asked him to take the entire charge of her soul. He then, on his side, remembering her four vows, hesitated a little, but after a while bade her meet him and his mother, Madame de Boisy, at a place called Sainte Claude, where they were going on a pilgrimage. Before she started, Jane went on a special pilgrimage of her own to St. Bernard's birthplace, Fontaine lez Dijon, to pray that her plans might succeed; and having received a distinct interior answer to her prayer, she felt much comforted, and left Dijon with her friend Madame de Bruslard, the wife of the president who had succeeded M. Frémyot. They found the Bishop and his mother at Sainte Claude, and he very soon took an opportunity of asking Madame de Chantal to render an account of her conscience since he had left Dijon in Lent. It was now August 1604. She did this truthfully and exactly; and when she had made an end he bade her good night and dismissed her.

The next day he came to see her very early, and looking wearied and worn out. 'Let us sit down,' he said, 'for I am very tired, and have not slept. I have been at work all night about your affairs. It is very true that it is God's will that I should

undertake your spiritual guidance, and that you should follow my advice.' After a pause the Bishop told her that the four vows she had taken to her former guide now served only to destroy her peace of conscience. Every word that he uttered seemed to Madame de Chantal like a voice from heaven, and the whole time he was speaking he seemed absorbed in the Presence of God. The next day he again sent for Madame de Chantal to the sacristy before vesting for mass, and bade her renew her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience during the elevation, and to beg of her own and his guardian Angels to be witnesses of the sacrifice. This she did faithfully, and at the same moment the Bishop made a solemn promise 'carefully, faithfully, and holily' to lead, help, and serve this soul in its progress in Christian virtue, so as to give an answer for her before God. That very day she began her general confession, after which, she says, she felt her youth renewed like an eagle's, plunging in the sea of penance, and giving herself wholly and entirely to God. The Bishop gave her a new rule of life, changing her method of prayer, and laying down for her certain definite points of practice to help her to make progress in Christian virtue.

Madame de Chantal went back to Dijon, as her chronicler observes, like a bee laden with honey to the hive. The first thing she did on her return was to go to Notre Dame de l'Etang to return thanks for all she had obtained. So much had been developed by St. Ignatius and his successors, St. Teresa, St. Philip Neri, and others, during the latter half of the preceding century in regard to the methods, practice, and rules of mental prayer, that the eminent religious men and women of the following age reaped a rich harvest of spiritual advantages. The Bishop of Geneva had a marvellous skill in awakening a love of spiritual life, and in presenting it under a variety of attractive aspects to those under his care. In addition to this spiritual gift Francis in an eminent degree possessed such advantages of position and education as gave him exceeding refinement, knowledge of the world and its various grades of life, and perfect manners. These lesser gifts peculiarly fitted him to com-

bat the corruptions of the court and upper classes of society, among whom his office perpetually called him at that time. His first great principle was to lead the soul to love God, and to show Him in all aspects as the most tender, watchful, untiring Father to men ; and the next, to induce people to show their love practically by some hearty acts of religion. When he was dealing with men in business or much occupied with public affairs, he shortened their religious practices, but insisted on their being as hearty and earnest as possible ; love, in fact, was to be the ruling principle both of lengthened devotions and short acts of prayer ; but when he was guiding people who really had leisure, and were capable of courageous persistence, he lengthened their spiritual exercises, and much insisted on the foundation of a solid habit of mental prayer. From Madame de Chantal he required the daily repetition of the *Pater noster*, *Ave Maria*, *Credo*, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, *Ave maris stella*, and *Angele Dei*, in Latin,—she was to learn well what the words meant,—and also a meditation on some part of the Passion or on the truths of Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven. In the latter case she was to add acts of hope and love, and never to meditate on death or hell without setting the cross before her at the same time. He gave her Tauler and St. Bonaventure for books of meditation. After meditation she was to hear mass, and some time in the day to say her beads ‘as lovingly as possible.’ During the course and occupations of the day she was to repeat ejaculatory prayers, especially at the striking of the clock. Now and then some hymns were to be sung, but always sung with a loving heart. Before supper a short time was to be given to selfexamination and retirement, with five Our Fathers and Hail Marys, which was in fact the particular examen of St. Ignatius, which Francis de Sales thus completely popularized. He advised Jane to begin this little exercise by placing herself in spirit in one of the Five Wounds on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday ; on Saturday in the Crown of Thorns, and on Sunday returning to the Sacred Heart. During the evening a full half hour was to be devoted to reading some spiritual book, and those first recommended were Louis

of Granada, the *Imitation*, Ludolph's *Life of Christ*, St. Teresa's works, and Ribadeneyra's *Treatise on Affliction*.

The Bishop accompanied these directions for spending the day well by some sweet words of his own, which exactly explain his whole spirit and tone of mind. 'Do all this without hurry and with meekness and love. If you happen to leave any of it undone, have no scruple about it, for our rule of obedience is written in large letters. We must do all things from love and nothing by violence. We must love obedience more than we fear disobedience.' . . . 'If it so happens that any hindrance of charity or other reasonable cause comes in the way of your religious exercises, I should wish you to fulfil that as a kind of obedience, and that the omission should be replaced by charity.' He reminded Madame de Chantal that Cardinal Borromeo, whose process of canonization was then in course, when dining out or supping with his Swiss neighbours joined in drinking the toasts given, though he was a man of remarkable austerity of life, and in general abstained wholly from wine. He added, with his characteristic fine discernment and skill in teaching, 'A lax person would have gone too far in this matter, and a narrow one would have thought it a mortal sin, while a man with a true spirit of liberty acted from charity throughout.' It was at the same time that he gave her another fact of that time of saints and eminent spiritual men. 'Father Ignatius Loyola, whose canonization is to be declared in Holy Week, once eat meat (on a day of abstinence) at the simple recommendation of his doctor, when a narrow man would have required at least three days of insistence.' With regard to bodily austerities, the Bishop allowed Madame de Chantal to fast on Fridays, to eat sparingly on Saturdays, and to use the discipline twice a week, which was his custom with such of his penitents as desired to make progress. He had an earnest desire that those who could bear it, should thus uphold the traditions of the Church and her continual protest against the softness and luxury of the world; and he pointed out to his children that although the mortification of the will, intellect, and inclinations is the higher kind, the chastisement of the body must

also be added to carry out the whole teaching of Christ ; for if bodily mortification is entirely dropped, the whole fabric of selfdenial generally falls to pieces and comes to nothing.

Throughout his advice to Madame de Chantal, the Bishop never forgot that she was a mother, a daughter, and the centre of a considerable circle of friends ; nor did he ever, either in speaking or writing, or in what may be classed as interior or external direction, for one single instant cease to bear in mind that she was a woman, and must therefore be protected by persistent courtesy and delicacy of treatment. Very early in his guidance, as we have seen, he began to speak largely to her about her children, their training and education, even more than their teaching, and was of essential service to them by softening her somewhat exacting disposition, and her tendency to severity in regard to their conduct and faults. But this part of her story requires to be continued in a fresh chapter.

## CHAPTER V.

### *The elder Children.* 1605.

NOT very much is to be gathered in regard to Madame de Chantal's eldest child, the only boy, Celse Benigne. He was, at eleven years old, a very handsome highspirited boy, daring even to audacity, bright, quick, and impulsive to the last degree, both in act and word. He inherited, in fact, all the special qualities of the Rabutins, particularly their sharp keen wit, and the fatal charm of manner in which lay Bussy's chief attraction. It need scarcely be said that his mother was fully alive to the dangers which lay ready prepared for him by his blood and his natural character, without reckoning those which the world had in store. M. Frémyot, who delighted in the boy, intended him to be brought up to the 'robe,' to be educated for the bar, to shine in the parliamentary life of Burgundy, and, if possible, to succeed him some day as president of the Burgundian legislature. And there is no doubt that had all these intentions been wrought into the boy's life, it would have been better for him, and would certainly have relieved his mother from what became in the end an anxiety almost too intense for endurance. But, like many other planned lives, this was entirely set aside. The love of battles, sieges, and camps took such full possession of Celse, he showed so decided an aversion for books, and attraction to anything in the shape of adventure and fighting, that even his grandfather was obliged to give way. He was gradually drawn away into the brilliant court and army of Henry IV. and his successor, and in his short bright career was alternately the pride, delight, and desperate anxiety of his mother.

Marie Aymée de Chantal, called by her mother the 'child



of my heart,' had been born in 1598, in the happy Bourbilly days. She was immediately consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, and baptized by the name of *Mary*, after her, and *Aymée*, beloved, after her great aunt De Rabutin; and this last name the child so thoroughly represented, that her beauty, sweet temper, and coaxing little ways endeared her in a few months' time to all hearts. Marie Aymée was scarcely four years old when her father lay dying; and during the terrible days of his suffering she was scarcely ever out of his room, caressing and stroking him with her little hands, and putting her face to his, as if she had an instinctive knowledge that she was about to lose him. When he had breathed his last, and the child was entirely overlooked in the general grief, Marie Aymée sat quite still on the floor in a corner, with her eyes fixed on her father's motionless remains. At length, seeming suddenly to perceive that what she looked at was her father and not her father, she burst into tears, stretched out her arms towards the corpse, and was carried sobbing away. The impression made by his loss was never effaced.

When Madame de Chantal had resigned her indulgence of grief, and turned to the precious resource of a widow—her children—she did so, as we know, in no half hearted way. Taking up her cross with both hands, she thoroughly carried out the counsel of Francis, to be '*une vraie veffe*,' the 'widow indeed,'<sup>1</sup> of St. Paul, she found Marie Aymée her chief solace and resource. The child's winning ways, in spite of herself, charmed away her gloom and depression, and gradually softened and soothed her grief. She resolved to cultivate with great care the character which already gave such promise of growth, and to weed out the faults which might have become serious if allowed to flourish unchecked. Marie Aymée was exceedingly sensitive, alive to praise and blame, and shrinkingly timid: so that she was liable, as all such characters are, to concealment and want of truth, as well as to be led astray by feeling and fear, and the craving for sympathy. On one occasion, when the child had made believe to be ill, and pre-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy v. 3.



varicated about it, Madame de Chantal punished her severely. It was the first and last time for the same fault.

At Monthelon, as we have seen, Madame de Chantal wisely put aside the contemplation of evils she could not mitigate, and devoted herself entirely to the education of her children. She rose early, and having put on one of her plain neat gowns, she went to the nursery, and was present at the dressing and washing of her children, during which she never allowed any of the foolish chatter and flatteries to which servants are addicted, and directed Marie Aymée's young intelligent mind to pious thoughts, or exercised her in keeping silence from unnecessary words. After the children were all dressed, she took them to wish their grandfather good morning, and to stay in his room for a little while, if he was in the humour to have them about him, which was not always. The day was then filled up with useful offices, either in the service of the children or of the old baron, or of others in the house, and of the neighbouring poor. Madame de Chantal taught her own children and those of the housekeeper to read, to repeat and explain the Catechism, and thoroughly to understand their religion. On account of the state of the house, and that no gossip might take place about the housekeeper's conduct, Madame de Chantal took care never to leave Marie Aymée alone with the servants, and watched over her children with untiring solicitude. Whenever the old baron would allow her, she read aloud some useful book in the evenings, assembling the servants in the sitting room, according to the simple manners of the time; so that the other children, and the household in general, began to love religion and to wish to practise their duties. On Sundays and holidays she prepared little expeditions for her children among their poor neighbours. If any of them were sick, she carried with them *tisanes* and light nourishment, while Marie Aymée and her brother were laden with clothes and rolls of bread. The more the little girl had to carry, the more joyously she frisked along beside her mother, and during her whole life her Sundays and holidays were happily associated with thoughts of recreation and pleasure. When they were all set-

ting out, this admirable mother would say, 'Now let us go on a pilgrimage to the Mount of Olives,' or, 'to the Sepulchre,' &c., so as to direct the children's minds and intentions, and give some special bent to their talk. In this way Marie Aymée learnt to love the life of our Lord and His poor, and to exercise all her childish ingenuity in devising means for helping her sick and sorrowful neighbours.

When Madame de Chantal had become acquainted with Francis de Sales, the gentleness and charming manners of the Bishop made a great impression upon Marie Aymée, whose sensitive and joyous character found too little response from her mother's austere gravity, and had been accordingly somewhat checked and chilled. The children were all strongly attracted to the Bishop, and whenever he went to their grandfather's house they ran gladly to meet him with outstretched arms, kissed and clung to his hands, and thus surrounded by what he called his little family, Francis was led into the room, where all the household were gathered together. Then, while her brother and sister amused themselves at play, Marie Aymée would stand apart, half hidden, gazing with loving eyes upon the sweet and noble face of the Bishop, or gradually drawing nearer and nearer to him, and leaning against him or on the arm of his chair. Francis never failed to observe her, call her to him, and caress her, asking her little questions, and bidding her say her prayers and be a good child. He always took a special interest in her, and in his own affectionate way spoke of this to her mother in one of his letters. 'In the first place Marie Aymée is the eldest, and, besides that, I must needs love her more dearly (than the rest), because one day when you were not at home, she was so good to me and let me give her a kiss. Have I not, therefore, good reason to ask our Lord to make her pleasing to Him?'

The children derived the full benefit of the Bishop's influence over their mother, who, like many other devout women, had gained strength and the power of self sacrifice at a certain expense of sweetness. Nothing could be more devoted and admirable than Madame de Chantal had been as a mother,

but she had forgotten that children require brightness, gaiety, and the sunshine of joy to fill out and ripen their young lives. Discerning at a glance little Marie Aymée's tendency to vanity, and probably to an excessive love of praise, Francis wrote to her mother, urging her to make war against this vice, to which women seem more specially born.

Laying this warning much to heart, Madame de Chantal thought she would send her little girls at once to the abbey of Puy d'Orbe, where they would be out of reach of the world, and of the common temptations to a love of dress and amusement, and might perhaps pass naturally from the innocence of childhood to the life of cloistral peace for which her own heart longed. Upon this, as upon all other things, she consulted the Bishop, and he at first inclined to the plan himself. But, as time went on, he became more and more convinced of the great truth, that in regard to the refined cultivation and habits of the daughters of a family, no convent education can equal a mother's care. Finding that letters were too unsatisfactory, Madame de Chantal went to spend ten days in Savoy, to put herself completely under the Bishop's direction both for herself and her children, and on her return she took up their instruction more carefully than ever, and kept them almost always by her side. She began to teach Marie Aymée how to make little, short, very simple, meditations for a few minutes every day, and found that when some easy little points had been read to her, the child could think over them, and give such a clear account afterwards of her own reflections as proved that her soul was profiting and developing by something like real mental prayer. But as children love and require change, her mother took care to vary the meditation by forms of prayer recommended by St. Francis. Night prayers were always said together, and consisted of the Litany of our Lady, a *De profundis* for M. de Chantal, examen of conscience upon the past day, and *In manus Tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*. Then Madame de Chantal gave her children holy water and her blessing, and had them put into their little beds. She never allowed them, under any pretext, to sleep together.

It will sound strange to many who now seem to leave the education and development of their children's characters to the chance influences of the hour, and who so yield to their wills and whims as rather to drift along the course of life than take their children in hand as a rich vineyard which necessitates strenuous daily toil, to hear, that when Marie Aymée was only eight years old her mother judged, from her diversity of talents and the richness and fulness of her character, that she would not be suited to a conventual life. And, wisely judging that all characters require a very careful culture and much unwearied labour, this excellent mother spared no pains to study out this most important matter, that she might never force or drive her child in a direction not pointed out by Almighty God. She consulted both M. de Frémyot and M. de Chantal, and afterwards talked freely to the child herself, so as to bring out all the points of her character and disposition. Francis was perfectly satisfied with the result of Madame de Chantal's decision, and wrote to her in a beautiful letter, 'As for our Aymée, if she is to live in the storm and tumult of the world, we must do everything we can to ground her a hundred times more carefully in true virtue and piety, and to furnish her boat with all the appliances necessary to meet the winds and waves.' And being fully impressed with this truth, Madame de Chantal took such continued and judicious pains with her little daughter that, at an age when most children are treated as puppets, mere playthings, or intelligent animals intended only to create diversion, Marie Aymée was a rational and most interesting companion, beginning already to understand for what end she was sent into this world, and, as far as her strength and capacity would allow, to practise Christian virtue.

In regard to Celse Benigne, Madame de Chantal's son, Francis advised her by no means to excite his ambition and desire to shine in the world, but to lay a solid foundation of study and a desire to be useful. He also recommended her to divide her time between Monthelon and Dijon, so as to ensure attention both to her father and the Baron de Chantal; and also, probably, that the noble and dignified goodness of M.

Frémyot might stir his grandson's emulation to follow in his footsteps. But whenever the Bishop gave this advice he always added, 'Do this like the angels. Consider how the angels would fulfil this duty,' and the like, meaning that a mother's influence must always be used meekly, gently, sweetly, without the noise, heat, and eager discussion which spring from natural impetuosity, and lead to numberless faults and mistakes.

Francis specially enjoined this meek calm course as a mother on Madame de Chantal, because she had a very independent, lofty, and definite character, and was apt to exact of others the prompt decision and high unvarying standard she had set up for herself. And in her dealings with others, especially with women, this was sometimes felt and complained of. She herself suffered, as every one must, from her own character. When she began with great earnestness following out the rule of life and plans laid down by Francis, she fell into many faults, which gave her needless discouragement, inasmuch as they sprang from over eagerness to grasp at some good. Her great mind and her large heart suffered alike in her eager and impetuous search after continual union with God. 'I am never satisfied,' she wrote to Francis; 'but I do not know why.' The Bishop answered with his usual graceful skill, 'I wish I could tell you why; but is it not because the very multitude of your desires encumber your soul? I too have suffered from that disease.' He afterwards told her that she weakened her soul by always craving for this or that virtue or state of progress, and thus spending her time interiorly in a succession of battles which necessarily drove away her peace. The whole course of this early direction of Francis de Sales and the full beautiful letters he wrote are of invaluable service to beginners in spiritual life.

The great aim of Francis de Sales throughout was that undisturbed growth of the soul, in the midst of peace as far as possible removed from idleness, which should enlarge the heart, enrich the mind, weed out littleness, childishness, and frivolity, despise rather than dread temptation, and help his children to go on their way without self torture and morbid introspection.

In Madame de Chantal's case, while he watched most tenderly over her mental troubles and trials, he never failed to humble her by distinctly pointing out her faults, and bringing clearly before her the knowledge of her own littleness and nothingness. 'Remember that you are a poor miserable little widow,'<sup>2</sup> he wrote once; 'and try to love that very misery. Take pride in your nothingness, because it is your misery that inclines God to pity you. The most wretched beggars, who are covered all over with sores, are the best to get alms. We are all only beggars, and the most wretched among us are the best off.'

Delightful and comforting as these letters were, Madame de Chantal found that they only made her crave still more for the personal help she so much needed during her interior trials, and she asked the Bishop to see her again. He accordingly appointed another meeting with himself and his mother at the castle De Sales in the May of 1605. Here Jane renewed her general confession, and offered herself wholly to the service of God; and while doing so both the confessor and the penitent received fresh and extraordinary light and grace, and were filled with trustful peace and the spirit of self-sacrifice. It was during one of their spiritual conversations, when both seemed to be already tasting the full sight of God, that Francis exclaimed, 'O my child, my dear child, very much rain is falling from heaven!' Jane thinking he was talking of the weather, and impatient at being interrupted by any thought of earth, impetuously answered, 'Let it rain, let it rain, dear Father!' Francis could not help smiling both at her mistake and the quickness of character which he knew so well, and merely told her to go on with what she was saying.

The castle was at that time full of members of the De Sales family, presided over by the venerable 'house-mother,' Madame de Boisy, who had had thirteen children, and who, after her widowhood, kept up the ancient house of Sales with a stately Christian dignity, and with a train of daughters, sons-in-law, and their children, lived in the castle in great peace and union. Among others to whom we shall have to return shortly was a

<sup>2</sup> 'Une pauvre petite chétive veffe.'



boy whose early promise and beauty was the delight of his grandmother, and even specially attracted his uncle Francis. This was Charles Auguste de Sales, the son of Louis, then a year and a half old, but who for some reason or other had never yet been weaned. Madame de Chantal strongly urged that this should be done, and as soon as the child was taken from his mother, had him carried to the church to be solemnly dedicated and blessed. She hung a beautiful gold reliquary round his neck, and never thenceforward lost sight of him through life. He eventually became Bishop of Geneva in his uncle's place, and always looked upon Madame de Chantal as his second mother and most valued friend. It is evident that this timely visit to Sales gave Jane as much comfort and pleasure as it was possible for her to feel at this time of her life, and she now began to taste the fruits alluded to in the old Monthelon legend, and to realize the true sweetness which is always stored up in suffering courageously met and borne for God's sake. Madame de Chantal therefore returned to Monthelon to work her newly acquired treasures into the practice of her daily life, and especially into the lives of her children.



## CHAPTER VI.

### *Work among the Sick and Poor. Fruits of Direction.*

1605-6.

DURING her happy visit to the old castle de Sales many good things had been secured by Madame de Chantal. Hitherto she had only been able to see the Bishop with certain drawbacks of difficulty, interruption of his necessary work, and the hindrance during public sermons and retreats of his being claimed by many others besides herself. At Sales she was able to see him quite at ease, and to pour out to him all her thoughts, fears, joys, difficulties, and temptations, unhampered by obstacles of any kind. And in the common intercourse of home Francis also had his opportunities of seeing Madame de Chantal with all those daily and hourly faults and shortcomings which are not always brought to the confessional, and are frequently unsuspected, even by those who are sincerely anxious to improve and cultivate their Christian character and life. He marked her over anxiety and restless craving to make progress in spirituality, her somewhat impetuous judgment of others, her tendency also to exact a higher measure than many are able to give, her inclination to pursue settled rules and practices without regard to the convenience of others, and her leaning to extreme exactness and something like severity in regard to small faults in her children. And seeing all these tendencies, Francis quietly but faithfully counselled her accordingly; so that on her return to Monthelon we find fresh energy applied to the cultivation of her soul, and a rapid, though silent, growth that surprises us even in this grand and vigorous character. But as usual this was shown in practical, and what are called small, things. Jane had been long accustomed to have herself called by a servant before five o'clock in the morning, who was to light

her fire, and help her to dress; and this poor servant, being anxious to please her mistress, and perhaps also to avoid being reprov'd, had accustomed herself to lie awake long before the time, that she might be ready to get up and light the fire. This was one of the practices for which Madame de Chantal was reprov'd, and the Bishop told her that if she wished to be up so early, she should light her own fire and do all she needed herself, and that the great living law of charity must come before her meditation and morning reading. Thenceforth the maids were allowed their full sleep in peace, and their mistress discharged their duties herself. She got up, lit the fire, made her bed, and swept her room like a nun in her cell, and then devoted the next hours to prayer and reading. During Lent she had her horse saddled and rode six miles to mass and sermon at Autun, coming back as fast as she could, that she might be in her place at the table when the old baron should be down for the morning meal. With the simple manners of the time, when the master and servants made but one family and had one interest, the men and maids at Monthelon made their remarks to one another with great freedom about Madame de Chantal. They said that 'Madame's old confessor had bidden her say her prayers three times a day, and then they were all tired of it, but the new one made her pray all day long, and no one was put out.'

Although five years had elapsed since her husband's death, Jane had never yet been able to master the weary grief which had become so stamped upon her face as to be painful to her friends. Francis had become aware of this, and thought it was time for her to make at least the attempt at some change, as the unchecked sway of natural depression hinders the effects of grace in the soul. He had accordingly bidden her be 'joyful' for God's sake, and for the sake of Him Who has given us free redemption and a place in heaven; and once, after his own special manner, had added as a reminder, 'The Jews could not sing songs in Babylon for thinking of their own country, but I should like that we should be able to sing everywhere.' We know that none of his words fell upon hard un-

grateful soil, and they soon sprung up and bore fruit a hundred-fold. Jane resolved that she would even change her face, and she succeeded. She obliged herself, as it were, to *practise* cheerfulness, to smile at her children and her friends, to speak in a brighter tone, and to use encouraging and hopeful words, instead of saying sad and depressing things. 'To bid the slow heart dance' is, as a great teacher tells us, uphill work and wearisome to nature, but Jane found, like others, that a difficulty steadily faced is half overcome, and when the habit was gained it came to her naturally, and was of much service to her own mind and spiritual progress. She took up her singing again, and found much pleasure in it, besides that it was cheerful and good for her children. She practised chanting the psalms, and used to carry a psalter in a little bag hung to the pommel of her saddle, that she might chant some psalms as she rode to mass or went about the farm and fields. While she thus strove to become more gentle, sweet-mannered, and pleasing to all, Francis watched over her carefully lest any of the strength, energy, and power of resistance in her character should degenerate; and with this view he advised common small details of selfdenial, which are often more serviceable than sharp bodily austerities. Jane had been daintily brought up, and her delicacy of taste had been cultivated till she could only eat certain kinds of meat and vegetables, and these cooked only in certain ways. She now strove to eat everything that was offered at table without making any choice at all, and finding that she was none the worse in the end from overcoming a variety of likes and repugnances, she chose every day some dish that she had formerly thought it impossible to eat, and in this way she effectually mastered many small feminine tendencies, daintinesses, and whims. Hitherto Madame de Chantal had worn her beautiful abundant hair frizzed and powdered according to the fashion of the time, and placed over it a pretty covering of ribbon and delicate lace,—for all her natural tastes were dainty and refined. But Francis took the opportunity of one Lent to urge upon her a complete surrender, once for all, of every remnant of outward worldliness. Still, with his usual refinement and delicacy of dealing,

he did not remark or insist upon any special details. Jane was fully aware that she had cherished her woman's gift of long silky brown hair, and this was enough to lead her to renounce it. She accordingly cut it short enough to destroy its beauty, and thenceforth wore only a common black head-dress, small linen collars, and sleeves of a moderate size, leaving off also the use of silk stockings, which were then considered the luxury of the more refined and wealthy classes.

More time than ever was given to visiting and relieving the poor at their own homes, the state of which in France at that time was miserable indeed. A very superficial inquiry into the condition of the country reveals, indeed, such an amount of wretchedness and suffering, that it seems marvellous how it could be borne, and it excites once more in stronger force the ever recurring question of, when will the history of the *people*, and not the rulers, be fully written? The continual passage of armies to and fro in the time of the first Napoleon has been sufficiently described of late to enable every one to realize the disastrous drain upon the country, and the total sweeping away of the food and supplies. But during the League wars it had been known that half a dozen armies, and not one alone, were traversing and ravaging the country, burning and pillaging, carrying off even the seed corn and store crops, and the animals fit for food, till the famished and feverstricken peasantry wandered about in droves, like packs of wolves, robbing and marauding in their turn, and dying under the hedges and on the public roads. And even when, by slow degrees, safety and order had been partially restored, there still remained in certain provinces a long interval of most wretched poverty, which Madame de Chantal now vigorously set herself among her own neighbours to meet. She overcame, while so doing, what may be called her stronghold of dislikes—the horror of the dirt and vermin to be encountered in the poor cabins round Monthelon. She took away the dirty woollen clothes and had them boiled, and then carefully patched and darned them herself, so that they could be worn to the very last. There was always a store chest of clothing kept in the castle to be substituted for the old,

tattered, and filthy garments taken away. There was also a dispensary filled with salves, medicines, plasters, herbs, cordials, &c., which Jane distributed herself to all the sick she could find. She washed and dressed the wounds herself, and always left the patients clean and comforted. She also swept and dusted their rooms, and made their beds, and if any one were dangerously ill, she was sent for, that she might be present while the last sacraments were administered. Her prayers and exhortations were at those times so beautiful, that none of the sick at all within reach of the castle failed to send for the 'dear Baroness,' the 'holy lady,' to be with them. And Jane had also the monopoly, so to speak, of burying the dead.

Often when Madame de Chantal had come home worn and tired from a distant round of sick visits, she would find a group of poor waiting for her on the benches put for them in the courtyard, some with sores, some with cancers, and dreadful swellings, and diseases the most trying to look at and handle. As it was generally found that no one but herself would touch a cancer, these painful and loathsome cases crowded upon her, and in the absence of village doctors and infirmaries, she undertook all who came. As is generally the case with those whose faces are resolutely set towards the imitation of our Lord's life, Jane was much blamed for her acts of love towards the sick, and she was pointed at as visionary, imprudent, and eccentric. It was said that she wasted her time and means running about on quixotic errands, neglecting her first and holiest duties, leaving her father in law to the care of servants, and exposing her children to infectious diseases, to serve a crowd of beggars and idle cheats and impostors. Jane's somewhat haughty and imperious character would formerly have led her merely to ignore all that was said, or tinged her explanations with contempt; but now she bent her head, and calmly and humbly explained her actions. And in doing so she gives us the opportunity of seeing how perfectly her conduct was ruled by a Divine law, regarding the sick and afflicted as the unbroken race of Christ's members, bearing the cross after

Him, and spreading the brotherhood of the Passion like a vast network through the world.

We find in this part of Madame de Chantal's life instances of that charity which, in the Christian ages, led men and women to do the most repulsive personal acts, which we who read their lives scarcely hear of without shuddering with disgust. One day a poor labourer was returning to Monthelon from Autun, when he found a leprous boy left by his companions by the wayside, because it was considered too dangerous to touch him. The labourer took heart, and brought the boy as a gift to the 'holy lady,' who certainly received him as some precious offering, thanking and praising and rewarding the labourer, and had the boy quickly undressed and put to bed in a room she kept expressly for such cases. Having rolled up his filthy and ragged clothes to be boiled, Jane took a pair of scissors and cut off the poor boy's hair, which she burnt, and covered his head with a clean fresh linen cap.

For some time, when the afflicted boy still lingered on, she visited him three or four times a day, oiled and dressed the dreadful sores on his head herself, brought him food and cool drinks, and fed his soul at the same time with sweet, loving, tender words, telling him how precious his soul was, and how our Lord loved him and watched over him, and had prepared a place in heaven for him when he should die. It sometimes happened that at the boy's meal times Jane was with the old baron or entertaining some of his friends, and then one of the maidservants was sent to the sick room with the meal. She, like so many others of her class, was not able to bear what her mistress lovingly underwent, and as soon as she had set down the tray barely within reach of the bed, ran out of the room as fast as she could, holding her nose to keep out the frightful stench of the sores. The poor sick boy felt this more than all his sufferings, and said with sobs, 'When the lady comes, *she* never holds her nose! She comes and sits close by me, and teaches me all sorts of good things. But if she does not come, everybody runs away from me!'

When the boy got much worse, Madame de Chantal sat up



with him for several nights, and stayed while the priest administered the last sacraments ; after which he turned to her like a little child, and asked her to give him her blessing. She gave him the blessing just as she would have done to one of her own children, kissed him, and said : ‘ Go, my child, and die in peace, for you will be carried by the angels, like Lazarus, to Abraham’s bosom.’ After his death she washed the body with her own hands, and prepared it for burial.

The whole course of this good work gave great offence to some of her relations, and one who was then staying at Monthelon took her severely to task, and asked her if she remembered that, under the old law, every one who meddled with leprosy was reckoned unclean? Madame de Chantal replied with calm dignity that ever since she had known that our Lord was reckoned as a leper,<sup>1</sup> she had had no fear of any leprosy but sin. During the burial of her poor sick boy, she made her meditation on these words : ‘ He hath lifted the poor out of the mire, and set him among the princes of the people.’

She afterwards took charge of another more hideous case of cancer, upon which some of her husband’s relations wrote to M. Frémyot, who added his rebukes and disapprobation to the general outcry ; but as he had merely forbidden his daughter to touch the afflicted woman, she still continued to visit and attend to her wants. The sole complaint made by this poor creature, in whose throat the cancer had worked a hole, was that she could not receive communion, and Madame de Chantal had a little pair of silver pincers made for her, with which the village Curé could place a fragment of the consecrated host in the opening made by the cancer. By this last act of a charity as ingenious in its resources as it was large in its grasp, the poor suffering woman received the Viaticum, and soon afterwards calmly breathed her last.

Once when, during this time at Bourbilly by herself, superintending the harvests and vintage, Madame de Chantal caught the fever, which, with dysentery, was raging in the neighbourhood, and had led her to spend most of her time in the cot-

<sup>1</sup> Isaias liii. 4.

tages of the sick. Just as her life was given up by the physician, it occurred to her mind to make a vow to the Blessed Virgin, which, when done, immediately showed its effects. Madame de Chantal got up and dressed, and was soon able to get on her horse and return to Monthelon, where the joy and caresses of her children, and the transports of delight shown by the poor, touched her very deeply. After this illness, Jane's loving service of the poor grew larger and more constant than ever. But nevertheless this was only one side of the large and various life built up by this noble woman. In another sense than that of the poet might be applied to her his well-known words :

' Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.  
Yet not for power—power of herself  
Would come uncalled for—but to live by law,  
Acting the law we live by without fear ;  
And because right is right to follow right,  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.'

## CHAPTER VII.

### *Vocation of Jane Frances decided. 1607.*

THERE are few things more difficult to annotate with certainty than the growth of a soul. It is said that in the diagnosis of disease physicians can now accurately point to the day and even determine within a few hours when the incipient germ from which the 'incubation' of a given fever dates its origin was deposited in the system and commenced its appointed course of destructive agency. And to a certain extent the germs of spiritual growth or disturbance, to which that other is the nearest external parallel, can also be discerned or 'diagnosed' by the skilful spiritual physician ; so that in the lives of eminent holy persons it is not uncommon to give the date and place of the reception of such inspirations or suggestions as mark the turning-point of their career. In regard to Jane de Chantal, whose growth was singularly gradual and consecutive, such dates are more difficult to fix ; but it was probably about the year 1606 that her fervent and energetic mind began determinately to rebel against the monotonous course of her daily life, and to develope more irresistibly larger issues in the service of God. The usual ordinary Christian life, perfect as she might make it, seemed to her but a lame and halting progress compared with the wings for which she thirsted to cleave the higher air. In vain she reminded herself of her duties to her children, and devoted herself more earnestly to their education and culture. She still could not satisfy herself without opening her full mind to Francis de Sales, and expressing her increasing desire for a life of total sacrifice under vows. To all her entreaties, pleas, and earnest representations of her wishes he at first only replied, 'Patience ; we will speak of this by and by.' Nor could

she for a long time win any other answer, nor obtain leave to write to him on the subject.

While Madame de Chantal's mind was in this state, one of St. Teresa's most eminent companions, Mother Anne of Jesus, was brought to Dijon by M. de Bérulle, afterwards the celebrated founder of the French Oratory, to found a third Carmelite convent in France. Those ladies of Dijon who cared for spiritual things naturally sought the counsel and conversation of Mother Anne, and among them was Jane de Chantal, whose mind was profoundly impressed by the extraordinary character and gifts of the Superior, and the selfdenial, joyous spirit, and perfect peace which reigned in the young foundation. It was not very long before she wrote to Francis asking his permission to take the Carmelite habit. Most happily for her, and for many whom she was hereafter to influence, the Bishop was a director who, with all his gentleness and suavity, could give a decided refusal where he saw no light nor plan laid down by God. He himself neither mapped out a path for his penitents, nor was led into any path of theirs, nor could anything induce him to acquiesce simply for peace' sake when he met with opposition or urgent pressure. His decision in cases of this sort was always to wait quite patiently, and his course with Madame de Chantal showed equal skill and supernatural sagacity. He replied to her request at some length, saying that he had been long and deeply engaged with the thoughts of her future course, not only continually praying about the subject himself, but obtaining many prayers from others for the same end, and he was now fully convinced that she would one day leave the world entirely, and serve God after the evangelical counsels. But he could not yet say that she should become a Carmelite ; for although he had brought his mind to as perfect a balance as possible upon the matter (which St. Ignatius calls the state of indifference), he was still inclined to say no rather than yes, nor should he decide the question at all till another year had passed. If, when that time should come, his advice should not satisfy her, she must call in some other counsel to enlighten them both. The exceeding humility, matchless discrimination

and prudence, and noble frankness of the Bishop throughout this correspondence are as conspicuous as the noble earnestness and devotion of his penitent.

And glad as the Carmelites would naturally have been to receive such a postulant as Jane de Chantal, they lent their full weight to urge upon her the same advice, and with the dignity of genuine self-denial refrained from leading her to speak of herself, or of their life in relation to her. One of them, Mother Mary of the Trinity, about this time even used the words so often since quoted as being in a sense prophetic: 'No, madame, you will never be one of St. Teresa's daughters. God will give you so many daughters of your own, that you will be instead one of her companions.' Nevertheless, as has sometimes happened both before and since their day, these excellent nuns could not refrain from giving Madame de Chantal a little spiritual direction. They questioned her about her manner of mental prayer, and told her that she ought now to take a step in advance by making less deliberate use of the understanding and imagination, and allowing her heart almost to act alone. When this advice was passed on to Francis, he again showed his skill, temper, and discernment. Without a single word of impatience or disparagement of the good Teresian nuns, he replied that no doubt the understanding and imagination were only aids in stirring up the will, but that the method of prayer suggested was more suited to those advanced in spiritual life and on the high ground than for such persons as himself and others, who still remained in the valleys. He ended with one of those exquisite sentences which, after a lapse of 200 years, still give out so distinct a fragrance of personal character, that we seem to have lived in those times and heard them spoken ourselves: 'My dear child, let us dwell yet a little longer in these lower valleys, kissing our Lord's Feet, and He will call us to kiss His Lips when it pleases Him. Go on in your usual way till I see you again.'

Familiar intercourse with her neighbours the Carmelites stirred up in Madame de Chantal a fresh love for bodily austerities, and a dissatisfaction with her one weekly fast and two

disciplines. She wrote to ask leave for less sleep, and to get up during the night to say some office and prayers; but all her requests were decidedly refused. Francis said he had advised between seven and eight hours' sleep, as being necessary for women, whose brain and frame are more liable to give way under pressure, when their work necessarily loses its value. He therefore again enjoined the usual rest and food, and forbade any changes for the present, except some rather more frequent communions; and during Lent he permitted three communions a week. It is a little surprising to us now to find that this was looked upon as a very exceptional permission, and that it had been considered a singular indulgence that Jane de Chantal had been allowed two communion-days in the week. Upon all these points she was perfectly obedient, both in accepting and renouncing, and she thus continued the laborious cultivation of that growing field which was now putting forth its strength to the promise of a harvest of many generations.

About a year's probation was travelled through in this state of dependent waiting upon the direction of God, during which Madame de Chantal's mind reflected the words of the gradual Psalm: 'To Thee have I lifted up my eyes, Who dwellest in heaven. Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God until He have mercy upon us.'<sup>1</sup> At the end of May 1607 the summons was dispatched for another journey to Annecy, and Madame de Chantal was so faithfully obedient to the call, that, having been delayed by business, she rode the whole way from Monthelon, travelling one night literally through 'thunder, lightning, hail, and rain,' though bound on no weird or unlawful errand. Francis rallied her a little when he heard the account of this stormy journey, and said that there had been no necessity for so rigid an interpretation of his words. It then wanted but a few days of Whitsunday, and during this preparation for the solemn feast, Madame de Chantal was occupied in prayer and

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxii.



in giving a faithful account of her conscience to the Bishop. On Whitmonday, after mass, Francis called her to him, and said with great earnestness, 'My child, I have quite decided what I will make of you.'

Jane immediately knelt down before him and replied, 'And I am resolved to obey you, my lord and father.'

'That is well,' he said. 'You must enter the Poor Clares.'

'I am quite ready, Father.'

'Still I think you are scarcely strong enough. You shall be a hospital sister at Beaune.'

'As you please.'

'No; that is not what I wish. You shall be a Carmelite.'

'I am ready to obey.'

'No,' said Francis, changing his voice and manner; 'none of those vocations would suit you.' And then he went on to unfold to her at considerable length his idea of the Visitation institute and its plan and spirit, towards which Madame de Chantal was immediately attracted, and knew that she now heard for the first time the genuine direction of God for her future life and work; for although she would have surrendered her will entirely with regard to any of the other vocations named, she now felt that strange, fresh, special joy which is given to some, of knowing that the whole labour and culture of their life is verging towards its appropriate harvest and fruition.

And this, it must be remembered, is the mark and special character of St. Jane Chantal's life, as each one's life must be studied with some key, or read by some light peculiar to itself. In some we find early sins deeply repented of, the buried foundation stones of great progress in holiness. In some, striking supernatural manifestations, by which, as it were, God takes the soul by storm, and overwhelms it with an abiding sense of His power and will. In others, as in the case of Marie Aymée de Thorens, the soul springs up 'while men sleep,' and, without any apparent effort on its own part, buds, blooms to its full beauty, and is gathered to its home, leaving men to look at each other in surprise, saying, 'This is God's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.' Madame de Chantal's story differs

from all these ; and because it runs in so simple and natural a channel, because it is so full of the pains and joys, and hopes and fears, and labours of common life, and especially because the ordinary toil by which the fruits of Christian virtue are stored is so obvious, so well known to all, and bought at such cost, her example is one of peculiar value and price to women who are earnest in wishing to profit by the lessons of life.

It will be well, while watching Madame de Chantal as she thus passed on into the peculiarly painful and thorny paths trodden by all founders of religious orders, to recall to view the state of Christendom at that special time, and more particularly the condition and prospects of France, which was then beginning to follow a more Catholic direction than before. She had gone through, during her various civil wars, one of those convulsions of stormy purification and suffering which seem allotted to that great but inconstant nation. Under the brilliant and chivalrous but most vain and frivolous Francis I. the French had anticipated their more modern degeneracy as a boasting and luxury-loving people, thirsting for fame, variety, and excitement at any price. Next succeeded the violent and overbearing domination of the Guises under Henry II. and Francis II., the deplorable weakness of Charles IX., while the doomed Henry III. alternated between gross profligacy and spasmodic devotion. The total upheaval of society before Henry IV. was firmly established on the throne, and the violent ruptures occasioned by religious discord and the loss of faith, loosened every bond of sound government and reverence ; and with an abandoned court, dissolute nobles, a great deal of corruption among the clergy, and a widespread relaxation of religious houses, it seemed as if France now tottered and trembled in the balance, and it became doubtful whether it might not fall headlong into heresy and entire apostacy from the faith.

Out of the very depths and hideousness of these evils sprang their divine remedies, and the abundant return of grace at that time is more marvellous to witness than its previous loss. Truly, then, we may say that the Spirit breathed where it would, and that the captivity of France to lawless passion was

turned, as the Psalmist beautifully says, like the rivers of the south. The bishops began to gather round them the more faithful among the clergy. The clergy roused themselves to stem the torrent of iniquity, and there sprang up, not one or two, but a multitude of those great servants of God who are never wanting to the Church in her darkest hours of need. The dawn, at least, of a great time of revival was now manifest. The time was soon to come for the great work of St. John Francis Regis in the Cévennes; for the labours of Père Eudes in Normandy; of Michel de Noblez in Brittany; of Pierre Fourier in Lorraine. The movement of regeneration included, as a necessity, provision for the education of children, such as was made by the foundation of the Pères de la Doctrine Chrétienne by Cæsar de Bus, after an idea subsequently perfected by the Venerable de la Salle. The Jesuits, lately banished, now again opened their colleges, in which a thoroughly practical and wellgrounded course of instruction, given to boys of all classes, gave a new impetus to education, and reawakened the love of Christian knowledge and truth. On the other hand, the Ursulines, the sisters of Notre Dame de Lorraine, Notre Dame de Bordeaux, and other communities of women opened excellent schools for girls, while the holy and eminent Father de Condren, the forerunner of St. Vincent de Paul and M. Olier, gathered about him a large body of clergy, whom he successfully trained and influenced for the regeneration of France. This was the famous seed of St. Sulpice and other kindred seminaries, from which sprang that spirit of selfsacrifice, mortification, and loving labour for souls which have distinguished the secular clergy of France in so remarkable a degree. The spirit of revival spread in the same way among the old religious orders. The Cistercian stock unfolded its four great reforms of Feuillants, Septfonds, Orval, and La Trappe; the Benedictines united into the congregations of St. Hidulphe and St. Vannes, to be followed by the more famous body of St. Maur. The Capuchins, developed from the Franciscan root, came from Italy, the reformed Carmelites from Spain, the Brethren of St. John of God from Portugal.

It was one of those great momentous times when any noble soul, even remotely connected with France, could not but earnestly desire some share in its renewal, and both the Bishop of Geneva and Jane de Chantal threw themselves heart and soul into the work. Throughout Europe religious wars or their consequences filled the chief Christian states with dissension and the bitterest enmity; and where there had been no religious conflict, as in England, the prospects of the Church were sad enough. But notwithstanding the heavy clouds which darkened the prospects of the Church, there had sprung up fresh sources of vigour, zeal, and hope, which, as we have seen, were silently bracing the energies of a vast body of men and women to superhuman exertion and success.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *Jane de Sales. Marie Aymée. 1606-1608.*

NOT far from Monthelon there was a Benedictine convent or abbey called Puy d'Orbe, which had become thoroughly reformed under the direction of Francis de Sales, and to which he sent his little sister Jane, who was about thirteen years old, thinking that she would be well educated there, and also that it might be seen whether she would be attracted or not to conventual life. Jane was much liked, it appears, by the nuns, but showed no wish to enter the convent; and Madame de Boisv and Francis de Sales then planned that she should go to Monthelon and be brought up by Madame de Chantal with her own children, sharing with them the advantage of an excellent governess whom she had secured for her little girls. In June 1606, therefore, Jane de Sales went to Monthelon, where Marie Aymée was delighted to have a companion older than herself, who could tell her all kinds of convent stories, and share all her studies; and as Francis gave the strongest proof of his confidence by intrusting Madame de Chantal with his sister, she was full of joy at welcoming the child to Monthelon, where she treated her exactly as her own. Madame de Chantal now also decided not to send Françoise and Charlotte to Puy d'Orbe as she had intended, and continued to overlook the education of the four girls at home, watching their training and the development of their characters with fresh hope and energy. Jane was not, however, allowed to pursue this useful life in peace. She was still young, very charming and pleasant in manners, rich, and of a good family; and, besides her many external advantages, she was sincerely admired for herself and her great qualities of mind and heart. She received, therefore,

numerous offers of marriage, which her different relatives agreed in pressing her to accept. One of these offers was from a great friend of her father's, a widower with a large fortune and several children, and M. Frémyot even went beyond what was reasonable in pressing Jane to accept the offer, begging, commanding, and imploring her with tears to make his friend happy. Wearied out at last with the continual repetition of this painful subject, and having firmly resolved to keep her state of widowhood, and finally to devote herself to God, Madame de Chantal one day took refuge in her own room, and, having heated a bodkin red-hot, she branded the name of Jesus indelibly on her heart, at the same time renouncing every earthly connection. As the little weapon eat more deeply into the flesh than she had intended, and a quantity of blood flowed from the wounds, Madame de Chantal, with the same earnest and generous impulse, dipped a pen in the blood, and wrote down a renewal of her vows and a resolution to give herself wholly to God.

In 1608, according to the most probable authority, though the date has been fixed at 1607, Madame de Chantal went again to Annecy to make a kind of retreat under the direction of Francis de Sales, where she was housed as before under the patriarchal roof of the old castle, in which all things went on as usual under the wise rule of Madame de Boisy, the 'house-mother,' and where there seemed to be no change except that of the growth and expansion of the flock of blooming girls and boys. And then, for the first time, Madame de Chantal was specially struck by the Bishop's youngest brother, Bernard de Sales, to whom she often talked, and from whom she accepted with pleasure the various little services which he delighted to tender. Once in particular, when, among three or four other gentlemen, the bright high-bred young man sprang forward to give her his arm to help her upstairs, Madame de Chantal smiled, and, accepting the arm, said playfully, and without any serious meaning, 'As to this young gentleman, I shall be glad of him for my own portion.' Madame de Boisy felt a sudden joy on hearing of these words, and the idea immediately struck her



that it would be an excellent thing to arrange a marriage for him with Marie Aymée, that he might be sure of the blessing of so admirable a wife as she must become. In fact, the dear old lady so fixed her heart upon this somewhat immature matter, that she gave Francis no peace till he had agreed, though very reluctantly, to open the subject to Madame de Chantal and try to secure her consent. Madame de Chantal was very much surprised on hearing the proposal, and, while too well-bred to show her amazement, her mind was preoccupied with the thought of her bright innocent child, who was the delight of her two grandfathers, and with the vivid image of their grief and dismay at being deprived of their darling, even before the early flower of her age. Still, this wise mother resolved to put no obstacles in the way of what might become God's will, and merely replied that she must take time to reflect upon so unexpected a proposal.

Madame de Chantal was not a woman to shrink from difficulties, and having given her word that she would do all she could to induce her father to consent to Marie Aymée's marriage, she at length laid before him the proposal. The president was at first entirely averse to it. Marie Aymée was the very light of his eyes, and to send her into Savoy seemed to him like banishing her for ever, and he could not endure that she should leave Burgundy and the jurisdiction of his beloved parliament. She was rich too, while her proposed husband was but a poor man. But, on the other hand, the alliance with the great Bishop was one not to be despised by good people, and in the end the venerable president gave a generous consent, and wrote a very courteous acceptance of the offer to Francis de Sales. The Bishop replied by a letter full of charity, and that peculiar fragrance of courtesy and simplicity which distinguished him, and about the same time wrote also to Madame de Chantal: 'That little Aymée will be one of the best loved sisters in the world, for I shall be her brother.' In fact, he never ceased to be to her, as he said himself, 'the dearest brother and father all in one, the most loving and true that can be imagined.'

It is rather astonishing, considering all these plans and preparations, to come back to the actual fact that Marie Aymée was at that time a little girl of eleven years old, just about to make her first communion. But of course the long betrothals of that day must be taken into full account.

Francis had wished to prepare his little future sister for her first communion himself, but as this would entail its being deferred he gave up the idea, and wrote to Madame de Chantal that he hoped God would on that day take the child for His own beloved one, and make her taste what His love was.<sup>1</sup> His prayer was answered, and from that time Marie Aymée rapidly improved. Her little childish faults disappeared or were overcome by strength, her mind seized the idea of Christian virtue, while her will was more and more bent towards it, and her character became more elevated and solid. These changes were doubly grateful to Madame de Chantal, because it now became necessary to prepare her child for the society in which she was henceforth to live. As soon as it was possible, she was to leave her side and the sheltering home of a mother's hourly watchfulness, to be launched on a career of her own. The next time she went to Dijon, Madame de Chantal took Marie Aymée with her, and having had her dressed and set off exactly in the girlish fashions and coxcombries of the day, she made her help to receive and entertain the Dijon grandees, who flocked to congratulate their president's daughter upon the arrangement made for her child. Marie Aymée was naturally a little thrown off her balance by her pretty frock and her new trinkets and headdress, and after the company had gone Madame de Chantal scolded her rather sharply for her childish vanity. Marie Aymée took it in excellent part, confessed her folly, and, as her mother obliged her to remain in the drawing-room every day, smartly dressed and talking politely to a number of ladies, the child found that company and dressing up were not quite so pleasant as she had at first fancied. It is amusing to find Francis writing to Madame de Chantal at this time to know if the reports he heard of her having taken her

<sup>1</sup> The 156th letter.

daughter into society were true, and asking also whether his poor dear little Marie Aymée had been obliged to wear a frightful infliction called the 'moule'—mould—upon her head. The Bishop adds, in his usual charming way, *apropos* of this chignon of his day, 'Not that there would be any harm in it, for you know I like heads to be well-moulded, and if that little head has been modelled by yours, I shall love it all the more. And, you see, girls must be set off a little.'

Francis himself travelled to Monthelon to introduce his brother to his child betrothed, and he playfully sent timely notice to Madame de Chantal of their coming, because she wished him to see Marie Aymée for the first time to advantage. The whole family de Chantal were gathered on the steps under the gray and weather-stained portal of the old château to greet the Bishop and Bernard de Sales. Marie Aymée, a tall and finely formed girl for her age, was very beautiful, as, with a child's blushing shyness, she clung to her aged grandfather, and as Bernard looked at her, he thought he had never seen a prettier picture. The whole visit was very pleasant, and the old baron and all his family were much pleased with Bernard. But that the natural excitement of the matter might not draw Madame de Chantal from her usual peace and calm, Francis wrote to her immediately on his return that well known letter<sup>2</sup> in which he tells her that her crucified Lord must ever abide in the very midst of her heart, and that she must keep the Cross there governing her nature, for the same reason that a girl whom he had once met kept a block of wood in her bucket, that the water might not lose its balance and overflow. Strengthened and comforted at the same time by the watchful counsels and care of her wise director, Madame de Chantal was able to put her daughter's marriage and future happiness into the hands of God, and to carry on her usual life and her children's education as if nothing unusual had disturbed the even tenor of their life.

After the first visit of Bernard de Sales to Monthelon, a very remarkable arrangement took place in his family, where

<sup>2</sup> The 113th letter.

Christian love and union were able to bring about what the law in France and Switzerland has since in a great measure ratified. The ancient law of the firstborn was in this instance entirely set aside, and all the sons of the family, beginning with the youngest, were bidden to choose in succession their portion of the family inheritance. Bernard was the youngest of all the brothers, and immediately chose as his share the old family castle de Sales, which gave him also the title of Baron de Thorens ; and although this choice gave rise to a good deal of discussion and some murmuring on the part of most of the family, the peace-making influence of Francis and Louis de Sales scattered the rising storms and brought about a good understanding in the end. Bernard, we should add, had been already solemnly betrothed to Marie Aymée, though the contract was not signed for some months. The marriage was deferred for a time on account of the extreme youth of the bride, who remained meanwhile with her mother.

The next event that occurred of any importance was the sudden and sad death of Jane de Sales at the old castle of Thotes in Burgundy, where M. Frémyot was accustomed to assemble his children and grandchildren to make a general holiday round him. There, in the harvest or vintage time, when on all the fertile hills and sunny slopes of Burgundy the troops of white-capped women and sturdy peasants heaped the grain, or piled in carts the purple grapes that covered the land, Madame de Chantal's happy children, gathered round their mother and their grandfather, shared in whatever rural labour was going on. But now it was the day of another kind of harvest, gathered in before the time, and, to Madame de Chantal's deep grief and dismay, Jane de Sales was struck with rapid fever, and, after a sharp illness of a few days, she sank under it and died. Marie Aymée never forgot this sudden and sad death, the second which had vividly impressed her feelings during her own short life. Francis himself was much troubled by the lost of his bright young sister, and naïvely complained of 'feeling so entirely human and nothing more.' It was on this occasion that, to comfort and strengthen Madame de

Chantal, he wrote that beautiful letter<sup>3</sup> in which he says that 'strawberries and cherries are gathered before bergamot pears, because each has its season. Let God, therefore, gather what He has planted in His own orchard. He will take each in its season.' He then, with that sweet earnest severity, which sank deep, but without wounding, into the hearts of his children, reproved her for offering her own and her child's lives, as she had done, for Jane, bidding her not only accept sorrow from God, but accept it also exactly as He sent it. 'Alas, my child,' he adds, 'this is a deep lesson, but then God also, Who teaches it, is the Most High.'

After this salutary reproof Madame de Chantal said the following prayer every day: 'O my Lord Jesus Christ, I desire never again to choose for myself! Touch that chord in my lute that is pleasing to Thyself, and it shall ever and for ever give back this single sound: "*Yes, Lord Jesus, may Thy will be done, with no ifs, with no buts, with no exceptions, whether it be for fathers, for children, for myself, and for all other things whatsoever.*"'

Like all other earnest prayers, this petition, so full and free, so thorough and single in its offering, was fulfilled to the utmost later on. And, as nothing remained stagnant with Madame de Chantal, Jane de Sales' death seemed both to close and to open a chapter in her life. She had, in the deep emotion of her grief, made a vow to replace Jane's loss by giving one of her own daughters to the Sales family; and this circumstance, among others, hastened the plan of Marie Aymée's marriage.

<sup>3</sup> The 149th letter.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *Foundation Stones of the Visitation.* 1608.

IF we were writing the chronicles of the Visitation Order, nothing would be more interesting than to trace the gradual progress of vocation in each of the first companions of St. Chantal, who were, without exception, a group of very gifted and eminent women. But as time and space fail us to accomplish so much, and we are occupied with Jane Frances de Chantal as a wife and mother as well as the foundress of a religious order, we can only give a slight sketch of some of the first materials which were preparing here and there, and without their own knowledge, for the work which Francis de Sales projected, although it ripened very gradually and slowly even in his own mind. The first person—after Madame de Chantal—who attracted his special notice was Marie Jacqueline Favre, the daughter of the president of Savoy. She was at that time a bright, frank, outspoken girl of eighteen, so fond of her liberty that she declared she would not marry unless she could find some one who would kindly die a few hours after the ceremony. Francis de Sales never sought to restrict her by observances, but he advised her to make one quarter of an hour's meditation every day, and to go to confession every week. Marie Favre was exceedingly fond of dancing; but when once at Chambéry for some grand ball, the thought of the worthlessness, both of the accomplishment and the admiration it excited, struck her forcibly, and she left the ballroom with the full determination to devote her whole life to God's service in a religious house.

Not long afterwards Louis de Sales, the Bishop's brother, made a proposal of marriage for her to M. Favre, who gladly gave his consent, and sent for his daughter to tell her of it.



Marie then knelt down, and in great agitation stammered out that she wished to be a nun. M. Favre was thoroughly amazed and put out; for the idea of his bright, highspirited, selfwilled girl leaving him for a convent had never occurred to his mind, and Francis de Sales was obliged to interpose before he would allow it to be mentioned or even thought of. He also undertook to break the blow to his brother, who was deeply attached to Marie. Francis accordingly sent for Louis, and told him he was grieved to tell him that he had a most formidable rival in Marie's affections, and that he thought Louis must give her up. Louis, much excited, declared he would not give her up to any man whatever, save and except the Duke of Savoy himself.

'Nay,' said the Bishop, 'but this is a far greater rival than the duke, and you could not even look Him in the Face.'

Louis stood motionless and silent, scarcely knowing what to think, and then Francis gently said, 'Mademoiselle Favre has chosen our Lord Himself.' Faith and selfcommand were thoroughly well practised in that admirable family, and Louis bent his noble young head in dignified submission, acknowledging that in that case he must 'yield his love to One Who had the greater right.' Marie was then bidden to wait patiently until the plan of the Visitation institute was more mature. The next postulant fixed upon by Francis was Charlotte de Bréchar, whose whole life had been a series of remarkable trials, and who afterwards proved one of the saintliest of all the eminent women who gave its traditions to the Visitation. After being brought to death's door by illness when a child, she was let fall by the carelessness of a nurse from a window, and picked up half dead from the pavement below. Nothing can better reveal the state of France in Jane de Chantal's childhood than the fact that Mademoiselle de Bréchar was left by her father to the care of peasants in the country, and when the village was ravaged by one of the famine plagues of which we have before spoken, the little girl was left to the guardianship of two old men, whose business it was to bury the infected bodies of the dead, and whom she used to accompany on their loathsome errand. Many a time, when going out with these parish grave-

diggers, the child was in great danger from the wolves who disputed with them the unburied bodies ; and during much of that critical period of her life she was obliged to subsist entirely upon such herbs and wild fruit as she could pick up in the woods and fields. When she was again restored to her father's unfatherly care, he sent her to school in one of the convents of relaxed rule which were then too frequently to be found in France, and here poor Charlotte was in greater danger than among the wolves. The nuns spent their time in the parlours, seeing all kinds of visitors, chatting and gossiping the whole day, and dispensing themselves entirely from office and prayers. But nothing could spoil or taint that noble and faithful heart. In spite of every disadvantage, Charlotte taught herself in this convent how to make meditation, and made great progress in the knowledge and love of mental prayer. Without the least example or guidance she practised great austerities, fasted on all Fridays and Saturdays, made herself a discipline out of an old horsehair dogleash, and went out every day to wash and dress the sores of about a dozen neighbouring poor creatures, who were afflicted with cancers and other terrible diseases. And without knowing the least what sort of life it was, Charlotte made up her mind first to be a Poor Clare, and then to be a Carmelite, the order preeminent in all minds at that time in Dijon. She did, in fact, enter the convent there under Mother Anne, and remained in it one month, when the severity of the life brought on a dangerous illness, and M. Frémyot then offered to take her with him to Monthelon, to stay with Madame de Chantal. It was during this visit that Charlotte Brécard first saw Francis de Sales ; and the experienced and sagacious Bishop at once discerned the tried worth of this single-hearted girl.

His third choice was made from a very different class of life, without a mixture of which the order could never have flourished as it did. Anne Jacqueline Coste was a poor maid-servant at the Ecu de France at Geneva, quite untrained, rough, and so untaught that she could not even read, but possessed of a fine generous character, and a determined faith-

fulness in her religious duties. All practice of the Catholic faith was forbidden at that time at Geneva, and Anne was obliged to walk three miles every Sunday to mass : yet, though every inducement was offered her to give up her religion and consult her convenience by conforming to the Genevan church, she remained as firm as a rock. The very first priest who came to the Ecu de France after Anne's going there was Francis de Sales, who was about to enter upon the famous conference which prepared the conversion of the whole town of Thonon. Among others Anne went to the conference, and prayed the whole time for the Bishop to have the best of the argument, but she had no opportunity at that time of talking to him, for the uproar became so great among the enraged Genevan Calvinists that he was obliged to fly for his life. He did not go again to the Ecu de France for two years, and then Anne went boldly forward, and taking up his portmanteau carried it to his room. She then surprised him by shutting the door, kneeling down modestly before him, and asking leave to make her confession. She then opened her whole mind to the Bishop, and cast off the burthen she had patiently borne so long. Francis marvelled at the story of grace unfolded to him, and at the clear discernment, simple purity, and unshaken courage of this so-called ignorant girl, and he asked her if she would like to receive communion. Anne joyfully replied that she should, but how could it be possible, as mass could never be said at Geneva? She was overjoyed beyond expression when the Bishop took out the pyx, which he always carried hung round his neck in Switzerland in case of such emergencies, and bade Anne prepare to receive the Sacred Host. In the life as well as the whole spirit of this poor girl we are forcibly reminded of the circumstances and character of early Christian confessors. While still performing the heavy and various duties of inn servant for several years, Anne de Coste found time for visiting a good many sick, relieving and comforting many destitute and sorrowful souls, and concealing and ministering to many priests. At one time she hid eighty Catholic soldiers in a cellar, and helped them to escape one by one in disguise.

But the most striking fact in her story, and that which the most exactly followed in the track of the first ages of faith, was the gradual instruction and conversion of her mistress, who lay sick of consumption for a whole year; and when she drew near her end, Anne walked three miles to the village where she had been accustomed to go to mass, and besought the priest to give her one of the consecrated particles in a clean linen cloth, that her mistress might receive the viaticum before she died. It does not appear why he did not go back with her, but he was of course obliged to refuse her the sacred particle, and poor Anne returned weary, footsore, and much disappointed to the inn. Almost at the same moment a travelling carriage drove up in great state, containing the French ambassador to the Swiss cantons, and with him was his chaplain. As soon as Anne saw them walk into the Ecu her heart leapt for joy, and very soon she found an opportunity of making the case known to the chaplain, who concerted with her the necessary arrangements for saying mass in the cellar where the soldiers had been hidden. This strange scene, so closely resembling the masses in the catacombs, took place in the depth of the night; and when the inn was hushed in sleep the priest carried the Blessed Eucharist to the dying woman, who, having lingered only to receive this greatest blessing, died in great peace nearly immediately afterwards. Anne de Coste then left Geneva and went to live at Annecy, but had so humble an opinion of herself that she did not claim any acquaintance with the Bishop or go to see him, but contented herself with hearing him preach and catechize. Francis, therefore, only caught sight of her one day sitting in the crowd, when he looked at her and seemed to open his pectoral cross, just as he had opened the pyx and given her communion at the Ecu de France. Anne understood by this, as he intended, that she might go to see him, and she always afterwards went to him for confession and direction. Before very long she told him her most earnest wish was to serve some nuns in a convent; but when Francis asked her if she would be a Poor Clare, she answered immediately, 'No, my lord, I should like to be a servant to the nuns you are

going to found.' 'Who told you I was going to found an order of nuns?' said Francis, very much surprised. 'Nobody ever told me so,' replied Anne, 'but I continually feel moved to this in my heart, and so I tell you.'

The Bishop did not lose one day before he wrote to tell Madame de Chantal of this circumstance; and from that day Anne strove more persistently to make herself worthy to serve the servants of Christ, and often asked 'when the lady was coming?' After Anne de Coste came two foundation stones of the Visitation, whose rank in life was of a very different kind from hers. These were Mademoiselle de Chatel and Mademoiselle de Blonay. Marie Peronne de Chatel was a beautiful and very accomplished girl of large fortune, whose music, singing, and graceful dancing were the constant theme of the brilliant society with which she was surrounded, as the daughter of the French ambassador at the German imperial court. Dancing in those days was not performed by a rude mob of rushing and twirling couples, but was a very graceful and stately affair, and Marie de Chatel was passionately fond of the excitement and admiration of the splendid balls she frequented, and the large parties at which she sang. She was also deeply attached to a young diplomat who proposed for her, and in spite of all her excellent mother's care and prayers, it seemed as if Marie were to be swept away by the seductive stream into an irrecoverably worldly life. Happily she was sought for by God Himself with unwearied patience and love, and after a while the pleasures which she so eagerly loved became wearisome to her, and the more eagerly she plunged into them, the more wearisome became life, and the more empty she found her heart. At the same time Louis of Granada's *Memorial* fell in her way, and after studying it for some time, Marie became convinced that for her there was no middle way. She must 'sell all she had,' give up father, mother, and home, and 'follow' our Lord in the way of the counsels if she would be safe. As soon as this conviction had been followed by the resolution to act upon it, Marie felt, like those who have been tossed hither and

thither by the waves, and at last reached a port, a great and peaceful calm.

But whither did this vocation call her? The two great centres of religious life for women then were the Poor Clares and the Carmelites, and her strength was by no means sufficient for such austerities as they required. In this difficulty she touchingly appealed to our Lord Himself, as He had called her, to show her where she should go to find either the swallow's refuge or the dove's nest, which satisfy generally the two classes of souls who seek religious life as a haven of rest. Marie's childlike trust was rewarded. She soon afterwards became acquainted with Madame de Chantal, and her true vocation unfolded itself to her in due time. And her admirable mother, long after M. de Chatel's death and in her eightieth year, became first a novice and then a nun in the house in which Marie was superior. This example is among the most wonderful instances of religious vocations on record.

The last of the foundation stones settled in its place was one whom Francis had longest known, even from her childhood. Marie Aymée de Blonay is also the most generally known of the first Visitandines. She was called when sixteen 'the little dove,' and was said to have exactly the same innocence of mind at sixty. She was also, from her subtle, discerning, solid, and practical character, so valued by Francis that he always spoke of her as the 'Cream of the Visitation.'

Marie de Blonay belonged to one of those thoroughly patriarchal families to be found only in Savoy and Switzerland, where the parents brought up their children in the simplest habits and the most earnest service of God, and where, often, it was the custom for both father and mother to make a vow that the survivor should enter religion and devote the remainder of life solely to God. In this case M. de Blonay, having outlived his wife, was ordained a priest and lived in great seclusion in his own castle, carefully educating his nine children. When the little Marie was ten years old she was sent to school with the Cistercian nuns at St. Catharine's abbey near Annecy, and when she was rather older she was taken with some of her



schoolfellows by the abbess to hear Francis de Sales preach. It seems the Cistercians were allowed to do this at that time. Afterwards the Bishop sent for her, and talked to her a long time, walking up and down a large room attached for some purpose or other to the church. Francis then questioned Marie about her method of prayer—always his first point—and showed her how to make progress and what to avoid. It was at that time that he told her he had two guardian angels, one for Francis de Sales, to help him as to his own individual soul and its dangers and needs, and one for the Bishop of Geneva, to help him to guide the souls of others.

And then it happened to Marie as it generally happened to every one who came within reach of Francis, whose marvellous attractiveness, differing in kind but like in degree to that of St. Francis Xavier, was a special gift of God. All the secrets she had so carefully kept locked up in her heart, all her reserves folded away since her first childhood, her thoughts, her fears, her strong wish yet half-scared dread of becoming a nun, a vow she had privately taken of virginity, and a sort of vision she had seen lately in a dream of her mother, clothed in white, saying that she must cut off her hair for her bridal—every thing was brought out freely and fully to Francis, ending with the resolution taken by Marie of joining the Poor Clares at Evian. The Bishop, deeply touched and struck by this beautiful story of grace, bade her wait with courage and hope till he should be able to tell her what to do. And Marie, perfectly reasonable and obedient, waited for three long years, and at last obtained leave to join Madame de Chantal at Annecy.

It is a singular and suggestive fact that none of these first pillars of the Visitation, except Mademoiselle de Bréchar, knew Madame de Chantal, nor were they acquainted with one another. They all lived apart; some in Savoy, some in Burgundy, gathering up in their own families the stores of grace, the fruits of circumstance, or the lessons of life, which were to mould their characters and show them the emptiness of the world. And this significant fact points also to the reality and strength in which the Visitation was founded. It was not

planned on paper or agreed upon by a committee of women, influencing one another or influenced by one mind. Like the temple of Solomon, the symbol of the Church and the New Jerusalem, it was built without noise or clamour, of stones carved and smoothed to shape apart, and it rose in silence, branch after branch, rather as a growth than a building made by hands. And this is one of the most signal proofs, if any were wanting, that the work was of God, and would be prospered by Him.

## CHAPTER X.

### *Leaving Home. First Settlement at Annecy. 1609-1610.*

EVERY thing therefore had for some time pointed out to Francis de Sales that this silent growth had reached the point when it should take some definite shape and become visible to the eyes of men, in whose sight the city once set on a hill cannot be hid. Marie Aymée's marriage first loosened the bonds which had tied Madame de Chantal to Monthelon, and now that Madame de Thorens, still quite a child, was about to remove to the neighbourhood of Annecy, it became only natural that her mother should be near her, and be at hand in moments of need. The most painful part of the sacrifice that Madame de Chantal had to undergo was the parting from her aged father and her son; and as this part of her story has been the most misrepresented, and the least understood, it will require to be told somewhat at length. The whole of our labour will have been in vain if we have hitherto failed to convey the strength of Jane de Chantal's natural affectionateness of character. Family ties bound her with the clinging, rooted, and passionate love which is always seen joined to strength in a noble character. Her conscience helped her feelings in magnifying to her her duties and obligations in regard to her children, till she gave herself no rest by day or night; and up to the time when she knew Francis de Sales, no amount of care, or watchfulness, or foresight of evil satisfied her that she had fulfilled her duties as a Christian mother. Thus it was that her want of interior peace on this point led to severity, and made her exact from her children more than would have been good for them, had it not been for the continual watchfulness and counteracting suggestions of their unwearied friend Francis de Sales. And it need

scarcely be repeated that Madame de Chantal fulfilled to the utmost degree all the affectionate and most watchful duties of a daughter to M. Frémyot. But the Voice which called her even to leave the dead to bury their dead must be obeyed ; the call had been too long and too clearly recognised ever now to be ignored. Hitherto she had been bidden to keep herself in readiness to say always, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth,' and to have her lamp, trimmed and kindled, ready to hand. Now the cry had been made, the Bridegroom was coming, and she must go forth to meet Him in this world with her last sacrifice, if she was to follow Him among His most chosen faithful in the next.

It was on the evening of St. John's day in her father's house at Dijon that Jane first clearly told him with her own lips that this time was come. M. Frémyot was now seventy years old ; and while the rest of the household had gone out to look at the bonfires which it was customary to kindle on St. John's day, he stayed at home, writing in his study, for the weight of years had never led him in any way to dispense himself from work. Jane went to his room door, resolved to make the most of this opportunity of talking to him alone, but just as she was going to turn the handle her heart failed her, and she knelt down to pray for strength to go through her hard task. She then opened the door, and in the fading evening light saw her father's venerable figure and snow white head bent over his writing. With a beating and full heart she sat down beside him, and began first to speak of her children, her own difficulties at Monthelon with bad example in the house, and of her wish to leave it altogether. M. Frémyot, who was of a quick keen temperament, replied that she had no sort of reason to make herself unhappy about these things, and that he should take entire charge of her boy. It was time, he said, for the girls to go to school at the Ursuline convent, and Marie Aymée was already disposed of and would go to her husband. When Madame de Chantal heard her father actually forestalling her own conviction that matters were so far wound up as to allow of her family being left, her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely speak ;

but having mastered her emotion, she said in a few words that she herself had thought the time was come, not only for these changes, but for following out her own long delayed wish of entering religion. M. Frémyot was far from expecting such a communication as this, and his voice in remonstrating with her was soon choked with sobs, each burst of which pierced his daughter to the heart. Before the conversation ended, however, M. Frémyot was a little cheered by her promise to take no farther steps till he had himself spoken to Francis de Sales; and when Madame de Chantal left him, she felt as if the greatest barrier were already removed. Still objections rained upon her from all sides, and even where she least expected opposition, from her brother the Archbishop of Bourges, who sharply reproved her for even thinking of such things as leaving their aged father, forsaking her children, and foregoing all the good her position enabled her to do. In fact, so great a storm was raised that it troubled even the deep peace of Madame de Chantal's resolutions, and she felt that she must be a barbarous, self-seeking, and cowardly woman to wish to leave her family and the common track of the world. In this conflicting struggle the light and suggesting grace of God could alone have made her way clear, and as she continually prayed to be guided, she was accordingly led out of the maze of feeling and landed on the firm shore. The whole cry of her heart during this time might have been expressed in the unforgotten words of one whose path two hundred years later has lain perhaps among all known difficulties of conflict and sacrifice;—

‘Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home—

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step enough for me.’

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou

Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path; but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath bless'd me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone ;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.'

In the October after this midsummer, the marriage of Marie Aymée brought Francis de Sales to Monthelon, and thus face to face with M. Frémyot. After the marriage ceremony, a consultation was held by them upon Madame de Chantal's future, while she, prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, besought God's help and manifest blessing upon her plans. After what seemed to her a century, she was called into the council, where she found her father, her brother, and Francis de Sales. M. Frémyot called his daughter to him, and questioned her minutely and most closely upon the state of her mind and her reasons for wishing to leave the world. While studying this story it is impossible not to be struck with the weight and authoritative character possessed in those days by parents, and the reverence and submission paid them by their children. During this lengthened interrogatory, in which M. Frémyot delegated no fraction of his fatherly rights to his daughter's confessor, Jane seems to strip herself entirely of her character as a wife, a widow, and a mother, and to stand before her father simply as a dependent little child.

And at the same time—and this conveys to us the pregnant truth that dignity and wisdom spring out of reverence and lowliness—Madame de Chantal showed no trace of childishness in her reply. She answered her father's questions categorically, going fully into her own state of mind from the very beginning of her widowhood ; entered into a minute statement of her stewardship of the property, her husband's debts owed and discharged, the different rentals and the value of the land, and the whole sources and prospects of her children's inheritance. She spoke of the improvements made on the estate, and of the future career of her children ; how far she intended to watch over them herself, and how far her care must be supported and replaced by others. And all this she did with such clearness



and precision, such sagacity and firmness, and at the same time such genuine modesty in regard to any lauding of herself, that her father, who really knew her well, was amazed, and turning to Francis said, quoting the words of Scripture: 'Truly this woman hath considered her ways, and hath not broken the bread of idleness!' Francis smiled, well pleased, but said nothing; for, according to his habit, he had put in no word of his own, but had spent the time in watching the issue with inward prayer.

Immediately after Francis had left this family, now gathered together for the last time on earth, two deaths occurred which plunged both himself and them into affliction. Little Charlotte de Chantal, the youngest child and of great promise, was rapidly carried off by sickness, and Madame de Boisy, the Bishop's venerable mother, calmly ended her days in great peace.

The Bishop wrote a full account of his good mother's end to Madame de Chantal, saying, among other beautiful things, 'I had the strength to give her the last blessing, to close her eyes and lips myself, and to give her the last kiss of peace. After which my heart filled, and I wept over this good mother more tears than I had ever shed since entering the Church, but, thanks be to God, without any bitterness of soul.'

It now became manifest that in any case Madame de Chantal would be obliged to remove to Annecy, as Marie Aymée could not be left entirely without some experienced womanly care. Thus events ripened gradually to fulfilment, and the last farewells were made at Monthelon and Dijon in March 1610. Those were most painful scenes. Outside the castle at Monthelon, and all the roads that led to it, the neighbouring poor swarmed, groaning, weeping, and sobbing for the loss of their mother, 'the good lady.' Within, the poor old Baron de Chantal, deeply penitent for his bad life and his treatment of Jane, was nearly unconscious with grief. Madame de Chantal knelt down at his feet, and implored his blessing and forgiveness for all her faults while at Monthelon. Then embracing the poor old man for the last time, she went down the wide old staircase and out

among the crowd, bidding all her poor people farewell, and mingling her tears with theirs. With difficulty she got Marie Aymée, Françoise, and Charlotte de Bréhard into the carriage, and followed them herself, and when at last it drove off from the gloomy old portal, very many of the poor peasants followed it for miles along the road to Autun. Among those who actually went as far as the town was a Franciscan brother,—apparently a Tertiary living in the world,—whom Madame de Chantal commissioned to go back to Monthelon, and take a sort of charge of the old baron for her sake, and after winning his confidence, to try to prepare him to lead a changed life and make a good end. And the brother, as we gladly learn, faithfully fulfilled his promise, and succeeded in his great work of charity with the baron.

In two days more this little band of veritable pilgrims arrived at Dijon, where Jane passed through the fiercest of all the fiery ordeals she had to encounter. The 19th of March, St. Joseph's day, was fixed upon by her family for the final meeting of all their relations whom it was possible to assemble to bid Madame de Chantal farewell. She went from one to another round the large saloon, saying something sweet and lowly to each, calm though very pale, and with her large eyes swimming in tears. Celse Bénigne, now a fine noble boy of fifteen, used every entreaty, every endearment, to induce his mother not to leave them all, and at last, wrought up to the highest pitch of desperate and rebellious suffering, he passionately declared that if she would persist in quitting his grandfather's house, she should pass over his body, and he threw himself at full length before the door, so that she was actually obliged to step over him to get to her carriage. Not until this most trying and cruel scene was over did M. Frémyot appear. He had shut himself up in his study, praying for strength to go through this greatest trial of his life; and when his daughter came out of the saloon where the family had assembled, he took her in his arms, and amid the sobs and tears of both, they talked together for some time. At last, as if no longer able to bear the painful conflict, Madame de

Chantal knelt down with streaming eyes, and asked her father's blessing. M. Frémyot lifted his aged hands above her head, and said :

'I have no right to blame you for what you are doing. I give my consent to your going, and with my own hands offer this sacrifice of my only daughter, dear to me as Isaac ever was to Abraham.' He then kissed her, lifted her up with feeble hands, and added, 'Go now, my child, where God calls you to be; and if it should be that my eyes should see you no more in this world, I shall die happy, knowing that you are in the house of God, where you will help with your prayers the father who allows you to leave him. Will you do this, my child?'

'Yes, my best and dearest father!' answered Jane most solemnly, but nearly choked by her sobs.

'Come!' said M. Frémyot, arousing all his energy, 'let us now put aside our tears, that we may show more reverence for God's will, and that our friends may not suppose our resolution is shaken.'

He then gave Madame de Chantal a beautiful letter he had written to Francis de Sales, and put her and her companions into the carriage which was waiting for them at the gates. Bernard de Sales accompanied his young wife and her mother, and took charge of the whole party to Annecy.

Well indeed might Madame de Chantal afterwards declare that she had then passed through the agony of death, for during these farewells the waters of nearly every bitterness flowed over her soul. But when the anguish of that hour had passed, if any one may ever apply to himself the words of the *Benedictus*, Jane de Chantal might surely have sung: 'Ut sine timore de manu inimicorum nostrorum liberati, serviamus illi; in sanctitate et justitia coram ipso omnibus diebus nostris.'

This was the letter sent to Francis by M. Frémyot :

'My Lord,—My paper ought to be covered with more tears than letters, for my daughter, who was my greatest comfort in this world and the solace of my wretched old age, is now leaving me a childless father. Nevertheless, according to your own ex-

ample, my lord, whose firm and unshaken resolution was shown at the death of your own mother, I too resolve to submit to the good pleasure of God. As He wills her to choose His special service in this world and by that path to lead her to everlasting glory, I will show that I prefer her joy and the peace of my conscience to my natural affection. She is now going, therefore, to consecrate herself to God, but on condition that she shall never forget the father who has so dearly and so tenderly loved her. She carries with her two pledges, one of whom (Marie Aymée) I look upon as well bestowed, for she will be entrusted to your blessed family ; the other (Françoise) I should like to be returned to us. As regards her son (Celse Bénigne), I shall take the same charge of him that a good father would take of his children ; and so long as it pleases God to leave me in this valley of tears and misery, I will have him brought up as a good and honourable man.

*'March 19th, 1610.'*

Never, surely, had Annecy appeared so lovely to Madame de Chantal as it showed that spring evening of Palm Sunday towards the end of her journey. Lying as it does under the lower slopes of the mighty ridges and shoulders of Mount St. Bernard and Mont Blanc, the little town seems to bask in a sunny plain of verdure and luxuriant fertility. Corn fields and vineyards, the greenest of pastures and richest of orchards, alternate with gardens gay with flowers and shady groups of the broad-leaved plane. Beyond the little town lies the silvery lake, winding among the mountains so as to give a constant succession of changing views, and fed by the numberless rills and streams flowing in all directions about Annecy. Above the lake rise the rocky shores, gradually mounting to crags and Alpine peaks, broken up by seams of rich pasture, pine and birch woods, now tasselled with their spring beauty, and an ever-changing profusion of mountain flowers. Above the town the picturesque old castle, with its turrets and bartizans of the Middle Ages, crowns the view with everything the eye of a painter can crave. It was in this castle that Francis de Sales,

lately driven from Geneva by the fury of the Calvinists, now lived, and he would therefore be continually at hand with every kind of help for the new congregation of nuns.

And before the party, now on horseback, reached the town gates, Madame de Chantal saw him. He had come out with a cavalcade of the principal inhabitants of Annecy, also on horseback, to welcome the 'good lady' who had given up so much for God's sake, and had chosen their town as her first foundation, and also to do honour to Bernard de Sales and his girl bride. Indeed, it seemed as if all Annecy had turned out of doors on this lovely Palm Sunday evening, and it was through a friendly and rejoicing crowd that the party of tired pilgrims were slowly conducted to the house of M. Favre, the president of the parliament of Savoy. Here Madame de Chantal was to remain for a few days, and it seemed to her that a haven of peace had been reached at last. We shall follow the thread of her daughter's history before pursuing that of the commencement of the Visitation.

## CHAPTER XI.

*Bernard de Sales, Marie Aymée, and Françoise.*  
1609-1611.

IT would read more like some fairy story than a record of real life were we to follow the little Baroness de Thorens through the first year of marriage in the old Castle de Sales. It is wonderful that, with all the pictures we possess of possible and impossible heroines in poetry and prose, no painter has tried his hand upon the actual beauty of this extraordinary and touching scene. Nothing could be depicted more full of grace and charm than the figures of this young Bernard, bright faced and golden haired, with his large transparent blue eyes, and his girl-baroness, with her richly coloured young face, sweet with its modest gravity and a kind of peaceful responsibility. We can imagine her sitting at work either in the long galleries or antique chambers of the castle, with their high coved ceilings and deep windows filled with stained glass, or kneeling in the quaint oratory, roofed with blue and sown with stars;<sup>1</sup> or again, wandering with her chivalrous husband among the exquisite valleys, gazing with rapt delight upon the mountains bathed in rosecoloured and purple light, or gathering primroses and violets from the rich spring carpet, which at the time of their coming home spread under the hoary oaks and pines.

Marie Aymée was indeed young to be left to manage her household and herself; but her biographers distinctly record that her prudence and precocious ripeness of character were so great, that after much consultation with Francis, Madame de

<sup>1</sup> Charles Auguste de Sales and another writer, in 1659, give a full description of the Château de Sales.



Chantal found she could leave her in perfect safety with her husband and the old servants of the house.

Marie Aymée's childish temptations to the love of dress, society, and pleasure again rose to the surface after her married life had become a settled fact, and the novelty of its difficulties with household servants had worn away. The Castle of Sales was surrounded by neighbours, for every valley boasted of one or two castles, inhabited by simple Savoyard families who claimed that patent of *noblesse* which alone entitled them in those days to the privilege of associating with other nobles. Twenty-five of these little properties surrounded the Castle of Sales, and out of so large a number of friends it may easily be imagined that the young Baroness de Thorens found ample means of satisfying her love for visiting and being visited, as well as that other lesser inextinct love for planning and wearing the prettiest and best-fancied toilettes. Her manners and hospitable welcomes were so charming, also, that the tide of visitors soon flowed higher and higher, and, as usual, the exact line which separates moderation from excess was soon passed. It was not possible that this state of things should continue long unknown to Madame, or, as she was now called, Mother de Chantal, whose ears and eyes were as watchful as her heart when her children's welfare was concerned. But Mother de Chantal had now too long studied under her great master not to have imbibed from him some of his sweet and gentle ways of winning souls; and instead of reproaching or frightening her daughter, or provoking opposition by a harsh narrowness, as if people in society were to live like nuns, she merely begged Marie Aymée, on one of her visits to the convent, to take up again her old habit of making a quarter of an hour's meditation every day. The little baroness, who evidently had an excellent will of her own, was very reluctant to bind herself to a restraint which she did not much fancy; but as her mother playfully remarked that a quarter of an hour soon passes, while the good of a quarter of an hour's mental prayer remains, she yielded, and took up once more that solid and most precious habit.

She had soon cause to rejoice that she had done this ; and before she had time to grow weary of her new resolutions, a good friend came to her aid. This was Mademoiselle de Monthoux, who afterwards became an admirable and well-known nun of the Visitation Order. Sister Paule Jerome, as she was called, came to join Mother de Chantal at Annecy in 1614, where she spent a most courageous noviceship, employed in all kinds of rough and unpalatable occupations, in the intervals of which she saw a good deal of Marie Aymée, and became her fast and faithful friend and counsellor. The maxims which had seemed to savour too much of Mother de Chantal's age and austerity sounded quite differently from the lips of a girl scarcely older than herself; and as war broke out between Savoy and Spain, and Bernard's absences with his regiment became frequent and prolonged, his poor little wife found comfort chiefly in going to the Little Gallery House and talking to Sister Paule Jerome. Everything was then unfolded ; visits, riding-parties, conversations, and jokes, whatever might have been uppermost, and when the whole budget had been emptied without reserve, Sister Paule Jerome gently remarked upon what would have been better said or unsaid, and without taking up that tone of preaching to which good women are sometimes addicted, she led Marie Aymée's mind to the words and example of the Gospel and its contrast to the spirit of the world. The novice's courageous example had even a greater influence than her words ; for whatever might be the interest of the conversation, if the time allotted were past, or any convent rule or duty called her—and these things were not made mysteries of—Sister Paule Jerome would hurry away, showing by every movement and gesture of her bright face and fragile frame, that God was always, and should be always, loved and served before any one else.

As the time drew near for the birth of her child, Marie Aymée made up her mind once for all to what is generally known as a true 'conversion,' that is, she hesitated no longer between God and the world, or rather, between serving God wholly or by halves. She made a general confession to St. Francis de Sales, choosing him altogether as her director and spiritual

father, and thus won a great victory, for hitherto she had rather avoided putting herself spiritually under his powerful though most gentle influence. Her mother was not then at Annecy, but St. Francis wrote to tell her, and to bid her redouble her prayers that this dear child might now become distinguished for her piety; and in several letters to herself he encourages, warns, and guides the baroness on the upward way.

On this great and royal though self-denying way of the Cross, Marie Aymée's progress, as that of loving souls generally proves, was rapid and thorough. In two months' time, says St. Francis, there was a visible change in her strength in overcoming temptations, and in her sincere love of prayer and retirement instead of the frivolities of the world. She rose very early, and went to the chapel for morning prayers, then she gave the necessary orders as to provisions, meals, dole, &c., and after all was clearly arranged for the servants and the house, she returned to the chapel to make her meditation. In this way the young baroness wisely avoided the delays and uncertainties among her dependents by means of which some good people worry and annoy their households, and help to make religion unpopular with others. She was also very careful to make none of those distasteful alterations in her dress and outward surroundings which are displeasing to the eye and taste, and in all such indifferent matters she consulted her husband's least wishes and inclinations. She continued to entertain a number of guests at the castle, and was even more popular, because sweeter, more equable, and more self-sacrificing than she had been when absorbed in parties and amusements. But at the same time, that love of the poor which is the most unailing sign of an increased love of God, began to assert itself more visibly in Marie Aymée, and her visits to her destitute and infirm neighbours, and occupation about them, took up a larger portion of her time and thoughts. During the months spent at the castle, the kind baroness became, in fact, the peace-maker, the adviser, the physician, the almoner, of all the poor in the neighbouring valleys.

Whether it were that, her thoughts and time being thus

usefully occupied, Marie Aymée was a little less visible in her sitting-rooms prettily dressed, and merely engaged in some graceful trifling handiwork, or whether it may have been that the young child wife, having now developed into a thoughtful and cultivated woman, was no longer so amusing and light-hearted a plaything as formerly, Bernard de Sales actually complained to her one day that though he was rejoiced to find her so good, he should have liked her to be *a little less pious*. It was a most critical moment for Marie Aymée, and a less brave and loyal heart might have been tempted to yield weakly, and by slipping back into her former frivolous course of life, might have dragged both herself and her husband down to the loss of grace. Well was it indeed for Bernard, with all his noble and virtuous ancestry, with all his valour in arms, that his child wife was so far braver and stronger than himself. Marie Aymée laughed at him, represented with her charming humility that his own brother had told her it was impossible to love God too much; that she herself had so little love that if she tried to make it less she should have none left at all, and that she believed that he had said this thing to her jestingly to try her and to excite her to be a little more fervent than she was. She said all this with such winning grace and wife-like submission, that her husband was more delighted with her than ever, and as is usual with men, valued her a thousand times the more for having resisted his foolish temptation.

We must now return to Madame de Chantal, and see how she was established at Annecy, where the small house already mentioned on the very edge of the lake had been bought by Francis de Sales as the first resting place of his young congregation. This house had a green court on one side, and a pretty orchard—connected with the house by a covered bridge thrown over the road—on the other. It was called the Little Gallery House, and Francis said of it: ‘I have found a hive for my poor bees, or rather a cage for my little doves.’ *Poor*, indeed, they were; for, whether prudently or imprudently, according to the court by which she may be judged, Madame de Chantal had made over all that she possessed to her children, and had

but a few crowns in the house. She trusted, however, with the utmost faith, that all things would be provided for those who had given up all for Christ's sake.

Marie Favre, Charlotte de Bréchar, and herself had spent the whole day before their establishment in the Gallery House in arranging the neat plain furniture ; making everything as clean as possible, and decking the chapel with hangings and flowers. The next day, June 6th, they all went to mass and communion, and filled up the time till the evening with devotions and visits to some sick poor people. Towards evening they went to the castle, where they were to sup with the Bishop and his three brothers. A great many of the principal people of the neighbourhood were also asked to come afterwards and take a last leave of the ladies in their ordinary mode of life. Then the Bishop summoned them to his own study : he spoke to them for some time with great zeal and feeling about the life they proposed to lead, and the singleness of heart with which they must enter upon it ; and then, putting into Madame de Chantal's hands a slight sketch of the first constitutions to be followed, he gave them his solemn blessing with the tenderness of a true guide and father. He had intended that the time of Madame de Chantal's departure for the Gallery House should be kept secret, but since the earliest morning the town had been on thorns to learn the news, and when the little party left the castle they could scarcely move for the crowd of people who respectfully escorted them, 'filling the air,' as the chronicler says, 'with blessings upon those who were going to do them good.' Bernard de Sales took charge of Madame de Chantal, and his two brothers followed with Marie Favre and Charlotte de Bréchar, the chief magistrates and townspeople coming after, and in this way the little procession was made with some ceremony. When they reached the Gallery House they found the little chapel quite full of ladies belonging to Annecy and its neighbourhood, who had all come to embrace Madame de Chantal for the last time and bid her farewell. Among these was Marie Aymée, who was then a little saddened by the bare aspect of the small mean rooms

after the vast castles and spacious apartments in which she had been accustomed to see her mother. Often, very often, no doubt, in her after life did she recall her childish views of the sacrifice her mother was then making, and earnestly bless God for having given her a parent who knew how to weigh the earth and its passing glories with the 'eternal weight of happiness' to be won by their renouncement. Anne Coste, at last admitted to the fulfilment of her long-deserved happiness, met them at the gate as portress, and kneeling down at Madame de Chantal's feet, promised to obey her in all things with great faithfulness.

After all the ladies had left and the gates were shut, the happy women knelt down and gave thanks to God for having brought them into port, and then, giving one another the kiss of peace, they went to their modest little cells. It is reported that as soon as Charlotte de Brécharde was alone, she tore off her headdress, or moule (a sort of chignon), and puffs, and trampled them under foot. Thus was the Little Gallery House instituted.

The character and story of Françoise, Madame de Chantal's only remaining daughter, were widely different from that of her elder sister,<sup>2</sup> but she was as carefully watched, as studiously directed, and as untiringly cultivated as that other chosen soul. She was born at the same happy home, Bourbilly, and was three years old when M. de Chantal died. Françoise was of a merrier, more thoughtless and noisy disposition than her sister, and her father's death and the sorrow of the household scarcely in any degree entered into her childish mind. After gazing for a few sober minutes at her mother in tears, she would run noisily away to her playthings and games, and was in all circumstances a lively, romping, high-spirited child. So early was this bold thoughtless character developed, that Madame de Chantal was almost convinced that a worldly life would be too ensnaring to her child's soul, and that it would be better to induce her very early to enter a convent. Francis de Sales

<sup>2</sup> Marie Aymée was born in 1598, Françoise in 1599. There was rather more than the year between them.



had then thrown his usual wisdom into the scale, and prevented the yielding to that strong bias to which womanly impatience is too prone. 'If Françoise heartily wishes to be a nun herself, well and good,' he wrote; 'otherwise, I do not approve of her free will being fettered with resolutions.' He had thought it well, however, that the child should be sent to school at the convent of Puy d'Orbe, that her wild untamed character should be trained and gently disciplined in good time; but this plan, as we have elsewhere seen, was not carried out. Madame de Chantal had already begun to mature her own wishes in regard to the establishment of a new congregation of religious women, and in the meanwhile she kept 'François' with her, and very early trained her in visiting and relieving the neighbouring poor, which gave the child unusual pleasure, and she very quickly showed an aptitude for discovering their wants, and ministering to them.

When Madame de Thorens was taken to Annecy, Françoise also accompanied her mother, for she scarcely liked to let the lively, impetuous, and engaging young child out of her sight. It was here observed by Francis de Sales, who played with 'François' almost as one child plays with another, that she took all the praise and foolish admiration lavished upon her as a matter of course and almost as her right, and he resolved to watch closely the springing up of the seeds of a somewhat haughty and too self-reliant spirit in this noble-looking little child.

Françoise was eleven years old when her mother and her admirable companions retired to the Gallery House, and she was of a character to feel deeply, and perhaps a little resentfully, the sacrifice made of the world and all it contains, and the poverty and hardships which it involved. But although the doors of the convent were shut against her for a short time, they were soon opened again, and she was received there to be educated. Probably no little girl ever had greater advantages in that respect than Françoise now enjoyed. She was, in fact, surrounded with governesses, all of them accomplished, cultivated, high-bred women, who devoted themselves by turns to

her improvement, instructed her in the fullest and most attractive way, and in those branches of study in which each most excelled. We cannot be surprised, therefore, to find that Françoise became a thoroughly educated and accomplished woman, and that her character and talents were alike trained and developed in the highest degree. Nor were the lighter and more external advantages wanting; for Mother de Brécard and Mother de Blonay had been the delight of the polished and intellectual society in which they had been distinguished, and therefore were well able to watch over the conversation, carriage, and manners of their little charge.

Her amusements were also well cared for, though we feel a little afraid of Mother de Brécard's strictness when we hear that she set free a caged sparrow and tame squirrel which had been given to Françoise as pets, because she saw that the Sisters were somewhat given to a waste of time and dissipating their minds in rather a frivolous way with these playthings. This very Mother de Brécard, however, was exceedingly skilful in dressing dolls, and she set up a whole company of marionettes, Angels, Archangels, and Saints dressed in character, and fastened with horsehair, so that they could be made to perform a kind of religious drama as the Court of Heaven, which Francis went to see. He was amused with the ingenuity of the device and the simplicity of the Sisters, but wisely decided that the play Paradise should be made over to Françoise, and that for the future dolls should be dressed in the convent for her use only. But though real child's play formed a part, and a most appropriate part, of her education, every other advantage was seized and profited by to lay the foundation of a lofty and noble woman's life. From time to time, and rather frequently, Francis would go, accompanied by his unfailing chaplain, M. Michel Favre, to give a kind of familiar conference or instruction on spiritual subjects to the nuns. He then either seated himself in the gallery which gave its name to the house, and which commanded the loveliest views of the lake and snowy mountain peaks, or he sent for chairs, which were placed in the orchard near a fountain, and with the nuns sitting on the grass in a cir-

cle round him, and Françoise at his feet, the Bishop gave those charming discourses which contain so large an amount of his own peculiar spiritual maxims, observances, and advice for obtaining the sweet strength of charity, adapted to religious women. It was characteristic of Francis de Sales to allow the child to share all these instructions, comprising many observances of the Directory, and to make no mystery of the aims and daily life of religious women. All was free, open, unrestricted, and candid, both in his intercourse with the convent and in the speech of the nuns to their spiritual father; and such frank humility of conduct must have had the most lasting and impressive influence on the mind of a cultivated and intelligent child. She also chose the Bishop for her confessor, and thus had the precious additional advantage of that inner and more Divine teaching which the confessional affords. What wonder was it then that Françoise de Chantal grew in wisdom, in virtue, and in the rapid development of Christian grace? The nuns in the Gallery House already looked upon her as one of themselves, and even whispered among one another that after such example and such training she would be the fittest and worthiest successor to her mother as Superior of their order. So do we continually plan, while God carries out His own secret designs.

They were most essentially *viæ investigabiles* in Madame de Chantal's case. All her wishes for her daughters were centred in their entering some religious house, and serving God as she served Him, with no other to share their hearts. Marie Aymée, the beloved eldest darling, had married, and now she hoped that the delicious peace and sweet charity of the Gallery House might lead Françoise to choose the 'better part.' And the child had no other wish herself. She used disciplines of briar, fasted continually, knelt upon the rough stones, and slept on the bare floor, for the very purpose of obtaining a religious vocation from God, and that she might be considered worthy to offer herself to the special consecration to Him by vow. At the clothing of her companions, she shed floods of tears, imploring to share that grace, and condemned herself as unworthy in such

sort that a contemporary does not hesitate to say : 'She was perhaps as much a religious by her sighs and tears, as others were by their noviceship and vows.' Her first little companion was Mdlle. de la Chavanne, who was allowed to put on what was called 'the little habit,' a custom which, as we shall see, led the way to regular schools. The little Chavanne was bent upon being a nun, and put herself entirely under obedience to Françoise, who gave her orders, devotions, and penances, in imitation of the nuns, and quite enjoyed the part of superior and novice-mistress which was thrust upon her. Nothing escaped the watchful eye and ear of Francis, and he soon informed Mademoiselle de Chantal that a nun's real love was for the last and lowest places, and for strict obedience ; and that her newly developed taste for superiority was the test which proved she had no vocation. Françoise, humbled and enlightened by these words, fully opened her whole mind to him, with all her struggles and doubts, and Francis then decided that she should now see something of the world. Madame de Chantal felt keenly grieved and disappointed at this decision ; but it is remarkable that no voice was ever raised for 'trying' Françoise's vocation, nor was there ever put forward the idea that if her call was not for the Visitation, it might be possible for her to succeed elsewhere.

Having once resigned herself, after her usual manner, wholly and thoroughly to the plans of God, Madame de Chantal made her arrangements for her child accordingly. She chose for her protector her own old friend, Madame de Charmois, for whom the *Introduction to the Devout Life* had been written, and who now took charge of the somewhat difficult and impetuous girl of sixteen : who is described as tall and noble-looking, with a striking and impressive rather than a beautiful face, but always interesting and even dazzling those with whom she conversed. In almost everything she was the exact contrast to her sister, Madame de Thorens.

Though she was already so fine and well-grown a girl, Madame de Chantal did not pay very much attention to her toilette, which vexed Françoise exceedingly, and she seems to have complained

of it to her best friend and Father, for Francis wrote one of his amusing but most wise letters to her mother, who was not then at Annecy, in which he says: 'I went to see Sister de Brécharde on Sunday. . . . I told her she must make her [our daughter de Rabutin] a fine ruff for great days, and that that would be enough till you return. I think the child would be much pleased to have these laces and standing-up ruffles—you see I know something about these things.' Thanks, therefore, to the Bishop's all-seeing charity, Françoise was provided with ruffs, collars, laces from Lyons, fashionable gowns, and all kinds of bravery; but as, notwithstanding these, she had now a taste for all the additional coxcomberies of the latest fashions, which her mother despised or never heard of, she was in the habit of going to a friend's house to dress, where other fond and foolish friends supplied her with ribbons, sashes, *frisettes*, and other such fripperies in which the hearts of women delight.

One evening, just when one of these extra magnificent toilettes had been achieved, Françoise met the Bishop, who said to her: 'Françoise, I am sure your mother never dressed you like that'—and he quietly took out and gave her some pins, as a gentle hint that her gown was too low. Another evening, when the girl had decked herself with a quantity of ribbon, and put puffs in her hair, she met the Bishop again, who stopped and looked at her without saying a single word. Françoise blushed deeply, upon which Francis, glad at heart, said in his sweet way, 'I am not so angry as you might think. Your things are a little worldly, it is true, but that blush, I think, comes from Heaven and a conscience not without God's grace.' He then lifted up his hand and hid some of her puffs under her headdress, saying, 'Now you can hide away the rest for yourself, for I must not deprive you of all the merit; and then you will see how much better you will please God than you would have pleased the world as you are.'

This wise and delicate guidance could not fail to win and influence; but the dangers of the world were not yet overcome. Besides the childish love of dress, which is the first but perhaps most easily broken snare to a cultivated woman, there were the

more subtle and hidden perils of intellectual attraction, and the wit and bubble-blown brilliancy of society, towards which Françoise's bright, clever, daring mind led her with irresistible force, and for some time kept her continually oscillating on the edge of danger. It was well said of her after her death that in the beginning she had liked to have all the pleasures of the world without incurring any of its risks, and all the sweets of devotion without the bitter ingredient of self-denial. How many, without the noble after life of Françoise, have persevered in this infatuated doubleness to their old age!

Throughout this phase of her life, which must have been most trying to her mother and her directors, Francis asked her to promise him only one thing, which was to say one 'Hail Mary' every day with all her heart; and this special request of the Bishop became very dear to her, and was never, on any excuse, omitted.

We shall hereafter continue the story of Françoise. Meanwhile the first months spent by her whom we must now call Mother de Chantal and her novices were so sweet in their fervour, peace, and spirit of prayer, that Marie Favre said, if it were not that it would prevent greater good, she should wish they could live always thus, without receiving any more postulants. But this would indeed have been limiting the fruits of Mother de Chantal's sacrifice; and very soon a number of ladies came to ask leave to be received into the house, out of whom seven remained. Among these were our friends Marie de Chatel and Marie de Blonay. As happens with beginners in all true religious foundations, these novices had to undergo real hardships of poverty and inconvenience, and often they had nothing in the house for dinner when it was nearly time to sit down to table. Once in particular, Anne Coste had become so unhappy at having nothing to set before the little community, that she borrowed a pitcher of milk, and boiled in it some vegetables out of the garden, thinking the poor sisters would faint with hunger. No sooner was this slender repast set on the table than a servant of M. Favre came to the house laden with a good provision of meat, bread, and wine. Anne



then felt ashamed of her want of faith, and said she should never again doubt that God would provide for their dear mother.

Francis meanwhile occupied himself with their rule and manner of saying office, which was the Little Office of our Lady. After the Sisters had tried over several of the usual tones used by the old orders, the Bishop himself struck a few simple notes, which were decided upon as suitable to the humble character of the new congregation. It may be that he dreaded for them any forms of outward splendour and attractiveness, having in view melancholy instances of religious houses where much pomp and external dignity and magnificence covered great spiritual decay. He evidently earnestly desired that all their glory, like that of the King's daughter, the Church, should be 'within,' and that natural pleasure should be sweetly, gradually and without violence checked and pruned, and never be allowed to stifle the growth of grace. The office tones chosen have certainly no beauty to recommend them; and, among the other simple and safe mortifications with which the Visitation Order abounds, that of the ear is added in the daily religious services. It is a little surprising to learn that the pronunciation of the Latin in the Psalms was somewhat of a difficulty to Mother de Chantal, and she is represented as spending several hours in the night in repeating again and again such verses as she had been told were faulty. With her, nothing that related to the service of God or to duty was ever considered of small moment, and she evidently toiled and laboured as conscientiously at the smallest details of the day's routine as she did with her children and the progress of her own soul.

Meanwhile the poverty of the Gallery House continued, and sometimes the Sisters had not even a piece of candle wherewith to light the house, or anything stored in the way of food. In short, there was 'neither bread, wine, oil, nor salt meat;' and once, when they wanted to buy some fuel, there was only three sous (a penny halfpenny) in the money-box. Still, God Himself provided for them in a marvellous way, so that a little

cask of wine which some one brought as alms to the house sufficed them abundantly for more than a year; and the deep and earnest faith of the Mother and her Sisters was as inexhaustibly sustained. It seems scarcely credible, and still is the undoubted truth, that even while watching over and adding to this little refuge of holy women, Francis de Sales had still no idea what shape they would eventually take, what would be their name, or even their chief end and employment. It was indeed no paper foundation, but a divinely suggested work, intended to fill a space in the world of which he had not, as yet, the least idea. In his mind there were only two distinct thoughts. The first was, that as the austerities of the Poor Clares, Carmelites, and Dominicanesses, prevented a large proportion of postulants from being able to remain, there were a multitude of religious vocations in the world for which no place was found. The second was, that as hitherto convents of women were strictly enclosed, it followed that a vast number of poor, sick, and evil-disposed persons were perishing for lack of the help and instruction of religious women. His idea was that the Visitation (not yet even named) would fill up both these blanks in the Church. It was not given to him to carry out the latter half of his plan. For a time, indeed, Mother de Chantal and her first Sisters were uncloistered, and went out to visit and help the sick and dying, and for other recognized purposes in the rule; but that crying need which Francis de Sales only partially discerned was fulfilled later on by St. Vincent de Paul, who was specially enlightened and strengthened to take the matter boldly in hand, and fully to face the terrible evils of the age. He also then cast his seed into soil perhaps prepared by Francis, and founded a congregation of women whom he would not allow even to call themselves nuns, who were released from office, from silence, and even from the necessity of going out two together, that they might be ready for every kind of service the utmost ingenuity of charity can conceive. But the time for this great army of women, whose sound has literally gone out into all lands, was not yet, though it may be that the half-fulfilled idea of Francis de Sales, as a single cur-

rent of electric fluid puts many forces in motion, may have acted upon the mind of St. Vincent de Paul.

Meanwhile Francis wrote of his nuns in words too characteristic to be omitted.

‘ My dear Brother, You ask what it is that I am doing in this corner of our mountains, the scent of which has reached even your part of the world. I can easily believe it, dear brother; for if I offer whole burnt-offerings upon God’s altar, will they not send up some fragrance? . . . My brother De Thorens has been into Burgundy to fetch his little wife, and has brought back with her a mother in law whom neither he nor I was ever worthy to serve. You know already how God gave her to me as a spiritual daughter, and you must know that this daughter has come to her undeserving father that he may show her how to die to the world. Urged by the thirst of God, she has left all; and with a wisdom and fortitude uncommon in her fragile sex, she has arranged her leaving the world so that the good find much in it to praise, while the evil-minded of the world scarcely know what to fix upon to gainsay. We shut her up on Trinity Sunday with two companions and a servant whom you saw, a soul so excellent in the rustic simplicity of her birth that I never saw quite her equal. Since then several ladies have come from Chambéry, Grenoble, and Burgundy, to be with her; and I hope this congregation will be a sweet and happy refuge for those not strong in health, for, without much bodily austerity, there is the practice of every essential virtue. They say the office of our Lady, and make their meditation; work, keep silence, practise obedience and humility, have nothing of their own, and lead a life as loving, peaceful, interior, and edifying as can be seen in any convent in the world. After this profession, they will go with great humility to visit and serve the sick, God willing. This is, in short, my dear brother, what is going on here.’<sup>3</sup>

Francis had so entirely in view the active service of the poor, that he wished to call the institute the Congregation of St. Martha; but Mother de Chantal was very much averse to

<sup>3</sup> Letter of April 8, 1611, quoted by M. Bougaud, t. ii. p. 175.

this, for she wished it to be entirely devoted to the Blessed Virgin. She said nothing, however, being always quite prepared to submit, but prayed for some time that Francis might be otherwise guided. In a few days he went to the Gallery House again, and told her that he had decided to call them the Daughters of the Visitation, hoping that they would take for their example the way in which our Lady left her solitude and seclusion at the call of charity only, hasting to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin St. Elisabeth, and then returning to the hidden life at Nazareth. This decision gave Mother de Chantal very great pleasure.

Many little details are preserved in the manuscript archives of the Visitation, which throw a full light upon the various delicate shades of character in Francis de Sales and the first nuns. His fatherly care was so protective and so minute that nothing was too great or too small for him to provide for. When the question of what habit should be adopted came up for discussion, the Bishop was there to give his opinion; and when Mother de Chantal, who knew very little of common stuffs, proposed to make the sisters' profession-veils of crape, Francis said crape would be much too refined and expensive a material for those who specially aimed at a very lowly poverty; the veils must be made of bombazine.<sup>4</sup> Mother de Chantal accordingly cut up the only bombazine gown she had to make the veils; and while she was trying one in various forms on the head of Sister Favre, Francis took up the scissors himself, and cut the bombazine rather short and rounded at the back, in the form it is still worn by the Visitation nuns.

At the same time no one could be more exact and even severe, when any faults occurred in what related to the high standard required by the vows. When the day of profession drew near, and there was nothing in the house with which to decorate the chapel and altar, the Sisters persuaded their Mother to let them use some money which the Bishop had left for the use of the sick. She allowed herself to be persuaded, and the money was used; but no sooner was it spent than

<sup>4</sup> 'Etamine,' probably a light thin kind.

Mother de Chantal, in an agony of penitence, wrote a note to the Bishop, telling him of her disobedience. He knew nothing of the circumstances which had led her to allow the money to be taken, and was much grieved at the fault. When he came the next morning to the house, Mother de Chantal went out to meet him, knelt down before him, and again most humbly accused herself of the fault. The Bishop, looking very grave and sorry, said to her, 'Daughter, this is your first disobedience to me; it has given me a very bad night.' And he passed on without another word, leaving her shedding bitter tears, and still kneeling on the ground; for he well knew that in the matter of the evangelical counsels, there is nothing little or of no consequence; and the conviction of this truth became so profoundly stamped upon the community, that the very spot in the orchard was traditionally marked and handed down, in remembrance both of the lesson and the humble way in which it was received.

But no grave faces or rebukes were allowed to throw a cloud on the profession day, which dawned on a lovely morning in June 1611. Francis went early to the Gallery House to hear the Sisters' confessions and say mass for them; and after confession Mother de Chantal renewed her vow of obedience to the Bishop. When the gospel had been read, he preached a beautiful sermon, in which he compared the little community to a few grains of wheat, which should bring forth a rich harvest. Then the *Veni Creator* was intoned, and first Mother de Chantal, after her the other first two Sisters, said aloud and distinctly this beautiful act of profession:

'Hear, O ye Heavens, and let the earth listen to the words of my mouth. To Thee, O Jesus, my Saviour, my heart speaks, though I am but dust and ashes. O my God, I vow to Thee to live in perpetual chastity, obedience and poverty.<sup>5</sup> I offer and consecrate to Thy Divine Majesty and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Lady, Thy Mother, myself and my life. Re-

<sup>5</sup> When the Order had been approved these words were inserted: 'according to the Rule of St. Augustin and the Constitutions of the Congregation of our Lady of the Visitation,' &c.

ceive me, O Eternal Father, into the arms of Thy most compassionate Fatherhood, that I may constantly bear the yoke and the burthen of Thy holy service, and may give myself up for ever wholly to Thy love, to which henceforth I devote and consecrate myself. I entreat thee, O most glorious, most holy and most sweet Virgin Mary, by the love and by the death of thy Son, to receive me under thy motherly protection. I choose Jesus, my Saviour and my God, for the one object of my love; I choose His holy and sacred Mother for my protector, and this Congregation as my perpetual guide. *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. Amen.*'

The Bishop then gave each of them a silver cross to wear, unfolded the veils, and placed them on their heads, saying, 'This shall be to you for a veil on your eyes against all the looks of men, and a holy sign that you never receive any mark of love but that of Jesus Christ.' Then they prostrated themselves, covered with the pall, while the *De profundis* was said, and the Bishop sprinkled them as a corpse is aspersed at burial. When the pall was taken off, and joyful canticles were being sung, the Bishop gave each of the Sisters a crucifix, and Mother de Chantal said, 'My Beloved is all mine, and I am all His. Never can I forsake Him for any man, for I am wholly united to Him by charity, and His goodness surpasses all the loves of the world. O my God, turn away mine eyes from vanity, and let no injustice rule over me.' When the lighted taper was given into her hand, she said, 'O Lord, Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Thy light hath shined upon me, and Thou hast given gladness to my heart.'

The Bishop then said to them: 'Go, my children, return to your abode, for God hath been very gracious to you.' And as they went back accordingly from the sanctuary to their own choir, Mother de Chantal, by a sudden inspiration, said aloud: 'Here is my rest, and here will I abide for ever,' in remembrance of which these words were added to the ritual of profession, and are used to this day.

A great number of ladies had gone to witness the ceremony,



and would not be satisfied without seeing Mother de Chantal, and congratulating her on the fulfilment of her wishes; but the Bishop cut their congratulations very short, desiring that on so solemn and momentous a day the nuns should be left in peace and to themselves. Very soon afterwards, he wrote a little note to Mother de Chantal, saying, after his chivalrous fashion, 'Our House of the Visitation is, by God's grace, noble and great enough to possess its scutcheon, its arms, and its own legend. I think therefore, my dear Mother, if you agree, that we should take for our coat of arms a heart pierced with two arrows, encircled by a crown of thorns, and surmounted by a cross graven with the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. My child, when we first meet I will tell you a thousand little thoughts which have occurred to me on this matter, for in truth our little Congregation is the work of the hearts of Jesus and Mary; our Saviour when dying hath engendered us by the opening of His Sacred Heart.'

Meanwhile the work of the institute was vigorously carried forward. Francis, accompanied by his secretary and chaplain M. Michel Favre, would often come and sit in the garden; and while the Sisters surrounded him upon the grass, he would suggest, in the most humble and simple way, but in words full of wisdom, their general plan of life, and lay down the spirit in which they should carry it out.

'My very dear children,' he said to them on the first of these occasions, 'now that we begin to grow in numbers, we must set all our affairs in order. In the first place, we will get up at five o'clock, which for me and Sister Anne Coste will be an easy matter, as we are country people.' Then, after arranging what allowance of food was to be eaten at dinner and supper on fast days, he went on to say: 'My children, we must always pay one another great respect. I know that the Jesuit Fathers take off their caps whenever they meet one another, even if it be a hundred times in the day; and we ought to bow to each other in the same way. But that we may give our actions a religious instead of a worldly character, instead of curtseying, you will bow the head. Shall it not be

so, my dear children?' And the Sisters all answered immediately, 'Yes, my lord,' except Mother Favre, who was a little put out at the prohibition to curtsy, which ladies then always did in the most elaborate way.

The Bishop went on to say, that an Italian monk had lately told him that the nuns of his acquaintance had become so attached to their crucifixes, beads and holy pictures, that some of them had chosen to leave their convents rather than give up their pious property. 'Therefore,' he continued, 'I have thought that it would be well for these things among us to be exchanged from time to time, that we may attach ourselves to nothing but God alone.' He went on to arrange, in his fatherly practical way, that on the last day of the year little separate piles should be made of the crucifixes, rosaries, pictures, &c. belonging to the Sisters, who should then draw them by lot.

Another day Francis took them all with him into the orchard, where there was a fountain, and where the short smooth grass and trellised walks made it a very pleasant recreation ground. The Sisters brought a bench for the Bishop, and sat down upon the grass about him; and Mother de Chantal asked him to explain to them in what the virtue of affability consisted. While he was enlarging on a subject so congenial to himself, a violent thunderstorm came on, and Francis led his little flock into the bridge gallery, that they might be sheltered from the heavy rain. As they followed him up and down, the novices made very large signs of the cross, and one of them could not restrain her fears and cried out, 'O, my lord, I am so frightened!' The Bishop laughed and replied, 'O, my child, don't be afraid. The lightning only strikes great saints and great sinners, and you are neither one nor the other.' When the storm had spent itself, Mother de Chantal asked the Bishop to give them all some virtue to practise. 'Yes, I certainly will,' he replied; 'and I will begin with you.' Each Sister then presented herself alone, while the others went to the end of the gallery, and the Bishop gave her some virtue to practise which he thought she most stood in need of.

Nearly every day he said mass for them, and taught them almost more by the sight of his sweet grave serenity, his unalterable patience, and his childlike openness and singleness of mind, than he did by his conferences and sermons. After his mass he would see one or another of the Sisters apart or in the confessional; sometimes would walk in the gallery or the garden, or sit under the trellis arranging the rule or custom of the house, and providing in the most minute way for the welfare of the souls, and wellbeing and happiness of the least inmate of the house.

None of them ever forgot these conversations. It was not only the look, the voice, the manner so full of charm, the mingled affectionateness and dignity which stamped him with a special character, but there was a mixture of childlike quaintness and strong practical originality in his sayings which make them, even now, like household words to us all. 'You see, children,' he one day said to the Sisters as they were sitting in the garden, 'you must always be very ready in your obedience, and say straightforwardly to God, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and not be like those monks St. Bernard speaks of, to whom one was obliged to say, "Brother, what would you like to do?"' No one could ever forget such an example as this. Presently one of the Sisters asked him what they should do in case one of their Superiors should give some order that would be contrary to the laws of God and the Church? Francis replied that in that case they should not obey her, any more than if the Superior were to say, 'Sister, go into the garden and gather some flowers, and throw yourself out of the window that you may get there the sooner,' when the Sister should gently and respectfully answer, 'Mother, if you please, I will go down the stairs.'

Every one in the Gallery House shared alike in the little practical sufferings of poverty and lowly service; and when a cow was bought—chiefly to supply milk for the poor—and the Sisters took it in turn to watch that she did not browse the young shrubs round the orchard, Mother de Chantal took her hours of cow-keeping along with the rest. In regard to the

keener sufferings of mortification and want of food and rest, she indeed took far more than the lion's share ; and there was not one of the Sisters who had not her hair shirt, chain and discipline, which they were sometimes allowed to make of brass. In short, the fervour and courageous selfdenial of the little community could scarcely have been surpassed in any convent in the world.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *Deaths and Changes. 1611-1617.*

IN the midst of the severe toils and sweet rewards of such a life, Mother de Chantal received the heavy blow of her father's death at the age of seventy-three. For himself there was indeed little cause to grieve, for M. Frémyot died as he had lived, full of Christian faith and constancy. Nearly his last most characteristic act was to make a full confession of his life to his son, the Archbishop of Bourges, who also gave him the viaticum and closed his eyes in great peace. But there can be no doubt that this death, coming so soon after her leaving him, caused Mother de Chantal many bitter pangs. She accused herself anew of selfishness and overhaste in not waiting a little longer and dutifully closing her father's eyes. These thoughts, with tender and sensitive consciences, will always arise, and no doubt if they could have foreknown the exact time of his death, both she and Francis would have agreed in putting off the final parting till that time. But the future is mercifully hidden from us that we may act with faith in the present, with which alone we have any of us to do. There arose now, however, a positive duty to the living which could not be put aside. M. Frémyot's death threw Celse Bénigne, still quite young, again upon his mother's hands; and she knew that it was incumbent on her to leave the convent to provide for his education and for other important affairs. She therefore left the Gallery House under the charge of Mother de Brécharde, chose Mother Favre to go with her to Dijon, and under the care of her son in law Bernard, set off for an absence of some months' duration. The Sisters, so newly founded and settled, felt this absence of their Mother very much, and as the Bishop

also was obliged to go at the same moment to Thonon, Mother de Brécard felt as if she were left both fatherless and motherless at once. As she was one day walking in the gallery, very sad at heart, and feeling that the burthens laid upon her were very heavy, she distinctly heard a voice from the crucifix saying : ' Father and Mother have left thee ; but I, Who am thy God, am here. Wherefore art thou sad ? ' And whether it were indeed an external voice, or that one within which speaks to every true servant of God, who casts all care upon Him, Mother de Brécard was much comforted, and felt strengthened to carry her cross cheerfully onward.

When Mother de Chantal reached Dijon, M. Frémyot had already been buried. She had no other consolation, therefore, but that of praying at his grave, which was in the church of Notre Dame. At a later time his monument and effigy were removed to the cathedral, where they are to be seen at this day. From Dijon Mother de Chantal went on to her old homes, Bourbilly and Monthelon, to set the estates and affairs in order for her children's future provision. Bourbilly had now become the appanage of Celse Bénigne as Baron de Chantal ; Monthelon and all its property was to belong to Françoise as soon as she came of an age to inherit. While she was at Bourbilly Mother de Chantal was much tormented by the efforts of her relations, who brought with them certain learned and pious people to try to convince her that it was her positive duty to come back and live in Burgundy, and make her home among her own people, like the tertiaries of St. Francis and St. Dominic. Mother de Chantal courteously replied that that was not her vocation. One of her lady cousins then losing all selfcontrol exclaimed very rudely, that it was too bad to see her ' buried in that way under two yards of bombazine ; and if they took her advice, that veil should be torn into a thousand bits ! ' To this Mother de Chantal with quiet dignity replied, ' She that cares for her crown more than for her head will not lose one without the other. '

Francis, having heard of the disturbance that had been made, wrote her an admirable letter of practical advice : ' If



you had married again some gentleman from the farthest ends of Gascony or Brittany, you must have left all your family, and no one would have made a single objection; but now that you have made a much less entire renouncement, and have reserved yourself liberty enough for a moderate care of your household and children, because the little retirement you have made is for God, people are found to try to make it seem amiss.' The Bishop ended by telling her not to think any more about the matter, and to stay in Burgundy as long as it was necessary. As soon as her affairs at Bourbilly were arranged, Mother de Chantal went back to Dijon, and having settled Celse Bénigne at college, and asked one of his uncles, Claude Frémyot, to take his father's place with the boy, she returned in all haste to Annecy, where her presence was indeed urgently needed. Sickness had been busy there, first with one Sister and then another, till Mother de Brécharde was quite worn out with nursing them all. Poor Marie de Chatel—Marie Péronne—had fallen more ill than any of the rest with a continual wasting fever; but she was so wedded to the thought and habit of selfdenial, that she kept a bottle of fresh water by her bedside, and sometimes was heard to say: 'O my God, the power of Thy grace must be great, for though I am consumed with thirst, I can abstain from drinking.' Sometimes she would even take the cup in her hands, and murmur gently to herself: 'You are very thirsty, poor Péronne, but you shall not drink, for your Saviour asks you not. Would you be so cowardly, for the pain of a little thirst, as to lose the glory of having always obeyed Him?' In this way Marie de Chatel, half unconscious, would talk, dropping continually such beautiful sayings that the Sisters strove with one another to wait upon and stay with her, for she was teaching them, by every word she spoke, some lesson from the school of Christ.

One evening, when two of the Sisters were with her till very late, Mother de Brécharde bade them go to bed, which they did not do until she had repeated the order three times. Marie de Chatel had already received the viaticum from Francis, who had now sent M. Michel Favre to assist her dying mo-

ments. He told Francis of this want of obedience, but not as if it was a matter of moment. The next morning Francis came to give poor Sister de Chatel extreme unction, after which she woke up, looked calmly at the Bishop, then fell asleep again, waking some hours after entirely restored to health. The Bishop, in his usual way, said afterwards a word or two to all the Sisters about the good of prompt obedience, and the two culprits of the night before dropped behind him as he was going downstairs, and they pulled M. Favre by the cloak, whispering, 'You told him, you told him!' The Bishop could not help smiling as he heard them, but he took good care not to look round to see which of the Sisters it was. That same evening this true father wrote this charming little note to Marie de Chatel, which must certainly have done her a great deal of good :

'Courage, in the name of our Lord, my poor and very dear child, Péronne Marie. Let us put ourselves once more in a state of vigour in all things, to begin again to serve our Divine Master in holiness and justice all the days of our life. Keep yourself quietly resting on God, that you may gain strength from His hands, so that when our dear Mother comes home, she may find us all hearty. What would that good Mother have said to us, if while she was away we had let her dear Péronne die?'

He had not told 'Péronne' what we know now, that he had spent the whole of the night before in earnest prayer for her, wrestling through all those hours of darkness, like Jacob with the Angel, that so valued a member of his little flock might be spared. It was not till Christmas eve that Mother de Chantal returned, but when she arrived Marie Péronne was well. She stopped first to see Francis, with whom she had a long conversation, and then went to the Gallery House, where the expectant Sisters could scarcely contain themselves for joy. She had travelled the whole way on horseback, but though much spent and worn, she insisted on taking her full part in the evening office, after which the Sisters said that the psalms and antiphons had never seemed to them so full of sweetness and joy. Mother

de Chantal had been so anxious to go back on account of the first election of the Superior and other officers, and the beginning of the service of the poor. She herself was of course elected Superior, Mother Favre assistant, and Mother de Brécharde novice mistress, an office for which she was peculiarly fitted.

And at last the time had come for active work. Mother Favre knelt down before the Superior, and said in the words appointed, 'Mother, we ask an "obedience" to visit the sick, that at the last Day our Lord may say to us, "I was sick, and ye visited Me."' Mother de Chantal first made choice of some Sisters, and then next day, when grace after dinner had been said, she called them by name and said, 'You, and I with you, will go now on behalf of the house to visit the poor of our Lord, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Then she went to the chapel, received our Lord's blessing before the Blessed Sacrament, put down her veil, and went out. Thus began that service of the sick which Mother de Chantal so much desired and loved. She herself has left behind<sup>1</sup> a statement of the careful, delicate, minute charity shown by the Sisters in their visits to the sick and poor, tending them in all their wants, supplying them with linen, bed-clothes, food, medicines, and enhancing all their gifts by their devoted personal attendance, and watching for opportunities of helping the recovery of their souls as well as their bodies. She speaks in the highest terms of the virtues of humility, patience, resignation, and the like, which the poor and sick they tended learnt to practise; but she has left unchronicled her own heroic patience and mortification during this time, more than one instance of which is related upon the authority of eyewitnesses in the process of her canonization. Now, as before at Bourbilly and Monthelon, she reserved for herself the service of the most repulsive and disgusting cases, 'never having greater contentment than when the sick persons were most infected and covered with sores, saying that she seemed then to be wiping

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires inédites*, quoted by Bougaud, tom. i. p. 515.

the wounds of our Saviour in His Passion.<sup>2</sup> This service of the poor was no sooner thoroughly set on foot than it became evident that their first beloved home, the Gallery House, must be abandoned for a larger, wholesomer, and more central dwelling. This conclusion of course was not arrived at, nor acted upon, in haste; but having well weighed their difficulties, the community bought a large house in the middle of the town, and packing all their furniture into a boat on the lake, by which it could be conveyed more easily than by land carriage, they bade adieu to their first primitive little beehive. Any pilgrim to Annecy, going down to the lake from the town, will still see on his right hand this modest little house, with its narrow windows and mouldering doorway, in which the convent-grate is yet remaining, where the seed of the Visitation Order first took root.

Before turning entirely to 'fresh fields and pastures new,' in the development of the Visitation, we must finish the tale of the Gallery House, which ended only when its first occupants had long entered into their rest. When, in the year 1612, Mother de Chantal found, besides its want of size, that there was something in the house or its situation that was decidedly unwholesome, she sold it rather in haste, and removed her Sisters to their new abode in the town. No sooner was the sale complete, however, than there arose a general regret at having lost the scene of so many circumstances of interest to the Congregation; and offers were made to the purchaser to buy it back again, but in vain. Nearly fifty years elapsed, when, in 1658, Charles Auguste de Sales, then Bishop, with the Sisters of the Visitation of his day—having then, and only then, succeeded in buying back the property—went to the Gallery House, and once more beheld the scenes of their first foundation. There was now remaining only one Sister among them all—Marie Fichet, eighty years old—who had sat in that orchard and walked under those trellises with the two Saints whose holy life had already been recognized by the whole Christian world. Nothing could exceed the joy of this aged

<sup>2</sup> Deposition of Sister Marie Aimée de Sonnaz (Bougaud, tom. i. p. 516). A good many details are given in the passage quoted.

Sister on once more seeing the many spots in the old house and garden which had become almost shrines by the hallowing words and acts of the past. She fell on her knees in all the rooms, kissing the ground wherever she recalled that Mother de Chantal and the Bishop had knelt or stood, and where she remembered words which had borne much fruit of holiness in many souls. Ten days were thus spent by the community in a kind of pilgrimage to these spots, during which the Sisters carefully gathered from the lips of the last eyewitness all that she was able to remember and to relate. It is on this authority that the details of our last chapter rest. And thus it came to pass that the very spot in the orchard where Mother de Chantal knelt in tears after her 'first disobedience' is still marked and cherished by her numerous children.

While the inmates of the new house flourished and multiplied,<sup>3</sup> the growth of their usefulness was stamped by the usual drawbacks and trials. Many people shrugged up their shoulders and said that the Bishop of Geneva wasted his time with these women. Others declared that he had discovered a new way to Heaven, by a path of roses without thorns. Others again called the Congregation the 'Confraternity of the Descent from the Cross,' because the Sisters had taken our Lord off the cross by avoiding suffering. Francis himself, while a window was being walled up in the new house, was told that it was well so, as the undertaking could not bear the light of day. For some time the Bishop opposed to these poisoned arrows only the shield of his own unalterable patience and meekness; but then, according to an unpublished manuscript at Annecy,

<sup>3</sup> It is at this period that M. Bougaud (tom. i. p. 523), if we understand him rightly, places the very alarming illness of Madame de Chantal, which the doctors could not explain, and which gave her and her holy director the occasion to practise the most perfect detachment of will from the designs which they had conceived for the glory of God, the fulfilment of which seemed likely to be entirely prevented if she were to die. St. Francis made his prayer, he tells a friend, for ten or twelve days consecutively on the words *Fiat voluntas tua*. Madame de Chantal, however, recovered. But if the date of the letter quoted by M. Bougaud (p. 523) is correctly given as April 3, 1611, the illness must have taken place before the transfer of the Sisters from the Gallery House.

he wrote one of his full and dignified expositions on the benefits of various kinds of pious congregations of women, which went far towards enlightening many minds to the truth.<sup>4</sup> A circumstance occurred about the same time which farther showed the true spirit of Mother de Chantal and her adviser. A rich lady of Annecy, who had at her own desire been visited in her sickness by the Sisters, died, and left all her property to the community. Her relations allowed the convent to bury her honourably, and then raised a cry for the nullification of the will. Francis advised Mother de Chantal, though the case seemed quite in her favour, to resign all her rights to the inheritance. At the same time the community continued to have masses said for the intention of the lady, as the will required; and as the Sisters were then exceedingly poor, and even in want, their disinterested charity and love of peace made the greatest impression upon the whole town.

The following year (1613) the old Baron de Chantal, now eighty-four years old, died at Monthelon. In his last hours the Franciscan tertiary, left by Mother de Chantal to watch over him, of whom mention was made in a former page, prevailed on him to repair the scandal he had given, and die like a good Christian. Once more, therefore, Mother de Chantal was obliged to leave her convent to look after her children's property and affairs. Celse Bénigne went to Annecy to fetch her, and after taking Françoise to her sister's, he and Bernard de Thorens took charge of his mother and Mother Chatel to Monthelon. The housekeeper who had brought such misery on the family of course expected that she should now meet with some of the punishment she so richly deserved, and was waiting trembling in the hall; but to her infinite amazement, Mother de Chantal stepped forward, embraced her kindly, and asked for all the details she could give of the baron's last days and death. The wretched woman, though at times bitterly humbled and abashed, still assumed various airs of authority and importance, which made Bernard so angry that he could scarcely restrain his tongue; but Mother de

<sup>4</sup> This work has never been published, and seems to be lost.



Chantal laughed at him, and calmed his indignation by sometimes saying, 'Patience, patience! this is nothing at all to what I went through when my father in law was alive.'

The poor old baron had left his affairs in great confusion. Many of the tenants had not paid their rents for years; others had paid them in part; and the accounts, memorandums and books were one mass of chaotic disorder. As soon as mass was over in the morning, Mother de Chantal therefore established herself in the great hall, where she received all the tenants and country people, going through with them the books and their own confused and disjointed papers. Some of them behaved very rudely and insolently; some were extremely stupid; and the whole matter cost her very great pains and trouble; but neither her son nor Bernard ever heard her utter an impatient word, or even raise her voice the least beyond its ordinary sweet dear tones. One of the tenants who had been closely allied with the housekeeper was one day exceedingly insulting, accusing Mother de Chantal of having torn out a page from one of the account books. The servant had promised to put him down as having paid all his accounts, and had omitted to do so. When Bernard de Thorens threatened to strike the man with his cane, Mother de Chantal caught his arm as it was about to descend, and said, 'My dear son, God forgives us much more than that.' She then signed a little cross upon the angry peasant's forehead, saying at the same time, 'Come, my good friend, a little honesty.' The man's face immediately changed, and he knelt down and begged pardon for all he had said, as well as forgiveness for his debt. In this and other cases Mother de Chantal thought it best freely to forgive the tenants' dues for the years that were gone, and by dint of great patience, gentleness and incessant toil, she at length succeeded in unravelling the whole web, and set everything upon the property straight and in order. Throughout all these arrangements she never mentioned herself in any way, always saying, 'You owe my children so much,' 'My son forgives you so many years' rent,' &c. She rode from Monthelon to Bourbilly in the day, and dispatched business there in the

same way for her son ; and as he was too young to live there yet, she thought it better to sell such of the furniture as damp and disuse were likely to spoil, and to shut up the whole of the castle but a few furnished rooms, which could easily be kept in order. She then made choice of proper responsible stewards for the three castles of Bourbilly, Monthelon, and Thotes, and went back to Annecy after an absence of six busy weeks.

The toil and ceaseless moving, during the hot summer weather, of these weeks told severely upon her health, and the next thing that occurred was a low fever, which brought her to the brink of the grave. Francis de Sales, much grieved, sent for the relics of St. Blaise, and having prayed earnestly beside her for some time, applied the relics to Mother de Chantal, when the fever instantly left her, and she felt herself cured. Sister Fichet was then heard audibly murmuring to herself, 'What was the use of going to Armenia to look for a saint belonging to the fourth century? His lordship could have cured our Mother very well himself without any relics.' It happened that Francis overheard these words, when, colouring crimson, he sharply reprov'd her, and gave poor Sister Fichet as a penance to fast on the eve of St. Blaise's feast for three years.

The Bishop had now set his mind upon building an entirely new convent for the Sisters. The house they had bought threatened soon to overflow with inmates ; and besides this reason he justly thought that no mere dwelling house could ever supply the want of a convent, built with design, and according to the spirit and occupations of the nuns who were to inhabit it. And in those days, still so near to the stormy times of the Middle Ages, and full of the disastrous results of war, every convent had its protector, who was bound to guard it against insult and spoliation. The choice of a protector for the Visitation fell upon the Duchess Margaret of Mantua, the Infanta or princess royal of Savoy. Not only did she accept the offer, but the Duke himself, Charles Emmanuel, wrote letters expressing his approbation and interest in the congregation, while the Duke de Nemours<sup>5</sup> gave up to Francis de

<sup>5</sup> Henry of Savoy, the Duke de Nemours and Geneva.

Sales a large piece of ground for the building of the new convent. The first stone of the convent of Annecy was laid in 1614, and the Duchess Margaret sent the Sisters a splendid processional cross of rock crystal and precious stones, as her gift for the occasion.

A most extraordinary and perhaps not altogether natural animosity sprang up at Annecy while the convent was building. Sometimes the workmen were pelted with stones and obliged to leave off work ; sometimes they found all their tools stolen, and the work they had finished the day before taken down again ; sometimes the bricks and stones or lime were scattered far and wide ; and sometimes the banks of the water course were wickedly loosened, so as to make the canal overflow. One day Francis himself was sent for to speak to a man who was cutting down the embankment stakes with an axe. The Bishop accordingly went down and bade the man desist ; but as he paid no attention to his gentle and persuasive words, Francis took hold of the axe, and with that extraordinary dignity he knew so well how to assume when needful, he told him that he should soon know what it was to despise the Bishop's authority. The man actually trembled as he looked up at the majestic face, and ran away as fast as he could, very much ashamed. In spite of all obstacles, however, the convent was finished in due time ; and as it had the blessing for thirty-one years of Mother de Chantal's guidance, and was constantly watched by Francis himself for ten, this convent was always called 'the Holy Source,'<sup>6</sup> and was looked upon as the mother house of the true spirit and traditions of the order.<sup>7</sup> Here too the bodies of the great Bishop and Mother de Chantal take their earthly rest ; and the many pilgrims to Annecy are still amazed at the perfect preservation in which they remain.

One morning, soon after the convent had been fully established, a travelling carriage full of ladies was seen stopping at the gates. One of them seemed a nun of some sort ; the others wore the pectoral crosses and the muffled head-dresses which

<sup>6</sup> *La Sainte Source.*

<sup>7</sup> The Visitation convents are all separate in government.

were then worn by all widows. The nun was Madame de Gouffier, belonging to the abbey of the Paraclete, where either the discipline was relaxed or the order dying out. Those dressed as widows were Madame d'Auxerre, Madame Chaudon, whose husband had become a Capuchin, and Madame Colin, who had had a kind of vision of a new order of nuns in habits she had never seen. Madame de Gouffier had been led to correspond with St. Francis by reading his book of the *Devout Life*, and had asked his permission to visit the convent which he had founded.

It chanced that a very young Sister, Claude Roget, just eighteen, was dying in the infirmary at that time; for, according to the quaint simple words of one of the old chronicles of the Annecy foundation, these faithful souls 'had besought their Beloved to walk in His garden and visit His spices; and this Divine Bridegroom had gathered out of it for Himself a little flower,' namely, Claude Roget, as aforesaid. This sweet little nun lay as bright and smiling upon her deathbed, as if she were enjoying the fulness of health and life; and the visitors were so struck at this unusual sight, that Madame d'Auxerre then and there declared her intention of joining a community for which death had no terrors. Her companions followed her example; and when Francis de Sales came to see them, they all told him it was their intention to become Sisters of the Visitation. After questioning them very closely and at considerable length, he heard from Madame de Gouffier that the only things she disliked in the convent were the earthenware mugs and wooden spoons, and that the Sisters had no sugar in their rice or milk. The Bishop, whose own exceeding refinement helped him to enter thoroughly into the tastes and inclinations of the upper classes, considered that, as the mortification he had laid down for the Visitation was chiefly interior, he should change this custom, and introduced a clause in the Rule which allowed of silver spoons, adverting to the fact of St. Augustine's example. He had the mugs also replaced by pewter cups. But as to the sugar, he did not think it necessary to provide any, unless it were ordered by the doctor for special reasons.

These visitors, having seen and heard all they could, returned to Lyons, intending immediately to found a Visitation convent there. But here they had reckoned without their host; for some good folk at Lyons thought that their own Archbishop, Cardinal de Marquemont, could found an order as well as Monseigneur de Genève, and that Madame d'Auxerre was as good for the first stone of such an edifice as Madame de Chantal. The new congregation was called that of the Presentation. The house was opened with great pomp and a vast crowd of witnesses at Lyons, with Madame d'Auxerre as Superior. But the new institute did not succeed; there was division among the inmates. Madame de Gouffier, on her way back to the Paraclete, passed through Lyons and visited her friends, and then Madame d'Auxerre with many tears entreated her to write to Francis de Sales and beseech him to forgive her folly, and send some of his Sisters to Lyons. The nuns at the same time petitioned the Cardinal to allow of this change, and he wrote to Francis himself and asked him to take the matter of this Lyons foundation in hand.<sup>8</sup> It was settled therefore that Mother de Chantal should go herself to Lyons, and take with her Mother Favre, Péronne Marie de Chatel, and Marie de Blonay, who with Madame de Gouffier, already a novice at Annecy, were to found the new community. The party were conveyed in some state in a large travelling carriage by the vicar general of Lyons, and Francis accompanied the carriage to the suburbs of Annecy, giving them his fullest blessing, and showering on them such kind and fatherly words that the Sisters who were having his protection could not control their sobs and tears.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It was found, about the same time, that when the royal 'letters,' for which Cardinal de Marquemont applied, arrived from Paris, the name of the new institute had been uniformly written as of the Visitation instead of the Presentation.

<sup>9</sup> On the way a very extraordinary thing is said to have happened. They were obliged to sleep one night on the road, and the Sisters were sitting round the stove at the inn, in which a bar of iron was heating for some purpose not named. It suddenly occurred to the vicar general to test the obedience of these unknown Sisters; and looking at Péronne, he told her to take the iron out of the fire in her bare hand. She immediately obeyed; and to his amazement and almost terror he saw the glowing bar

The foundation of the convent at Lyons was the turning point in the history of the Order of the Visitation. It opened France to the religious Sisters whom St. Francis and St. Jane Frances had gathered together; and they were destined to take root and flourish in that great kingdom more than in any other part of the Christian world. But this access to a sphere so far wider than that which was offered to them by the single diocese of Geneva, beyond which it was not the original idea that the congregation should extend, involved also, either of necessity or on account of the strong opinions and inflexible character of Cardinal de Marquemont, a change in the plan and design of the new institute, which was little short of fundamental. If the convent at Lyons was not to be the cradle of a new order, it was at all events to modify profoundly the congregation which it received with open arms. There were, in fact, several features in the plan of St. Francis which were innovations or, at least, returns to a system as to religious women which had anciently existed, but which had been abolished in the fourteenth century by Boniface VIII. Since his time all religious women had been strictly cloistered. Cardinal de Marquemont at once saw the innovation which had been introduced at Annecy, the retention of which would certainly prevent the institute from becoming an order under solemn vows. He forbade the Sisters to visit the poor, and ordered them to observe cloister strictly. In the course of the year 1615, visits were interchanged between the Archbishop of Lyons and the Bishop of Geneva, in which the principles of the question under discussion were canvassed; and there exists in the archives of Annecy a long memoir drawn up by the Archbishop, in which he goes through his objections, especially to the proposal of retaining the character of a simple congregation for the institute. He argues that as long as that character was retained, the Holy See could not approve of it as an

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of iron grasped in her delicate hand. 'Drop it, Sister!' he then exclaimed; 'drop it directly, that will do!' and she put it gently back into the stove. He bade her open her hand, and, according to the account chronicled of the Lyons foundation, there was not a mark upon it.



order; the vows would remain simple, so that any one leaving the congregation might validly marry, and that innumerable legal inconveniences would follow from this. Moreover, parents would not consent to send their daughters into convents of a simple congregation. This point of the solemnity of the vow being conceded, it would be impossible to avoid insisting on the strictest enclosure. Then, as to the subjects to be admitted, Monseigneur de Marquemont readily accepted the idea that they might be persons who, from age or weakness, might not be able to endure the rigours of the elder religious orders; but he objected to the admission of widows, who might have frequently to leave their convents on account of family business. He urged that even the name of Visitation should be changed to that of Presentation. If the congregation remained what it was, and was not to be erected into an order, he proposed certain modifications, the chief of which was that no vow but that of chastity should be made in public.

These views were certainly very much in accordance with the spirit of the times, though the practice of the Church since the beginning of the seventeenth century makes them appear to us in many respects obsolete. It must be remembered, also, that the visitation of the poor and sick was not the primary end of this institute of the Visitation, and had been taken up rather as an exercise of devotion. When such works of charity came to be made the object of a special institute by St. Vincent of Paul, the rule which he gave to the Filles de la Charité was far more unlike that of the older orders than was the rule of the Visitation as drawn up by St. Francis of Sales. The Bishop of Geneva was, however, at first, strongly opposed both to the erection into an order and to the introduction of the enclosure. He confided Monseigneur de Marquemont's objections to Cardinal Bellarmine, and received from that sagacious and prudent counsellor the advice to hold fast to his original plan. Bellarmine quoted the example of the nuns of the Tor de' Specchi at Rome, the Oblates of St. Francesca Romana, who had no enclosure and made no solemn profession. Nevertheless, Francis de Sales gave way, and his pliant humility

has given to the Church the Order of the Visitation, the nursing mother of hundreds of saints, in the beautiful form in which it has existed ever since. The memoir still exists in which he answered the considerations urged by the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons. After establishing the perfectly legitimate character of all that had been done at Annecy, he at last conceded that the Visitation should be erected as a simple congregation, with the perpetual enclosure required by the Council of Trent, making, however, a stipulation for the entrance of girls for the purpose of instruction, as well as of women who might wish to make retreats. He urged the retention of the name of the Visitation, which the Cardinal had wished to change, and finally yielded the point as to making the congregation into an order under the rule of St. Augustine. He wrote at the same time to the Mère Favre, the Superior at Lyons, telling her that he gave way with a feeling of happiness and tranquillity, and even a sweet pleasure quite unexampled, and that not his will alone, but his judgment had been well content to do due homage to that of so great and worthy a prelate as Monseigneur de Marquemont.

Francis had sent the memorial of the Archbishop to Mother de Chantal, but her judgment had been decidedly in favour of remaining as they were. She wrote letter after letter to Francis, urging him in the strongest terms to stand his ground and not to yield to the Cardinal's influence. One of her pregnant vigorous notes will convey a good idea of the immense loss sustained by the destruction of her letters.

‘My very dear Father, I have just heard that a man is going to Lyons tomorrow. I beg of you, if you can, to write a word to the Archbishop in strong ink; for it seems to me that this matter is so important to the house that it ought to be well weighed. My dearest Father will say that I am always (over) eager. Ah, certainly I should be heartily eager in this matter if I could do any good!’

Whatever Mother de Chantal may naturally have felt, having so clearly expressed her opinion that the Archbishop of Lyons took a mistaken view of their institute, she cheerfully

followed in the footsteps of her guide. It must have been no small sacrifice for that noble woman, so full of masculine energy and administrative power, to see her active work cut off, and her relations with her poor neighbours restricted; but she made it with the same fortitude with which she had formerly undergone so much suffering and spent so many hours in wearisome business in her Burgundian homes. The decision seems to have been made in 1617. It was received, we are told, with great enthusiasm by the public, and vocations became at once plentiful, as well as demands for convents of the new order in various cities of France. This year and the next were spent by Francis and Mother de Chantal in carefully drawing up the Constitutions. A great part of this time she spent in bed, or suffering from such weakness and incapacity that she could not carry out her usual life. Perhaps this wearisome affliction was sent her that her impetuous natural activity might be chastened and purified, for not only her body and mind, but her mode of prayer also, became changed. Her whole being seemed to remain wrapt and passive in God. She passed into what is called the prayer of quietude, and this change, about which she consulted her director, drew from him some of his most beautiful letters on spiritual subjects. Once when on a journey, she became absorbed in a kind of ecstasy, and then made that same vow, 'always to do what was most perfect in the sight of God,' from which St. Teresa was obliged to be released; and this vow Mother de Chantal is said to have kept without sensible fault for thirty years before she died. After convincing himself of the certainty of the solid progress she had made in the science of prayer, Francis drew up for her use and that of the more advanced Sisters, his famous treatise *Of the Love of God*.

A special interest is attached to this great work,—which, as he told Mother de Chantal in confidence, was written expressly for her,<sup>10</sup>—inasmuch as many of the examples given in it were facts known to himself of various Sisters of the Visitation,

<sup>10</sup> 'Le livre de *l'Amour de Dieu*, ma chère fille, est fait particulièrement pour vous.' Quoted by Bougaud, t. i. p. 646.

and thus the book *Of the Love of God* forms a part of their story. Mother Anne Marie Rosset herself furnished the instances of the sixth, seventh, and eighth books; Mother de la Roche was his example when treating of ecstasy; Mother de Chatel of the joys of innocent souls; Mother Favre of terrible interior trial and desolation. He reproduced largely the letters he had written, and the advice given by him, to Mother de Chantal, who had incessantly stirred him up to the labour of writing the book, and to whose petitions and perpetual urging it is in large part due. This celebrated treatise cost Francis de Sales every leisure moment of the year 1616 and part of 1617, and he himself said that for a few lines of it he had sometimes been obliged to read twelve hundred folio pages. After mentioning the names of St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, Denis the Carthusian, St. Catharine of Genoa and St. Catharine of Siena, Louis of Granada, Cardinal Bellarmine, and St. Teresa, Francis could not refrain from saying that it was a little congregation of devout women at Annecy to whom he owed a good part of his book, and especially to the Mother who conducted them, 'for whose soul,' he said, 'as I had that esteem which God knows, she had no small power to stir up mine on this occasion.' It was remarked that after writing the *Devout Life*, the Bishop's friends begged him to write no more, lest he should lower the effect of that excellent work by not writing so well again. But after the book *Of the Love of God*, he was besieged by petitions to write continually, and all Europe raised one voice of admiring praise.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### *Death of Bernard and Marie Aymée de Sales. 1617.*

THE happy labour of drawing up the Visitation rules, and otherwise arranging for the preservation of its spirit, was broken in on by a double calamity, which struck down the Bishop and Mother de Chantal with the same blow. War had broken out between France and Spain, and a complication of political troubles agitated the court of Savoy, and disturbed the peace of the Château de Sales, where, as our readers will not have forgotten, we left Marie Aymée learning to fulfil to the utmost the part of a Christian wife.

Bernard de Sales was often summoned to the court of Savoy, or called upon to command his regiment wherever it was ordered into the field; and when he was absent on either of these duties Marie Aymée immediately went to the Gallery House to her mother and Sister Paule Jerome. She had always loved this nun, says an old ms., 'like her own heart;' but now she never related to her worldly news, foolish gossip, or frivolous tales. When in the convent Marie Aymée always opened her mind fully either to her mother or to this guardian angel friend, and as a means of humbling and subjecting her lower nature she used as much corporal austerity as she was allowed. It was well for her that the bright colours with which youth and her own joyous rich nature had invested this world, now took their real more sober hues, for troubles were close at hand, and life soon became to Marie Aymée the trial ground which was to purify her for Heaven. Francis had written to her, and sent a beautiful prayer fit for women in her condition, imploring a special blessing on the new soul soon to be launched into the world, that it might never lose the merit of Christ's Passion, nor be banished

from the kingdom of Heaven ; and this prayer the baroness said every day. But in spite of this, and of the many fervent prayers said for her, this long looked for birth did not take place, and she was not this time to know a mother's joy. At the same time her own health, which was already delicate, became very bad, and at the early age of seventeen the baroness thought it right to make her will and every preparation for death. She was reserved, however, for other sufferings and sorrows, and in little more than a year gave birth to a child which died directly after it was baptized. It was with a saddened heart and shattered health, therefore, that Marie Aymée now entered upon a new era of trial, during which her brothers and her beloved Bishop and guide drank to the very lees of the bitter cup of calumny, misrepresentation, and the hatred of those who were best able to wound and injure their reputation and usefulness. The cause of these troubles was the ambition of the count, afterwards duke, of Geneva, Henry de Nemours, who succeeded his brother Charles Emmanuel and his father James, whose marriage with Anne d'Este, the widow of Francis of Lorraine, had involved him in all the intrigues and turmoil of the League wars. James seems to have bequeathed both his ambition and his warlike unrest to Henry, who was first neutral between the King of France and the Duke of Savoy, and then rebelled against the latter, his liege lord and cousin. During the intrigues and jealousies of these little Duchies, Francis de Sales became the subject of endless suspicion to both parties, the Duke of Savoy probably laying the fact of his cousin's neutrality at the Bishop's door. One after another the four brothers De Sales were accused and calumniated, threatened with imprisonment, and held up to the country as traitors, leagued with France, and false to their own government and rulers. In the end Francis wrote very brave and noble refutations of all that had been said to the two dukes, and soon afterwards the real traitor, who was the Duke of Geneva himself, was unmasked. He borrowed bodies of troops from France, and tried to wrest Savoy from the duke, who then clearly perceived how much he had been duped by his cousin. In order more speedily to put



down the insurrection and clear the valleys of these invaders, he went himself to Annecy, where he took up his abode with Francis de Sales, loaded him and his brothers with thanks and favours, and cleared them in the face of all the neighbourhood from the false accusations of treachery and sedition to which they had been subjected. In this train came also Bernard de Sales, who was able to remain at the castle for several months, and, with Marie Aymée, welcomed the restoration of peace and thoroughly enjoyed their time of rest.

It was a beautiful spring, and the return of the warm sunshine to the deep and sequestered valleys about the castle had just called forth the troops of flowers which fringe the Alpine rocks at this season. The ground was sown with pink and blue and white stars and bells, the runnels of ice-cold water leapt from rock to rock, the call of the herdsmen answered the bells of their cattle, and all that most solemn and glorious beauty of the Alpine spring shone more radiant under the deep blue sky. It was exactly seven years since that other never to be forgotten spring of 1610, when Bernard de Sales had first brought home his girlish bride; and as they now wandered here and there, enjoying their unlooked-for holiday after so many trials, it seemed to them that they had slipped back again to that same childlike happiness, and were enjoying it all over once more with the added zest of repose from care and pain. It was another instance of those islands in life—those brief sojourns by the palm-tree and the spring—which are vouchsafed in mercy to all those best beloved of God who must win their crown through much battle and sorrow.

It was, in truth, a brief sojourn. The French king suddenly withdrew his support from Charles Emmanuel,<sup>1</sup> and when the 4,000 men he had contributed were ordered back to Dauphiné the duke was obliged to summon every soldier he could muster to arms. Bernard de Sales was one of the first to receive this mandate, and for the first time in his life he felt sad and reluctant to go. He and his wife drove to Annecy together, holding one another by the hand, and as the carriage took them

<sup>1</sup> Charles Emmanuel I.

farther and farther from their beloved castle, they often looked back to the mountain peaks and green slopes where they had lately wandered, and where they had lived so happily together, but which they both now felt sure they should never see together again. At Annecy, while Bernard was collecting, arming, and drilling his men, all in like manner to be recalled from their occupations and homes, Marie Aymée spent her time before the altar, imploring the safe return of her husband. But in vain she seemed to beseech, or to hope to be heard. The word *hope* seemed to be changed for her into *resignation*.

Bernard's will is dated May 5, 1617, and it is soldierlike and short. In it he orders that his body shall be buried in whatever parish he may happen to fall, and leaves a small yearly sum to his dear wife, begging her to remember that she is already in possession of much of his property, and that he is bound to leave some provision for his heir, who, failing children of his own, would be his brother, Louis de Sales. The moment of their separation was so bitter that it foreshadowed completely that of death. They promised one another solemnly to live so as to meet in Heaven. Marie Aymée told her husband that if he died in battle she should consecrate herself to God in her mother's convent, and then, tearing herself from his agonized clasp, she was taken to the Gallery House, where she lay before the altar in the chapel more dead than alive. She spent the next few days in prayers and tears, constantly imploring that her husband might be spared and return, but scarcely once hoping that her prayer would be heard.

This was the office and lot of the wife. The husband, happy in being able to plunge immediately into action, was trampling his grief into the snows of the Alpine pass, across which he had to lead his troops. The Spanish army had already invested Vercelli, which Charles Emmanuel was defending with the most brilliant courage and skill. The summer heats that year came on early. There was a want of provisions and water, and Bernard, accustomed to breathe the purest mountain air, felt oppressed by the crowded quarters and fetid atmosphere of the camp and plains. Sickness broke out and rapidly spread, and

Bernard was one of the first attacked by malignant fever, when, being given up by the doctors of the army, one of his brothers had him carried to Turin, where they hoped that better remedies and air might save his life. His only thought, however, was how to die. He sent for a Barnabite monk, Dom Guérin, a friend of Francis de Sales, made his confession, and acknowledged that it seemed most hard and bitter to be so soon divided from his beloved wife. The kind monk shed many tears with him over his sad and early death, but begged of Bernard to make the sacrifice of his dear and matchless wife courageously, and to look forward to being with her for ever in Heaven. Bernard had also one other sacrifice to offer. He had ever been reckoned one of the bravest and most efficient officers in Charles Emmanuel's army, and now he knew that he should not die like a soldier, fighting for his country on the glorious battle field, but must give up his life like a sick woman in bed. But this last fiery natural impulse was also faced and fully overcome. Distinctly uttering the words of his sacrifice, Bernard de Sales resigned his beloved wife, renounced his early and intense desire to die gloriously in battle, and offering to God his bright happy life of thirty-four years and the humiliations of its inglorious end, he calmly implored a blessing on his young wife and sent her a message, and having received the last sacraments, he died without pain, 'like a young Saint among the soldiers,' as Francis de Sales said. He was buried with great state in the church of the Barnabites; but his noblest sepulchre was in his wife's heart, where he was embalmed with the most loving resignation and tears.

When the news was brought to Annecy, Francis de Sales would not let Marie Aymée know it that night, but in the morning he bade her come to confession, and after she had finished he said to her,

'Well, now, my dear child, have you put yourself entirely in God's hands?'

She replied, 'Yes, my lord, absolutely.'

'And are you not then eager to receive from His holy and blessed hands anything it pleases Him to send?'

‘Yes, my lord and father :’ then stopping short she added, ‘Ah, you are going to tell me that my dear husband is dead !’

The Bishop tenderly replied that it was so ; and he heard this sweet wife reply,

‘Ah, my Lord and my God, hast Thou taken away my dear husband? What wilt Thou that I should do?’

The admirable and tender-hearted Bishop knew well that our Lord Himself would be her best Comforter, and only saying a few sweet and gentle words, he told her that he was going now to celebrate mass for the departed, and to give her communion, which was the only balm for that wounded soul, and which comforted and soothed her very much. She remained during mass in the sacristy, and the kind and sympathizing nuns, who were weeping and praying with her in the chapel, have recorded some of her words, as she spoke as if face to face with our Lord, and with her usual childlike transparent openness, made all her complaint to Him Who alone could wound and heal her. When we read these loving complaints we are reminded of the fragrance of rich gums or spices, which, when distilled or bruised, fill the whole air about them with odour. ‘O my Lord and my only Good, what is this that Thou hast done unto me? Thou hast cruelly pierced my poor faint heart with a deep wound ; pour into it the healing oil of Thy grace. I submit myself wholly to Thy Divine will, and would rather die a thousand deaths than say or think anything displeasing to Thee. Thou art my Comfort and my true Good ; therefore, in spite of my great grief, I declare to Thee that I am Thine wholly, Thine only, and that Thou mayest cut, bruise, and do with me as Thou wilt, only give me strength to bear it, for it is as the agony of death.’ Sometimes she would fold her arms, look up to Heaven, and say, ‘Ah, my dear Lord, my heart is beside itself with anguish. In Thy fatherly goodness shield me in this storm of grief.’ And once she uttered these most touching words, ‘O my Lord and my only Good, grant me, Thy most unworthy servant, not to complain of Thee, but of myself, for it is my sins that have brought this flood of grief upon my poor desolate soul.’

She was taken into the nuns' choir to receive communion, where she also made secretly a vow of perpetual chastity, and after her thanksgiving was gently led away to her bed, where she remained the whole day, making acts of love, thanksgiving and submission, and being in all things the gentlest, sweetest and most docile mourner that can ever be imagined. Nothing kept her alive in her great sorrow but the life which she was to bring forth, and the thought of her child also prevented her from receiving the Visitation habit, which seemed now her only remaining wish. This also was granted her, but not as she had thought.

After about three months had glided by, the pains of premature childbirth fell suddenly upon the little Baroness de Thorens, and as it was then impossible to move her to the house prepared for her in the town, the nuns wisely put aside all their own habits and feelings about the matter, and sent for the nurses that were necessary, and for one or two experienced married ladies who were often at the convent. In the middle of the night, therefore, a beautiful little boy was born, who, like his sister, had time to be baptized, and was then carried away to eternal rest. His mother, rejoicing to hear that a son was born to her, seemed to return to life; but when they said to her, 'You have brought an angel into the world,' she quickly understood, and said she was glad, for he would have forced her to remain in the world, but that now she could be a nun without hindrance.

But the time of her brief and beautiful life was to end with another sacrifice, and as sudden and sharp illness soon set in, Marie Aymée knew that she must put her house in order, and go forth with her lamp well trimmed to meet the Bridegroom. She sent for Madame de Chantal, and arranged her affairs in such a way as that her husband's family should not be burdened at her death. Soon after that she became worse, and Francis was sent for. The news of all that had occurred grieved the tender-hearted Bishop very much, for he dearly loved this dear little sister, so early widowed, who was also his child and charge. He brought with him several priests,

who were deeply moved at the courage and devotion of the dying girl. The Bishop asked her, in his usual way, if she was ready to say, 'Live Jesus!' She replied, 'Yes, my lord,' and also added, 'Whose death showed the strength of His love.' He asked her again if she would make her confession. 'Ah, yes,' she eagerly replied, 'I shall be glad. I wish it.' And joining her hands, she immediately began to make her examen of conscience. After the viaticum, Marie Aymée asked her mother to grant her one favour, which was to receive the habit of a novice; and very humbly turning to the Bishop, she begged of him not to think of her sins and misery, but rather of the charity and mercy of God. The Bishop replied that the nuns would be exceedingly glad to give her the habit; and when everything was hastily made ready, he invested her with the novice's habit, and then gave her extreme unction.

Marie Aymée had by that time become perfectly calm and joyful, and asked if she might beg one more grace—that of making her three vows and her profession as a Visitation nun; and as all the community joined with Madame de Chantal in giving consent, the Bishop clothed her with the black veil and received her vows, which she pronounced in a sweet clear voice with great fervour. And now, having nothing farther to desire, she only made ready to depart in peace with extraordinary joy, saying, 'O my Jesus, my King, my Spouse, Thou art all mine, and I am all Thine, for ever and ever!'

Very sharp and cruel pains seized and racked her feeble and failing frame, and in spite of her resolution and courage she could not help crying out aloud. Francis, wishing to give her the merit of one more final sacrifice, asked her if she were ready to bear those pains till the last day if such were the will of God. Marie Aymée instantly replied that she was ready to bear, not only those, but any other pains that God might send, for she was His alone and altogether. Those who were looking on about her bed, while weeping and sobbing gently at the thought that their beloved little sister was leaving them while still a child, saw with delight that her fair face was lit up with a heavenly radiance, and that the Divine peace seemed



already stamping its own seal upon that spotless childlike brow. Towards the early dawn Marie Aymée spoke once more, saying gently, 'Here is death; now I must make ready to go.' Then, pronouncing in a clear sweet voice, 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!' she looked up once towards Heaven, and went to her rest.

This beautiful life, let it never be forgotten, had lasted but a little more than nineteen years. During that time Marie Aymée de Chantal had become a wife, a mother, a widow, and a nun, and also, as we may truly believe, a person of ripe sanctity and much beloved of God. The flower cultivated and tended with such extreme care was early gathered and removed out of sight, but it was transplanted to that 'garden enclosed,' in which the Lord of pure souls and little children takes eternal delight.

In following this short, bright course of spiritual growth, we sometimes fancy we are looking at a picture, sometimes as if reading a poem, yet still convinced throughout that the chronicle is genuine and vitally true. In turning from this deathbed of Marie Aymée, the well-beloved, we think of Galahad's crowning,

And straight beyond the star  
I saw the spiritual city and all her spires  
And gateways in a glory like one pearl;

and feel, with Sir Percivale, that returning 'across the ridge' to common life and every day characters is but flat and weary work. The crown, however, does not come so speedily to all, and for the ordinary run of even devout people we must be content to follow their course as it was, onward or backward, now here, now there; sometimes victorious, other whiles wandering and bewildered; sometimes fed with manna from heaven, at other times hungering and thirsting in the rock-bound desert; which is the exact history of so great a multitude of souls in their journey through life.

## CHAPTER XIV.

*New Foundations. Paris. Angélique Arnauld.*

1617-1619.

It was, no doubt, well for Mother de Chantal that the special toils of her vocation now began to multiply on all sides. The rapidity with which the young lives, so full of promise, of Bernard de Sales and his wife had been cut short, afflicted her with no common sorrow: nor was hers a character to throw off the grief of losses which pierced her to the heart. It was therefore most opportune that a third swarm left the mother hive at Annecy that same year of 1617, and that Mother de Bréchar, who conducted it, met with numerous difficulties and hindrances in establishing the foundation at Moulins. Great interest had been made with Francis de Sales to induce him to allow the Sisters to settle there; but when the townsfolk found that Mother de Chantal was not there herself, and that the Superior was a person whose very name was unknown to them, they began to cool down, and left the poor nuns in such poverty, that they were often actually in want of bread. When the year's rent became due, there was no money wherewith to pay it, until Madame de Gouffier, their patroness, induced two other ladies to pledge their jewels in order to raise the necessary sum. Soon afterwards the Moulinese began to discern Mother de Bréchar's character, and after an interval of suffering, as usual patiently borne, the tide turned, and help and postulants began to abound. Among these was Héléne de Chastelluz, of an ancient and noble family, who, like so many other girls of high station at that time, had been brought up in an abbey, to which she was to succeed. Twice Mademoiselle de Chastelluz was driven away by the cabals of the provi-

sional abbess to live with her relations, and the second time she was nursing her sister who lived near Monthelon. There Madame de Chantal saw and induced her to return at all costs to the practice of the counsels. A few years afterwards the Visitation had sprung into life ; and when Mother de Brécharde went to Moulins to found the third convent of the order, this heroic girl laid down her crosier as abbess, left one of the richest abbeys in France, and having entered as a humble novice in the poor little convent just then beginning, brought to it not only the support of a great family and a wealthy dowry, but also the far greater riches of eminent religious virtue.

After Moulins, convents were founded at Grenoble and Bourges, and from Bourges Francis de Sales summoned Mother de Chantal to Paris, to see what prospect there was of settling in that seething caldron some little refuge of peace.<sup>1</sup> In every sense Paris might then be called the centre of the conflict raging in Europe ; and while sin and evil of all kind abounded, valiant warriors of the Cross were continually going down, like Homer's heroes, into the fight, and rescuing many from destruction and death. M. Pierre de Bérulle and his priests, Father Condren, St. Vincent de Paul, with a noble company of helpers, were all striving to establish active and lasting good works, and now, for the first time, Francis de Sales joined himself to the rest. But, as usual, jealousies sprang up, and even the religious communities of long standing joined in the cry against the 'innovations' of the Bishop of Geneva. Among other eminent persons in the religious world of Paris with whom Mother de Chantal became acquainted, was the celebrated Angélique Arnauld, the abbess of Port Royal, who very early fell under the double attraction of Francis de Sales and his spiritual daughter, and thought of leaving her own abbey and its command for obedience among the Sisters of the Visitation. She wrote to Mother de Chantal that people came to her with strange stories of the new institute, contemptuously

<sup>1</sup> The account of the Paris foundation was written by St. Jane Frances herself, and it is from this narrative that Bougaud quotes.

saying that people joined it to take their ease and be comfortable. 'People tell me,' she goes on, 'that if I join it, I shall lose what reputation I have. I reply gently that your rule was drawn up by the greatest Doctor of the Church (St. Augustine), and your Constitutions by a great and holy Bishop, and that they cannot but be good. But to those who tell me that each (Sister) is asked every morning what she would like for dinner, I abruptly say that it is not the least true.' It was not long before Francis de Sales gave Mother de Chantal the key to these malicious whispers. 'Would you believe,' he one day wrote to her, 'that some good people told me today that the sweetness and piety of our institute so exactly suit the French taste that you would take away the vogue of all other convents; and that as soon as people have once seen this Madame de Chantal, they would not care for any one else?' All kinds of underhand intriguing went on to hinder Cardinal de Retz from allowing a convent of the Visitation to be established in Paris. Some of the clergy advised that Mother de Chantal should be asked to contribute a large sum for another religious house, as a condition for her own foundation; others, that she should be obliged to take charge of fallen women. 'If not, she must go,' said the religious who made the proposition. 'Then, father,' replied this meek but valiant-hearted woman, 'we will go, rather than make a breach in our congregation. We came in obedience, and in obedience we will go away again.' She said this with such real lowliness, that he asked her if she had made a vow of humility. 'Ah,' said Mother de Chantal, smiling, 'I would to God we were able to practise humility as a fourth vow !'

After three weeks of agitation and tumult about the affair, Cardinal de Retz one day suddenly took up a pen on returning from court, and wrote with his own hand the permission for Mother de Chantal's community to settle in Paris. 'This was looked upon as miraculous by an eminent spiritual man,' says Mother de Chantal herself. The Paris convent was therefore immediately opened; and as Francis was about to return to his own diocese, he left the Sisters in charge of St. Vincent de

Paul, who, under the name of 'M. Vincent,' was then the moving spring and central fire of most of the charities of the time. Under his direction the Sisters flourished in spiritual growth, but he could not ward off the cloud of trials which came thickly upon them. Reports were spread that they were enormously rich, so that they received no alms whatever; and although they were then in want of the actual necessaries of life, they never made it known, but cheerfully bore their privations, as if they were special favours from God. At the same time a most fearful pestilence broke out in Paris, so that the king and court, and all the principal inhabitants, left the city, and for a time grass was seen growing in the streets. By the time this visitation had died away, Mother de Chantal and her Sisters were sitting on the floor because they had no chairs, and had nothing to keep them warm at night except a heap of brushwood, which in the morning was often found sprinkled with snow, from the badness of the roof. Day after day, during these extraordinary hardships, Mother de Chantal used to go into the church towards dinner time, and say an Our Father, that the Sisters might have their daily bread. And more than once, as the records of the Visitation show, just as they sat down to the bare table, having said their grace, bread for the whole community was brought to the door.

During all this time of suffering, borne with true heroism, the Sisters were sustained and comforted by the unflinching brightness and cheerfulness of their Mother. Strict to exactness in regard to failure of observances, irreverence in spiritual things, or want of punctuality in any duty, she was large and indulgent to every one but herself, and never refused her patient loving sympathy to any call of a troubled, timid, or burthened soul. After the storm came a great calm; and then the entry of a wealthy postulant, Mademoiselle Lhuillier, into the Paris convent, brought a great temporal relief and fresh encouragement to Mother de Chantal. Besides possessing far higher and better qualifications, she had a large dowry, with which, after much consideration and search, Mother de Chantal bought a large hotel in the Rue St. An-

toine,<sup>2</sup> in which the community were finally settled in 1621. Very many eminent persons frequented the parlours of that convent for spiritual consultation and advice, who went away declaring that they received more benefit than they could ever give. Cardinal de Bérulle one day said that he thought Mother de Chantal was among those who loved God most on earth. M. Duval, the confessor of St. Vincent de Paul and Madame Acarie, declared that in sanctity Francis de Sales and Mother de Chantal were 'the two marvels of the age.' M. Gallemand, who once did all he could to draw away Mother de Chantal to the Carmelites, M. de Renty, and Madame de Saint-Pol, 'whose names, purses, and hearts were given to all the good works of the day;' M. de Sillery, and M. Marillac, benefactors of some of the chief convents of Paris, and Father Binet, who never forsook the nuns, even during the pestilence; these and many others, who might be numbered among the most eminent servants of God then living, came and went at the Rue St. Antoine as to a centre of charity.

Among others, as we have seen, Mother Angélique Arnauld and Mother de Chantal met and were attracted by each other. When Francis de Sales went to Paris, the abbess of Port Royal was at the height of her fame. She had been appointed to that dignity at the age of fourteen, and at seventeen had vigorously set on foot the reform of her abbey, which became in her hands an example of regular living, revived faith, and the practice of virtue. Having succeeded beyond her hopes, Angélique then undertook the reform of the abbey of Maubuisson, a far more gigantic task. While spending her masculine energies and powers upon others, this young abbess of eight-and-twenty, whose name was then in every mouth, felt the deeper need of taming her own haughty spirit, and the restless insatiable mind, which was accustomed only to take counsel of itself. She, like every one else, had heard of the Bishop of Geneva's gift of direction, and she saw him almost as soon as he reached Paris, at Maubuisson. No mere sweetness or gentleness of character could have attracted a woman of her disposition and capacity, and it is well to note

<sup>2</sup> Belonging to M. Zamet.



that Angélique Arnauld was subdued by the firmness, decision, and governing power of Francis de Sales. Even she, for a time, completely submitted her strong will, her deeply rooted opinions, and her impetuous craving nature to the sweet yoke of Christ. Francis once remained nine days at Maubuisson, heard the general confession of the abbess, and corresponded with her afterwards for some time. It is from these letters that we learn to decipher the extraordinary character of Angélique. Francis speaks in them of her large heart, tortured with the craving for great things; her soul, restlessly seeking to know whether it were to be high or low; of her swift indignation at the sight of evil; her readiness to anger and to satire; her gift of turning things to ridicule when met by the childishness, absurdity, and woman's weaknesses and self pity of her nuns. We see how he dealt with her thirst for self sacrifice, her impatience for perfection, and her fever for bodily austerities, which Francis calmed with great gentleness, and led her to devote all her energy rather to the cure of her faults. He bade her learn that if God had given her an extraordinary vocation, the way by which it was to be attained was not extraordinary, but by the exercise of a meek and gentle humility, practiced sweetly, peacefully, and by degrees, and, above all, joyfully and gladly. He bade her regulate her soul by the well ordering of her daily actions, and to make sure that whether walking, getting up, sitting down, going to bed, or eating, she should always act with the greatest tranquillity and gentleness. 'Then you will see,' he adds, 'that in three or four years you will have entirely controlled your abrupt impetuosity.'<sup>3</sup>

Angélique was as much taken with Mother de Chantal as with Francis himself, and seems to have produced on her a more favourable impression than on him. What she writes to Mother de Chantal, with the most perfect freedom and fulness, are the genuine outpourings of confession. She, too, speaks of her own haughty and imperious indignation, her tendency to be satirical and sarcastic with others, her impatient, ardent thirst for goodness, and that impetuous quickness which so

<sup>3</sup> Letters of 1619 and 1620, &c.

characterized all her movements as to make it impossible for her to walk without breaking into a run. She speaks of her want of detachment about herself, so that she could not endure to be found fault with, and of the terrible strength of her will. And every page of these letters tells also of the energy with which she battled with this host of powerful enemies, and of a frankness and truthfulness which shows what she might have been under skilful spiritual guidance.

It was probably the heat and din of this strife with her internal foes which first led Angélique Arnauld to desire the repose of obedience under Mother de Chantal. She asked to be allowed to lay down her abbess's crosier, and to become a novice in the Visitation convent; and although Francis did not feel inclined to grant it, he could not make up his mind at once to refuse. But Mother de Chantal was far more ready to accept her, and urged Francis for a whole year and half to yield. In this difficulty, and still feeling a strong conviction that Angélique was too formed in opinions and too imperious in character for the meek spirit of the Visitation, Francis wrote very frankly to Father Binet, who had also urged the request, deciding that if the Pope gave permission to the abbess of Port Royal to quit her convent for another order, he should look upon it as God's will, but otherwise he should advise her to remain where she was, and practise humiliation in heart.<sup>4</sup>

The proposal seemed strange at Rome, for Port Royal was under a much stricter rule than that of the Visitation, and such changes can hardly be tolerated as a general rule. The reply was delayed, and before it was received, Mother de Chantal had left Paris, and the Bishop of Geneva had entered upon his rest. Poor Angélique, whose impetuous heart had been set upon this change, thus lost both her wise and admirable counsellors at once, in a time of utmost need. At the moment of rebound from self will to submission, the evil influence of the Abbé de Saint Cyran was brought to bear upon her, and as he immediately perceived the use that could be made of such a character and such splendid gifts, he took every possible means

<sup>4</sup> Letter of November 11, 1621.

to rivet her chains. Dazzled by his brilliant eloquence and passionate impetuosity, Angélique Arnauld was dragged by him into the excitement of controversy and dangerous theological questions upon grace and freewill, and with the glory of her great qualities still hanging about the wreck, she became the embodiment of the spirit of Port Royal,—of those nuns of which the Archbishop of Paris said that they were pure as angels, but proud as fiends.

Some writers have speculated upon the history of Angélique Arnauld, and her intimacy with St. Francis de Sales and Mother de Chantal, and have asked what might have been the result for herself and for the Church, if the abbess of Port Royal had really been allowed to enter the heavenly retreat of the Visitation while it was yet in its first beauty and glow of perfection, under the guidance of the two great Saints who were the instruments of God in bringing it into being. It is clear that Francis de Sales never thought her fitted for his order, and that he only adopted the expedient of a reference to Rome to satisfy at once his own conscience and the importunities of Mother de Chantal and others. It is clear also, that he had already given Angélique the best possible advice, and that if she had followed that advice instead of putting off her efforts at self conquest and the more serious practice of interior mortification under the idea of changing her vocation, she would have been more fitted, when the time came, to meet the dangerous and insidious influence of St. Cyran with that simplicity and humility which are the best shields for truehearted children of the Church against the devices of the Evil One. Mother de Chantal never attempted to force the hand of her holy Father, and she was saved by his prudence from what might possibly have been a great danger to the rising Order of the Visitation. We can look back upon the history of Jansenism, and see the poison working even in the earlier stage of the movement, before there was anything to mark the rebellious and disingenuous spirit by which it was afterwards characterized. But at the time of which we are speaking, a very large proportion of the most virtuous and religious-minded people in France were

inclined to believe in Port Royal, the adherents of which had more or less intimate relations with almost every one who was considered eminent for piety and charity. If by any chance Angélique had risen to a high position in the Visitation, it would have been quite possible for her to have tainted it by means of the relations which she must almost inevitably have kept up with the leaders of Port Royal. The Visitation was saved from the danger by her rejection, or rather, by the failure of her attempt to enter it. The counsels and directions of St. Francis of Sales might also have saved her, and through her a multitude of other misguided souls, from falling into the nets of one of the most detestable heresies that has ever disfigured the Church of Christ.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *Madame de Toulonjon. Death of Francis de Sales.*

1619-1622.

DURING the whole time of Mother de Chantal's journeys to and from the new convents, she either took Françoise with her or kept up a minute correspondence with and about her. Sometimes she travelled with her in the same carriage, and in all things watched over her child with the most loving and scrupulous care. When Bernard and Marie Aymée died, Françoise was about eighteen, and the two sad deaths deeply impressed her mind, and began to work some change in her character. It was remarked that after her sister's death she never cared for the splendour and details of dress as she had done before, and her mother thought it was now a favourable moment to propose to her to marry. Mother de Chantal wisely concluded that if once Françoise had a position and grave duties to occupy her life, her great qualities would help her to keep herself in check and root out her love for the world.

Among the gentlemen who frequented the little court of the Duke de Nemours was M. de Foras, his chamberlain, a man of a grave and reserved character and great nobleness of disposition. Francis knew him well, and held him in great esteem, and the friends of both the young people united in wishing for his marriage with Françoise. But as it was arranged, after the fashion of the time, without consulting her, she was somewhat hurt and displeased, as she was also when M. de Foras went away with the Duke de Nemours to the Low Countries without seeking a personal understanding with herself. In short, though M. de Foras renewed his proposals, and Francis threw himself heartily into the plan, it never came to pass. Françoise fell ill,

and in the end positively refused to marry M. de Foras. The delays and the result on the subject of this marriage caused Francis to say that 'if there were a noviciate for marriage, there would be very few professed.' The failure of this marriage was not good for the proud, independent, and deeply susceptible character of Françoise, and she suffered from it so much that her mother was exceedingly uneasy, often saying that this time of her life yielded her many excellent thorns. While she was debating within herself who to propose to her daughter in marriage, Providence seemed to arrange the whole matter without her help, for M. de Toulonjon, a Burgundian gentleman of an old family, saw Françoise at Dijon, was struck with her noble grand expression and bearing, and having made inquiries about her, wrote to her mother to offer to make her his wife. There is something very quaint, but full of straightforward simplicity in the conduct of all those concerned in this transaction. Mother de Chantal wrote a long, earnest letter to Françoise, urging her to accept Monsieur de Toulonjon, and sent it by himself to Dijon. We can imagine with what feelings this high-spirited girl read such a letter in his presence, although surprise kept her so completely absorbed that she forgot him till she had read the letter to the end. When, looking up, she met the eyes of this grave and loyal man fixed upon her, as if waiting for sentence of life or death, Françoise was touched to the heart, and when he urged his suit with emotion restrained by a manly self respect, the proud head bowed, and with that generous frankness which distinguished her, and without a thought of littleness or affectation, Françoise gave him her hand as a sign that she accepted his love.

In this act she probably sacrificed some of her young dreams, for M. de Toulonjon was then forty-eight, while she herself was just twenty-one ; but her confidence in her mother was thorough and unquestioning, and this marriage of principle rather than fancy was blessed with great happiness. Like most men who are attached late in life, M. de Toulonjon could not lavish enough affection, attention, or gifts upon his young bride, and probably then as now, the disparity of years suited the independ-



ent and fearless character of Françoise better than if she had married a young man of her own age. Mother de Chantal was soon obliged to protest against the pearls, earrings, and diamond-set enamels which the bridegroom desired to heap together, and to beg that her child would not buy the jewelry—‘nearly all the jewelry of Paris’—which he insisted on sending her to choose from. Two things which transpire in these letters are worth noting: one, that noble country ladies were not supposed to wear jewels, because it was thought *bourgeois*; and the other, that one gown, or suit, was considered sufficient for a *trousseau*! The letters of this saint-mother to her daughter on this occasion are models, not only in their wisdom, sound common sense, and knowledge of character, but also in wit, point, and concentration. In one of them Mother de Chantal takes Françoise to task for not wishing to be married in May, an old superstition having a pagan root in the old Roman law forbidding marriage in that month. But the fact was that Françoise had very little of any superstition about her, but a considerable amount of indecision springing from her untameable character, love of freedom, and dread of being bound to duties which she must conscientiously fulfil. Her mother knew her well, and continued to repeat in varied tones, how happy she was to have won the heart of so noble, loyal, and admirable a man as M. de Toulonjon, playfully adding, ‘If ever woman was perfectly happy, it is you—yes, you, you, my pet!’ And in the end Françoise allowed herself to believe the same truth. She laid aside her self-contained, somewhat haughty carriage, and gave her whole heart without reserve to the noble and chivalrous husband who had chosen her to make the happiness of his life at home. In the summer of 1620, Françoise de Chantal and Anthony de Toulonjon were married at Paris, whither her mother went to be present at the ceremony, and to give her daughter a marriage blessing.

The first years of Madame de Toulonjon’s married life were disturbed by the death of two pretty children, and the frequent absences of her husband on military service, for it was no part of the conduct of the men of that time to forsake unpleasant

duties on account of marriage, or of their wives to hinder them with murmurs and complaints. And yet military service must have been specially distasteful then to M. de Toulonjon, for he had large and beautiful estates near Autun, where his château of Alonne was pleasantly situated, and he had fully entered into the agreeable duties of landlord, magistrate, and country gentleman for the first time in his life. It is easy to conceive how hard it was to 'boot and saddle' at the continual call of the king, Louis XIII., and his war-loving minister, Cardinal de Richelieu, and to have to leave his home and young wife in the midst of all their plans for the improvement and happiness of their poor neighbours. But it was duty, and it was done.

During the end of the year 1621, Madame de Toulonjon was with her husband in Paris, where Louis XIII., his own queen, and the queen mother, Marie de Medicis, held one of the most brilliant courts ever known in the world. Françoise entered into all its pleasures and assemblies as if she had been born among them; and her beauty, wit, and a certain kind of splendid audacity, made her the delight of all societies. She wisely took continual counsel of her husband, whose perfect confidence in her was combined with an affectionate and untiring protection; and although the court of France was as full of dangers as it was of brilliant fascination, no word was ever breathed against Françoise. Thanks to her admirable education, and to her honourable obedience to her husband and her mother, she 'walked unspotted' through the mazes of one of the most difficult periods of her life. Her husband imposed upon her no restrictions except those which her own prudence suggested, and his indulgence was so unbounded that he shielded her even from the watchful admonitions of her mother, which generally adverted to Françoise's lavish expenditure, and her intense love of picturesque and magnificent costumes. From time to time, also, when sending her some new material or dress, 'the most beautiful and costly that can be made,' other little warnings about her tendency to hold people cheap, or to hold them up to ridicule, came out, and it is easy, from these indications, to sketch for ourselves a character that would require much grace

and cultivation before it was entirely subdued. Certainly *notre Françon* must have been a moderately expensive wife; for although her mother reminds her that in less than a year and a half she had had five gowns, four of which were silk—a wardrobe which we fear a Belgravian young lady would hold in supreme contempt—still another letter asks that 50*l.* may be in readiness to pay for one gown, which in those days was certainly costly. Old habits, it is evident, still bound this great soul in some of their chains; but Francis watched over her with the genuine tenderness and patience of a saint, and would not allow her mother to worry her too much or too sharply about faults which he was sure would fall from her in God's own time. He wrote to Françoise, begging her to treat every one with kindness, and to be careful to make her conversation always pleasant and agreeable, especially when the people she was with were not of the highest rank or to her special taste. He urged her to be 'valiant, and to keep her heart lifted up to God, hoping that His work would be fully accomplished in her soul one day, and that she should glorify Him for all eternity.' The holy Bishop, with his usual courteous tenderness, concludes in these words: 'I shall prize and honour you with my whole heart always, hoping that you may be holy and blessed. Amen.'

Better than many sermons, and much hard ascetic threatening and rebuke, did these sweet gentle letters attain their end. Françoise was drawn irresistibly along the stream of gracious charity which flowed and swelled round the citadel of her pride, which about this time she for ever surrendered and forsook. Rapid events, too, succeeded to absorb her thoughts. The war broke out again with the Huguenot party, under Soubise. Brilliant but murderous battles took place; and at the taking of Négrepelisse M. de Toulonjon led the assault, and was severely wounded. The doctors having announced to him that death was imminent, he applied one of the letters he had received from Francis de Sales to the wound, on which the bullets were discharged from the wound of themselves, and he recovered. As Françoise was then expecting the birth of another child, Mother de Chantal went to stay with her at Alonne,

where she was received with intense joy and satisfaction. For the first time, perhaps, in her life, did this daughter then thoroughly understand and appreciate her mother's character and love, and their intercourse for the first time was entirely free, and full of confidence and affection. With that spirit of prophecy which holiness confers, Francis had perhaps foreseen this result, and he sent to Françoise this one message in a letter which met her mother at Alonne: 'I do not say one word to our Madame de Toulonjon, except that she should listen to her mother's heart. This is all that her old father wishes for.' His wishes were fulfilled; and henceforward Françoise and her mother had but one heart and one mind, one thorough and resolute desire to serve God. Mother de Chantal was joined at Alonne by six of her nuns, who were going to found a new house at Dijon; and their bright childlike gaiety and devotion filled the old château with gladness, and soothed the anxiety of Madame de Toulonjon during her husband's illness and danger.

While he was still away her little girl was born; and peace having been made with the Huguenot leaders, M. de Toulonjon returned home, and could not contain his joy at the sight of his wife and her newly christened little Gabrielle. There are few things more picturesque than the mingling of ages that was seen when the grave majestic soldier and his young wife hung over the cradle of their young child; and Francis added to their joy by writing continually the freshest and most sympathizing letters, which fully bear out his own naïve description of himself. 'Really I think I have that kind of fatherly heart which is motherly too.' Seeing, as he had hoped, that the duties and responsibilities of marriage would more effectually temper and purify the grand soul of Françoise than merely spiritual influences, the Bishop now watched and helped her with an untiring solicitude which can scarcely be expressed, and which our own hurried, impatient, and ruffled spirit can scarcely understand. Indeed, with all the toil and occupation of his continued journeys and diocesan labours, the abundance of his letters—all written as if he were a man of leisure—seems nearly superhuman. 'I do not write to the dear little one,' he

says, after Gabrielle's birth, 'but I can say this—that I am keeping for her the most loving kiss, such as I bestowed on a young lady of the world sixteen years ago.' It was then just sixteen years since he had seen Françoise for the first time, and his tender heart went back to the remembrance, filled with joy at her useful life. During this whole year of 1622 these letters crowded to comfort and sustain Madame de Toulonjon, and it seemed that her dear and loving Father foreknew that she should soon see his face no more. At the end of the last month of this year he wrote to her on his way to Avignon, and it was the last of his letters she ever received. In it he speaks of his joy at hearing from her mother that she lived 'ever in the fear of God, and the desire to progress in a devout life.' 'Since your childhood,' he goes on, 'I have had a passionate desire for your salvation, and a great confidence that God will hold you in His hand, if only you will correspond with His grace. Do so, I conjure you, my very dear child, and from day to day wean your heart from all kinds of frivolous amusements. Like you, I am not scrupulous, and I only call frivolity the voluntary inclination to things which turn away the mind from thoughts and meditations upon eternity.'

This letter was written a few days before the death of Francis at Lyons, and we must go back a little to relate how the Visitation nuns were prepared for this irreparable loss.

Among the many consolations given to Mother de Chantal in her lifetime, as part of the promised hundredfold, perhaps few gave her more joy than the foundation of a convent at Dijon, her own birthplace and the city of her forefathers. In 1622 she had gone to Moulins, still admirably governed by Mother de Brécharde, and from there to Alonne, where Françoise de Toulonjon met her upon her knees, overwhelmed with joy at receiving her mother into her own house. After this happy meeting, which Françoise turned to all the advantage she could, several Sisters arrived from Annecy to meet Mother de Chantal, and she went on with them to Dijon. It seems strange that at Dijon, of all places in the world, there should have been great resistance made to the foundation of a convent

of the Visitation, but probably the parliament had not forgiven M. Frémyot for his former successful opposition to their rebellion. The obstinate refusal of the authorities to allow of a foundation was overcome by the single-hearted faith of two poor young women, Marie Bertot and Claire Parise, who set off to Paris, and managed to obtain from Louis XIII. letters patent empowering the Visitation nuns to open a convent at Dijon. The municipal authorities rose up in arms at this audacious step, and passed a resolution that before the convent could be begun Mesdemoiselles Bertot and Parise must give security for 40,000 livres; for, as it was well known that they had only their needles to live by, it was hoped that, without any outward disobedience to the king's letters patent, the whole affair would thus blow over and come to nothing. But, to their amazement, Marie and Claire offered the security, and the widow of one of the presidents of Dijon, Madame le Grand, took the payment of the money entirely upon herself. It was after all this opposition, and when the humble little house taken by Marie and Claire was ready for her, that Mother de Chantal went to Dijon from Alonne. The whole population of the city, who evidently sympathized very little with their civic authorities, crowded the streets to meet her, and she said of their greeting herself: 'We could not hear or feel the motion of the carriage. It seemed as if those good people carried it in their arms. We were a long time making very little progress, for it was impossible to pierce the dense crowd.'

She said aloud, as she entered the house, 'This new convent is destined to honour the hidden life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the house at Nazareth.' In the evening, after the city magistrates had paid their tardy respects, about two hundred peasants came in from the villages in the neighbourhood to welcome Mother de Chantal. She was so delighted to see and talk once more with some of the poor whom she had so long and lovingly served, that she sent for all the Sisters and bade them lift up their veils, that they might better entertain these visitors, who quite filled the courtyard. They remained,



well pleased at the cordial reception given them, for some time, and when they were going away Mother de Chantal spoke to them all in a very simple way, encouraging them to love God and win Heaven by their faithful work on earth. When she finished speaking they all went down on their knees, and refused to get up till she had given them her blessing.

It is worth noting that, while Claire Parise was the first to become a novice in the convent, Marie Bertot did not feel called to enter the order she had so energetically helped to establish. She went soon afterwards to a place called St. Jean de Losne, where she founded a hospital for the poor, which is to be seen at this day, and there made a most holy end. Madame le Grand, who, though seventy-four years of age, was the second to enter as a novice, was a striking example of the eminent women who gathered about Mother de Chantal, as creeping plants, and birds, and bees, gather about the shelter of some forest tree or fragrant shrub. She had such a love for abjection that if she had met with no humbling circumstance in the day, she used lovingly to say, 'Ah, my God, what have I done to Thee that Thou hast not visited me to-day?' The Sisters, seeing how thoroughly genuine her humility was, gave her charge of all the rough work of the garden, where she spent hours in hoeing the weeds, and cutting herbs and vegetables for the kitchen. The Bishop, seeing her bending continually over the garden beds—she being now seventy-four—asked her if she was not tiring herself too much. 'My lord,' she replied, 'when I see Mother de Chantal doing the humblest offices herself, nothing is too hard for me.' In six months' time a new spacious house had been bought and partly paid for, and a flourishing community was set well on foot. These matters were thus satisfactorily arranged when Mother de Chantal received a letter from Francis de Sales, telling her to meet him at Lyons.

He was to go to Avignon with the Duke of Savoy, and to spend some time at Lyons on his way home. He wrote from Annecy, and, on the day he was to leave it, he went to the convent, the mother house which had been his constant care for ten years, and there said mass for the community for the

last time. After mass he gave the Sisters a little instruction upon his favourite subject, that which may almost be called the motto of his shield, '*Ask nothing, and refuse nothing.*' When this was over, and the Sisters had accompanied him to the door, he said to them, 'Farewell, my children; farewell till eternity!' The poor Sisters, on hearing these words and the certainty with which they were spoken, threw themselves weeping at his feet, exclaiming, 'O, my lord, may God bring you soon back again!' 'And if it pleased Him not to bring me back,' he replied, 'would He be less loveable?' And so saying he left the house and went out to the gate, where he found the faithful portress, Anne Coste, on her knees sobbing bitterly. 'My child,' he said to her, 'I have often before gone on a journey, and I never yet saw you crying at my departure. What do all these tears mean to-day?' 'Ah, my lord,' she replied, 'my heart tells me that this is your last journey, and that we shall not see one another again.' The Bishop, gifted with a clear foresight of the near approach of her own death, quickly answered, 'And my heart tells me that, if I do not return, we shall see one another again sooner than you think.' He also knew that what she said was true, and that he should come back to Annecy no more. Another very singular forewarning was felt about the same time by a Sister at Belley. As soon as Francis de Sales went into the convent, Sister Simplicienne burst into tears, and when the Bishop asked her what was the matter she answered, 'O, my lord, this year you will die!' With his own peculiar serenity and gladness, Francis said, 'What did you say, Sister Simplicienne; that I shall die this year?' 'Yes, my lord; but I beseech you to ask our Lord and His blessed Mother not to let it be so.' 'Ah, my child, do not ask me that, for I shall not do it.' 'Then I shall,' she said; 'I shall pray so earnestly to our Lord and the Blessed Virgin that He will put it off for some years!' 'My dear daughter Simplicienne, take good care how you do such a thing,' replied Francis almost entreatingly. 'Ah, my dear child, should you not be glad if I went to rest? You see, I am so tired and weary that I can scarcely hold up. Besides, what

do you want of me? You have your Constitutions, in which everything is so well settled; and then I leave you our Mother de Chantal, who will be enough for you. And, more than all that, we must not put our hope in men, who are mortal, but in the living God.'

The accounts of Francis at this time are full of these little traits of character. At Valence he forbade the nuns to go to law with a neighbour to force him to sell them a garden, of which they were much in want; Francis told them to wait till the man was willing to part with it. There also he decided them to admit an old lady, Madame de Granelle, who was eighty-eight years of age, saying that no age was unworthy to be consecrated to God. A *tourière* Sister was showing him the way to the house of a holy person whom he wished to visit, and this good Sister in her natural impetuosity walked a great deal too fast for the feeble strength of Francis; he remonstrated with her, and when she again forgot herself, hastened after her, saying that those who are being shown the way must follow their leader. He gave the Sister a triple blessing on parting, and told her she should one day wear the veil of a nun of the order, and so it turned out.

Mother de Chantal, who was making her retreat at St. Etienne, felt an increasing desire to see Francis, as she had not spoken to him face to face for three years and a half, and Francis desired no less to see her; but so many people of consideration crowded round him at Lyons, and he had so much to do on account of the presence of the courts of France and Savoy, that even when Mother de Chantal got there she found it difficult to obtain a visit from him. At last he managed to shake himself a little free, and came to the convent, where she was instantly struck with the change in his whole appearance. For some years past it had been remarked that his face almost shone, and now it was as if the veil of the body, so long becoming more and more transparent, were rent, and the glory of Heaven already was reflected upon him, and showing itself in his eye, on his brow, and in all his words. Almost immediately he said to her, 'Mother, we have some

hours before us, which of us two shall begin the conversation?' 'Let me, if you please, Father,' answered Mother de Chantal with a little of her old impetuosity; 'my heart has great need that you should look it over.' Francis looked at her with his sweet gravity and said, 'What, mother, are you still eager, and making choice of this and that? I thought I should find you quite angelic!' And knowing that many things were of more consequence than the examination of a soul which God Himself directed, he went on: 'Mother, we will talk about ourselves at Annecy; now let us finish the affairs of our little Congregation. O, how I love it,' he added, 'for God is well loved in it!' Mother de Chantal, without objecting by even a word to his wish, folded up the papers upon which she had written down notes relating to her conscience for the last three years; and she and the Bishop spent the four successive hours in regulating what was still required for the complete establishment of the order. Francis specially insisted upon its not being erected into a Congregation under one general Superior, but that the convents should be severally independent, governed by the bishop of the diocese and the Holy See. He remarked that while praying about this point he felt that God let him see that such was His will, and that in this way neither unity nor stability would be lost, while there would be more fervour. 'Our daughters,' he said, 'are the daughters of the clergy, and the clergy are the first order of religion.'

When the business of the Congregation had been concluded, and Francis was about to take leave, Mother de Chantal felt herself so filled with veneration for Francis, that she broke into an irrepressible cry of affectionate prophecy: 'Father! I am sure you will one day be canonized, and I hope to help in bringing that about.'

'Mother,' replied Francis, very gravely, 'God can work miracles; but those who are to labour for my canonization are not yet born.'

These were his last words to her on earth. Sweet, grave, immovable in his serene peace and rest upon God, unshaken by the exceeding manifestation of her affection as he was in his

own deep humility, Francis de Sales left her, and when the convent gate had shut behind him, Mother de Chantal saw him no more. In obedience to the calls of duty, she immediately afterwards left Lyons, and went back to the convent at Annecy. For one fortnight more Francis remained at Lyons, and continually saw his children of the Visitation there. He had refused several magnificent apartments offered him elsewhere, and taken up his abode in the gardener's house near the convent, inconvenient as it was, saying gaily that he was never better off than when he was badly lodged. While he was saying mass on Christmas-day, Mother de Blonay, the Superior, saw his face shining with light, and was so struck that she ventured to speak to him about it at the sacristy grate. 'My lord,' she said, 'while you were intoning the *Gloria in excelsis*, I thought I saw the Archangel Gabriel by your side.'

'My dear child,' he said, looking at her very pleasantly, 'the ear of my heart is very deaf to inspirations, and I need the Angels to speak to my bodily ears, so as to strike my senses with holy melody.'

This evasive answer did not satisfy Mother de Blonay, and she insisted upon hearing more, when Francis said, 'It is true that I never was more consoled at the altar; the Divine Child was there visibly and invisibly. Why should not the Angels be there too? But you shall not know anything more now, there are too many people about.' The next day he said mass again for the Sisters, and in the evening he went back to the convent, and having had all the Sisters called to the parlour, he gave them an instruction and familiar conference, still upon his own motto, '*Ask nothing, and refuse nothing*,' and being quite unaware of the lapse of time, he went on speaking for three hours, till his attendants, whom he had told to come for him at eight o'clock, came to the convent and into the parlour with torches ready lighted. Francis was much surprized to hear what time it was, and saying that he could very easily have spent the night talking of holy things with his dear daughters, but that nevertheless, to imitate our Saviour (of Whom he had been speaking), in paying obedience to inferiors, he would go; and so he got

up and bade them farewell, adding—and they were his last words to the community—that he bore them all with him in his heart.

On the 27th of December he once more said mass in the convent, and Mother de Blonay asked him also to hear her confession, which he did. She therefore was the last on earth to receive absolution from his lips, for a few hours afterwards Francis was struck down with apoplexy and paralysis.

His agony lasted for thirty hours, and was aggravated by the application of red-hot irons in order to rouse him from the heavy lethargy of the disease. But during the whole of those painful hours the serenity of that majestic face never changed, and the light on his brow grew still more bright, till it struck an awful kind of joy into all who gathered about his couch. At length the prayers for a departing soul were heard in the silent room, and while the words, '*Omnes sancti Innocentes, orate pro eo,*' were being said, the beautiful soul of Francis de Sales soared to its rest. The doors of the prison house were opened, says the chronicle, 'and the blameless captive within departed to eternal freedom.'<sup>1</sup>

At that moment Mother de Chantal, who was offering him to God in the chapel at Grenoble, distinctly heard a voice saying, '*He is no more;*' but not thinking of his death she exclaimed, 'No, my God, he is no more; he lives no longer, it is Thou Who dost live in him.' Her mind was still under the spell of that wondrous transformation which she had seemed to discern in him. Though for an instant she thought of his death, not a single foreboding even troubled her, and she left Grenoble to go to Belley, where his faithful priest, M. Michel Favre, gave her the note containing the terrible news. Terrible indeed to her, whose life for so many years had been guided by his counsel, upon whom she had leaned with such pure, such devoted, and such reverent affection. For one whole day and night her tears flowed gently but without stopping, till after her communion the next morning; and though she went to the evening recreation with the Sisters, she could not speak a single word.

<sup>1</sup> *Fondation de Lyon* (inédite): Bougaud.



When the evening was over, the Superior of the house sent to her Sister Simplicienne, who stayed all night by her bedside, speaking of their blessed Father and relating how she had foreseen his end, and all that he had said to her in return. This talk comforted Mother de Chantal much, and the next day she went on to Annecy, to make ready the chapel to receive the sacred remains.

But at Lyons the door of the little gardener's house was besieged by sorrowing yet rejoicing crowds, who streamed in to kiss the feet of the dead Saint, and to gather up the blood which flowed from his mouth, or touch his body with medals, rosaries, pictures and handkerchiefs. The whole city seemed to rise up and declare loudly that as it had pleased God to bring him to Lyons to die, the city should not be robbed of his remains. Alarmed at the strong feeling which had arisen, his own faithful attendants hastened the necessary preparations for carrying the body back to Savoy, and had already placed the coffin on a bier, when the chief magistrate of the province, M. Olier, sent authoritative orders that it was not to be moved.

What Mother de Chantal felt on hearing this prohibition cannot be described. She had already sent word to Mother de Blonay to do everything that could possibly be done to hasten the departure of the precious remains, and for the first time in her life had used these words of command: 'I beseech of you, and, if I may dare, I command you to do this.' She now wrote to the Duke of Savoy, and to the mayor and syndics of Annecy, and sent for the dean and other ecclesiastical authorities to the convent, where she showed them the attested will of the Bishop that at Annecy his body should rest. In short, she took up the matter with such energy and prompt resolution that a deputation was sent to Lyons, and M. Olier was induced to withdraw his opposition to the removal of the remains.

The funeral train therefore started, but it soon became a triumphal march, during which many thousands of people flocked out to meet and welcome the hearse with the deepest reverence, and the body was carried into the churches by the way, that the villagers and townspeople might satisfy their de-

votion. And at last, after a temporary visit to the church at Annecy, the coffin was borne into the chapel of the Visitation, where it was received by his loving children, Mother de Chantal and her Sisters, with mingled emotions which no words can describe. It was placed in the sanctuary, close to the nuns' choir, and was covered by them with a large white pall embroidered in gold with the names of Jesus and Mary.

'We will talk about ourselves at Annecy,' Francis had said to Mother de Chantal in their last conversation at Lyons. And obeying her saintly guide in death as in his lifetime, she now knelt beside the coffin and opened her whole soul before him, exactly as she had been accustomed to do when Francis had been on earth. What then passed between this great teacher and his faithful disciple must remain a secret until the day when the hidden things of God are told, but when Mother de Chantal returned to the community, her face was bright, her whole manner changed, as of one infinitely comforted and refreshed.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *Council of Superiors, and new Foundations. 1622-1626.*

MOTHER DE CHANTAL was well aware of the great responsibility that now rested with her alone. Upon her it now depended to carry on the work of Francis de Sales; to defend it against attacks from without and dangers within; to expound the rules, and provide for their observance; to develop their spirit of mingled strength and sweetness; and, what was most difficult of all, to sustain the vigour of the institute while multiplying its foundations. But for all these arduous tasks Mother de Chantal showed herself prepared, and she promptly took her measures accordingly.

‘Live Jesus!’ she wrote a few days after the death of Francis to Mother de Chastelluz, ‘and may His most holy Name be for ever blessed in our tribulations, that the greatness of our sorrows may be a perfume pleasant to His Divine Majesty. My child, my child, how great and heavy is the blow, but how sweet and fatherly the Hand that has given it! This is why I kiss and cherish it with all my heart, bowing down my head and bending my whole heart under His most holy will, which I worship and reverence with all my strength. There is nothing left to me in this life but the earnest desire to see our convents in the perfect and entire and loving observance of everything which this most blessed and holy Father has left us. We must undertake this, my dear child, and lead our dear Sisters to do the same; but sweetly and gently, for, above all things, it is needful that the spirit of meekness should shine among us.’

The rule of the Visitation required that, on the Saturday after Ascension-day of the third year of superiority, the Super-

riors were to lay down their office, and while waiting either to be re-elected or replaced by others, should take the lowest rank in the community. Hitherto, at the express wish of Francis de Sales, this rule had not been applied to Mother de Chantal, who had always continued to act as Superior. But now, after much deliberation and prayer, she resolved to submit to the rule in this as in all other things: and having assembled all the Sisters in the chapel, and in the presence of the Provost de Sales, who represented the Bishop, Mother de Chantal knelt down, and solemnly laid aside her office, according to the rules of the Visitation. It was like a thunderclap to the whole assembly, for no one knew of it beforehand. But it was done with so much decision that not a voice was raised against it. The deposition was accepted, and the government temporarily placed in the assistant's hands for four days, until the election could take place.

Meanwhile Mother de Chantal was exceedingly content in the lowest place, performing all the usual duties of choir and refectory, sitting on the lower benches with the younger Sisters at recreation, receiving the 'obediences' and occupations given to all, asking leave for everything she did and used, and taking no part whatever in the government of the convent. At the end of the four days, however, the nuns had their revenge, and unanimously elected Mother de Chantal *perpetual Superior*, which was at first a great blow to her. She had not, however, the slightest idea of giving up her strict obedience to the rule, and she astonished the community by declaring the election null and void, and entirely contrary to the rules and constitutions of the order. The Sisters in vain appealed to the words of Francis de Sales; Mother de Chantal replied that if their blessed Father were alive, she should lay before him her reasons, and he would forbid the perpetual superiority. In the end, her firmness triumphed over all entreaties, and she was re-elected for three years only.<sup>1</sup>

One of her first acts was to assemble a special council of

<sup>1</sup> These details are related by Mother de Chantal herself, from whose letter Bougaud quotes.

Superiors, to consult upon a mass of papers which she had found, partly finished, by Francis de Sales, relating to the customs and usages of the order. Mother Favre came from Dijon, Mother de Brécard from Riom, Mother de Chatel from Grenoble, Mother de Beaumont from Paris, Mother de Mouxy from Belley, and Mother de Compays from Montferraud. To these Superiors were added two assistants, and the four consultants of Annecy. Mother de la Roche was absent on account of illness, and the Lyonnese absolutely refused to allow Mother de Blonay to leave the city even for a few days. 'Better would it be for the sun not to shine in the sky than for Mother de Blonay to leave Lyons,' they said: so that Mother de Chantal, who was sadly disappointed not to have the voice of the 'Cream of the Visitation,' was obliged to supply the want by dispatching express messengers backwards and forwards to Lyons while the council lasted, to obtain Mother de Blonay's opinion upon one question after another, as they passed under discussion. Among all these mothers of the order one lay person assisted, whose opinion Mother de Chantal valued almost more than that of any other, and said if it had not been for her little children she would never let her leave Annecy. This lady was the Countess de Dalet, whose story will be told later, and who looked upon herself as the handmaiden and little servant of the Visitation. She spent all her leisure moments, when free from the assembly, before the tomb of Francis de Sales.

In this manner, and by such women as these, the Custom-book of the Visitation was drawn up, and as soon as it was finished, the book was laid by Mother de Chantal upon the founder's grave, where she sent all the Sisters to pray that every word and thought contrary to his intention might be blotted out of it. It was then read aloud from the beginning to the end, and as one unanimous voice accepted it and approved, it was sent to all the convents, with a letter from Mother de Chantal, begging the Sisters to observe the Custom-book as they observed their rule and constitutions. The great work of legislation for the new institute was thus brought to an end in 1623, and it will be as well to say now that the result of

these labours was contained in three books ; first, the *Rule of St. Augustine*, translated into French by Francis de Sales ; secondly, the *Constitutions*, drawn up by the Bishop to explain and adapt that rule ; and lastly this *Custom-book*, put together by Mother de Chantal and her council from the notes of the founder. This entire work forms one of the most remarkable pieces of religious legislation existing, and is stamped throughout with that spirit of force and sweetness, moderation and practical common sense, which might have been expected from the lofty spiritual gifts of the Saints from whom it chiefly emanated.

The next work undertaken by Mother de Chantal was drawing up that commentary on the Visitation rules known as the *Responses of our holy Mother*.<sup>2</sup> This name sprang from a certain peculiarity in Mother de Chantal's mind, for, though full of her subject, she could not readily arrange her ideas in words, nor did they flow easily from her lips unless she were questioned. Fully aware of this fact, she continually repeated to her nuns, ' My children, I have nothing to say to you if you do not question me.' ' My children, I am no great preacher, as you know ; I can scarcely speak at all, except by answers,' &c. The Sisters, therefore, took very good care to ask her a multitude of questions about their rule and customs at recreation, receiving the clearest and most luminous answers, which some of the community carefully noted down, to the amount of several thick volumes, which were circulated from convent to convent, everywhere implanting the true traditions of the order. These manuscript volumes were of course totally unarranged. They contained many repetitions, and were marred by some very important omissions ; but the nuns were afraid that if they showed them to their mother, their precious notes would share the fate of her own letters to St. Francis, which she had thrown into the fire. But as at length the older nuns, and especially Mother Favre, very strongly urged the necessity of doing all that was possible for the order, Mother de Chantal promised to revise the notes, and put them into the form of answers to questions,

<sup>2</sup> *Réponses de notre sainte Mère.*



or, as this charming book might well be called, 'Conversations at Annecy.'

Mother Favre, having obtained so much, went a little farther, and sent the Answers to be printed without Mother de Chantal's knowledge, when the binder unfortunately allowed some copies to be seen by a person who thought they were to be sold, and spoke of it to the Bishop, John F. de Sales. The Bishop was both amazed and wounded, and went immediately to the convent to see Mother de Chantal. He then reproved her a little sharply for publishing books of her own drawing up upon the rule without consulting him. Mother de Chantal was deeply grieved at the reproof, and still more at the fact that her book had been seen in public, and said it was one of the best humiliations she had ever received, one which she well deserved for her pride.<sup>3</sup> She immediately sent for all the copies which had been intrusted to the bookseller; and for the future no copies were allowed outside the convents, in which they were bound up as well as the nuns could manage.

'We must suffer crucifixion to keep up the spirit of the institute,' was once said by Mother de Chantal herself, and in this spirit she insisted on the maintenance of the constitutions even on exceptional occasions. She had soon a notable opportunity of insisting on the maintenance of the rule that no superiority in the Visitation should last more than six years. The community at Grenoble unanimously re-elected Mother de Chatel, but Mother de Chantal wrote the Sisters a letter full of energy, reminding them of the intentions of Francis de Sales, and telling them that the election was null, and must be made over again. She well knew that what had been caused in this instance solely by Mother de Chatel's great merits as a Superior, and the peace and order of her convent, might be brought about hereafter by ambition and the love of rule. She resisted the entreaties of the early mothers of the Visitation who were then with her at Annecy, and when some returned to France, she begged them to turn aside on their journey, and throw themselves at the feet of the Bishop of Grenoble, to implore

<sup>3</sup> See Bougaud, t. ii. p. 148, 149.

him to declare the election invalid. The Bishop, however, was not willing to take this step, for Mother de Chatel was much beloved; and then Mother de Chantal, full of determination that no breach should be made in the constitution, set off immediately herself and went to Grenoble, where she found many influential persons leagued together to support the Sisters in their election. But all was in vain. The Bishop gave way to her earnest but humble petitions. During the interval of suspense, Mother de Chatel showed herself a true daughter of her great mother, being present at the council which set aside her own election, saying more for the strict observance of this special rule than any other Sister, and being one of the nuns who went in person to the Bishop to implore him to set her aside and have another Superior elected.

At Moulins, where Mother de Chastelluz was just made Superior, a lady had entered with a rich dowry, as foundress of the convent, but her worldly habits were not yet laid aside. Madame Tertre de Morville refused to have her hair cut off, had costly hangings and carpets in her cell, and had surrounded herself with a number of petty luxuries and vanities. She received the visits of her friends, made 'parlours' of all the garden alleys, and actually prevailed upon the Bishop of Autun to allow several of her friends to go in and out of the convent whenever they liked. When Mother de Chastelluz refused to ratify this extravagant permission, Madame de Morville flew into a passion, abused her to the Bishop, and spread false and ill-natured reports of her among her friends. Mother de Chantal was deeply grieved at hearing these facts, and did what lay in her power, by wise and noble letters, to sustain poor Mother de Chastelluz, and to awaken the worldly nun to a sense of her duty, at the same time giving her every encouragement to reform her life. Her patience, prayers, and generous indulgence and charity at last opened Madame de Morville's eyes. She went to her Superior, and kneeling before her acknowledged all her faults, and begged forgiveness with so much real sorrow that Mother de Chastelluz scarcely knew how to comfort her. She then cut off her own hair, sent away all her pictures and carpets, and

asked as a favour to be allowed to make her noviceship again. After passing through this probation with genuine and unabated contrition, this true penitent asked leave to make her profession with the gratings unclosed. The chief people of the town being present, Madame de Morville publicly begged pardon for her bad conduct, and before the whole assembly tore up the papers granting her a foundress's privileges, saying that she was too glad to take the lowest place in a house from which she deserved to have been driven in disgrace. She lived only a year and three months after making these acts of reparation, and died in the odour of sanctity.

Before continuing the story of the Visitation convents, we must advert to the removal of one of Mother de Chantal's chief domestic burthens, which marked the year 1624 for her with a special blessing. Our readers are well aware that a continual undercurrent of anxiety had run through her life since she had left the world about her son Celse Bénigne, in whom, as he grew, up the Rabutin blood gradually gained the ascendant, and urged him perpetually to extravagance, rash duels, and madcap follies. One day Francis de Sales would write to her about him, 'God will give him much solid perfection, if He grants my prayers,' while the next would bring her news of some fresh scrape. He was the delight of the French court, and the idol of the brilliant throng who now figured there. He numbered the Duc d'Elbœuf, M. de Noailles, and the Prince de Chalais among his intimate friends. He was the best dancer, the boldest rider, the surest shot, of all the young coxcombs of the day; and his time was chiefly distributed between balls and banquets, sports, duelling, and frays of every imaginable kind into which a highbred gentleman could by any means stumble.

Mother de Chantal rightly judged that marriage would be the best cure for Celse Bénigne, and after uncounted tears and prayers, and deliberating for several years, she asked and obtained for him, in 1624, the hand of Mademoiselle de Coulanges, who promised in every way to make him an excellent and suitable wife. She was pretty, wellborn, rich, very ami-

able, and, as we need scarcely say, a girl of solidly Christian life. The arrangement of this marriage gave Mother de Chantal unusual pleasure, and she wrote of it to the various members of her family and relations as an excellent match for her son.

Having gone through all the labour of the arrangements and business of this marriage, Mother de Chantal denied herself the natural pleasure of being present at the ceremony, in spite of her son's urgent entreaties. She wrote to Madame de Coulanges that she should content herself with 'pouring out her heart and her little prayers before the tender mercy of God, that He might bless the dear married ones with His best graces, giving them to possess one heart and one mind, and to live long and happily in the fear of God.' She laid down her weary burthen of anxiety with thankful joy, and turned with refreshed powers to the arduous work of her new foundations.

Thirteen convents<sup>4</sup> had been established before Francis de Sales closed his eyes in peace; and the fourteenth—opened after his death, but the same year—was at Marseilles, where, when Mother Favrot was named Superior, she flew to Mother de Chantal, and besought her not to injure the new foundation by giving it as a Superior a woman so incapable as herself. A convent at Riom was opened during the same year by Mother de Bréchar, who met with every kind of difficulty before she could establish the Sisters in peace. The consuls and municipal authorities were, for some unexplained reason, full of ill-will towards the foundation, and imposed one vexatious condition after another, hoping that the nuns would leave Riom in disgust. They could not absolutely refuse the permission, as Mother de Bréchar had obtained a royal mandate from the queen, Marie de Medici. She proceeded to buy a house, when the authorities demanded a guarantee to be given for a large sum. This being furnished by several ladies in the town, and the house bought, Mother de Bréchar began to have the walls raised, when an official appeared with a second message,

<sup>4</sup> Annecy, 1610; Lyons, 1615; Moulins, 1616; Grenoble, 1618; Bourges, 1618; Paris, 1619; Montferrand, 1620; Nevers, 1620; Orleans, 1620; Valence, 1621; Dijon, 1622; Belley, 1622; and St. Etienne, 1622.

forbidding any further building, under pretext that the heightened enclosure would darken the windows of the townhall. Mother de Brécard thereon sold her house again, and bought another in a distant quarter of the town, that there might be no excuse for any further opposition from the magistrates. The illwill and prejudices of the townspeople were, however, so unconquerable, that they immediately devised a new and unheard of mode of attack. Among the ladies who had become warrant for the sum demanded was the Countess de Dalet, the widow who had assisted at the council for drawing up the rules of the Visitation. This lady had four little children, and at the instigation of a lawyer in Riom these little children were carried off and marched through the streets to the municipal council, with a petition that these poor orphans might be befriended, for they were forsaken by their unnatural mother, who was abandoning them in order to receive strangers. The report of this ran wildly through the town, and the excitement was so great, that Mother de Brécard was obliged to leave and go to Montferrand.

Even Mother de Chantal then thought that the foundation at Riom must be given up. She expressed her opinion in her characteristic way, saying that 'as it pleases our Lord to allow those gentlemen of Riom to make such strong and persevering opposition to your establishment in their town, I think you would do extremely well humbly and peaceably to withdraw.' She advised the removal of the Sisters to Lyons, whence it would be easy to dispatch them to one of the other towns which had so long petitioned for a Visitation community. But Mother de Brécard was very unwilling to give up Riom without making one more effort, and she returned to the town secretly and by night, against the advice of her friends there. Then followed a fresh excitement, and a council was called to guard against the threatened 'danger.' Men actually went about shouting in the streets, 'These nuns must be got rid of! They must be sent away from here!' The result of this public mutiny was a decree that Mother de Brécard must go; and Mother de Chantal then wrote a second letter, again advising

the removal of the Sisters to Lyons. Everything was prepared for their departure, when an unexpected friend came to their relief and turned the course of affairs.

The house the nuns were in, belonging to Madame de Dalet's mother, was next to that of the lawyer who had suggested parading the children through the streets, and from his study he could distinguish everything that went on among the nuns. He witnessed their silence, the regularity of their hours, their recollection, and heard their soft chanting of the Psalms; for they dared not raise their voices, lest they should excite observation in the street. These things so changed his mind that he became their firm friend, and endeavoured to regain for them the authorization which had been withdrawn. Once more the queen wrote to the Bishop of Clermont and the town authorities in their favour. It was then as if the last assaults were made by the Evil One, who feared the good influence of the Sisters; for a louder outcry than ever was raised, and Mother de Brécharde was still more shamefully abused and ill treated. This last attack determined Mother de Chantal to go to Riom herself; and she had no sooner met the magistrates, and discussed the matter with them in her pleasant, frank, sensible way, than all the difficulties disappeared, and the permission so long refused was freely granted. The ceremony of installation was fixed for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception; an altar was decked with the jewels of all the chief ladies of Riom; and to the satisfaction of every one—even the consuls—the act of foundation was solemnly read by the proper officer, the enclosure was established, mass was said, and when it was over, Mother de Chantal herself intoned the *Te Deum*, which was chanted with the exulting joy of thankful hearts.<sup>5</sup>

Mother de Chantal had gone to Montferrand on an errand, which concluded another of the beautiful stories abounding in the Visitation annals. Some years before, Madame de Dalet, who had attained to a high degree of prayer, had seen in a kind of vision, after communion, a venerable Bishop building a beau-

<sup>5</sup> 1623. *Fondation inédite de Riom*. Bougaud, t. ii. p. 175.



tiful house and setting it in order. The door of this house she could not find, and while wearying herself in the search, she heard a voice saying, 'Pray and hope; you will find it later.' Some months afterwards she saw Francis de Sales for the first time, and exclaimed in great surprise, 'That is he! that is the Bishop of my vision!' She then made a vow of chastity and a promise to God to enter the Visitation when her children should be grown up. But she had first to pass through extraordinary trials. Her mother, a violent woman, pressed her to marry again; and after many most painful scenes with her children, with various theologians and religious, with the Bishop of Clermont, and finally with a family conclave of relations, before whom Madame de Dalet knelt down and told them that after her husband's death she had bound herself by a vow of perpetual chastity, Madame de Montfan, her mother, actually fell upon her in a transport of rage and beat her violently, and drove her out of her own château in the depth of winter. When she and her little children were outside the gates, her mother had the drawbridge raised and the gates locked. The poor Countess, thus, like St. Elisabeth of Hungary, infamously driven out of doors, wrapped the youngest child up in her gown, put another on her back, and holding the elder ones by the hand, took shelter for the night with a kindly peasant woman, who gave up her own bed for the four children to sleep in. 'As for myself,' said Madame de Dalet, 'I had so many things to say to our good God, that I did not go to bed that night at all.'

Francis de Sales now interposed, and for a while the poor Countess was left in peace. But after his death her persecutions began again, and Mother de Chantal then brought about a kind of compact, by which it was agreed that Madame de Dalet should stay quietly with her children, and devote herself to them as long as they could possibly need her. This she did for the next ten years, leading the life of a nun in secret, wearing a rough haircloth under her handsome dresses, and never using either carriage or litter, except for a few visits once or twice a year. The day after her youngest daughter's marriage, Ma-

dame de Dalet joyfully put on the Visitation habit for which she had waited fifteen years ; and two days after her profession, by a singular exception, counselled by Mother de Chantal herself, she was chosen Superior at Montferrand.

The convent at Chambéry was founded in 1624 by Mother de Chantal in person. She went there with seven Sisters and M. Michel Favre, and was received with every imaginable honour. Incense and holy water were offered her, boys carried lighted tapers before her, and for three days all the chief ladies of the city came to visit her, and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. M. Maupéau, a priest much loved by Francis de Sales, gave up an important cure to offer himself as confessor to the nuns, and thenceforth served them faithfully all his life without receiving the least reward ; saying that as he only played the part of a poor little dog in the house of the Lord, he needed only what food would keep him alive.

About the same time with this foundation at Chambéry, another convent was founded at Avignon, where a holy lady from Lyons, Madame de Casselis, who had been married at twelve years old, had become a widow at seventeen, and had then led a life of extraordinary sanctity, had gathered about her a sort of community of young women with the idea of forming a new religious congregation. Her death, at the age of sixty-three, dispersed her companions, some of whom entered various religious houses, and the nine or ten who hung together tried to form a community under the Ursuline rule. But the work did not flourish, and at last they conceived the idea of sending for some of the nuns of the Visitation to found a convent of the new order, which they themselves would join. Four Sisters were therefore sent by Mother de Blonay from Lyons under Mother de Balme. But at Avignon, as at Riom, obstacles were put in the way by the city ; and whilst the opposition was at its height, Mother de Balme died. What she could not succeed in doing during life was granted her after death ; for so wonderful was the general impression of her sanctity, that more than ten thousand people pressed in to kiss the feet of the corpse and touch the hem of her habit ; and when at the end of a fort-

night her body was found fresh, supple, life-coloured, and exhaling a fragrant odour, the city authorities enthusiastically granted the necessary formalities for the foundation, and the convent was solemnly opened.<sup>6</sup>

But we must perforce forbear from attempting to give an account of the many foundations of the Visitation which followed in the year after the death of Francis de Sales, as at Aix les Bains and Autun, where Madame de Chantal had lived for eight years, and near which her daughter was settled—both in 1624—at Embrun and Evrai, at Rumilly and Blois in 1625, and at Pont-à-Mousson in 1626. Everywhere, whether in France, Savoy, or Lorraine, Mother de Chantal was received with extraordinary honours as a public benefactor and a recognized Saint.

<sup>6</sup> 1624.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *Progress of the Visitation. Death of Celse Bénigne.* 1626-1628.

IN the year 1626 Mother de Chantal's superiority, according to the rule, came to an end; and as she was just then much occupied at Pont-à-Mousson she laid down her office in writing, dispatching at the same time to the community at Annecy a letter, in which she again reminded the Sisters of the rule and her determination to abide by it. They had had enough experience of her firmness to know that remonstrance was useless; and although much grieved at losing their mother and her wise encouraging government, they did not weary her by entreaties, but elected Mother de Chatel in her place. It was no sooner made known that Mother de Chantal had ceased to be Superior at Annecy than the nuns at Orleans elected her for their own convent; but as it was found that Francis de Sales had laid it down that she should not tie herself to any one single convent but that of Annecy, she did not accept the office, but went as soon as she could to Orleans, to soften the disappointment of the Sisters, and to assist at the election of another Superior.

Just as she was leaving Annecy she met a gentleman named M. Granieux, of Grenoble, who was coming to the Bishop's grave to seek a cure for violent attacks in the head. When he saw Mother de Chantal leaving the convent, he hastened to speak to her, and as he was speaking or bowing, she laid her hand upon his head, when, to his great delight, he immediately found himself cured of his dreadful pains. He naïvely expressed his joy that what he had intended to seek at Annecy from the holy man, the holy woman had obtained for him.<sup>1</sup>

Another remarkable fact soon followed; for just as Mother

<sup>1</sup> Not easily rendered in the original sense,—‘*le saint et la sainte.*’

de Chantal had reached Crémieux, where a new foundation was to begin under Marie Fichet, the house, belonging to two ladies who were to be the founders of the convent, took fire ; but when Mother de Chantal had knelt down in prayer the fire went out, as if quenched by a sudden deluge of water. The fire was so fierce, that some poor carriage horses were found burnt alive ; but the state of the planks and stones of the stable showed that the fire had been suddenly arrested, and the people who ran in crowds to see it exclaimed, ' A miracle ! a miracle ! ' Mother de Chantal ascribed the fact to the intercession of Francis de Sales, at whose tomb she had made a vow that one of the foundresses should offer a little silver house, in remembrance of the foundation at Crémieux. The next stay of Mother de Chantal was at Paray-le-Monial, now for ever memorable as the convent of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. Françoise de Toulonjon accompanied her mother, with the Bishop's leave to enter the convent ; but Mother de Chantal nevertheless stopped her at the door till she had the permission of the Superior of the Sisters. From Paray-le-Monial she went to Autun, where she was received with extraordinary marks of veneration, both by her own nuns and the other religious communities of the town. The very children of the place got wind of her presence and of her sanctity. They crowded into the parlour, where she caressed them, and lifted her veil that they might see her face, forbidding her companions to drive them away ; and then the children ran about the streets announcing that they had seen the saint. Everywhere she showed the deepest humility, as well as the tenderest charity. At last, by slow degrees, she approached Orleans. Although the Sisters were much grieved at her refusal to be their mother, they were all refreshed by her stay of three months with them, during which time she filled the Superior's office with exact observance of the rule, and was most gentle, patient, and tender with all. When the three months were ended, Mother de Chantal assembled the convent chapter to elect a Superior from among themselves, and then left them to go to Paris.

In Paris, the Superior, Mother de Beaumont, had excited

a storm of hostility, which seems to have been chiefly caused by her extraordinary success. She had just founded a second convent almost without resources, and attracted the friendship and favour of some of the most eminent personages of the court. Among these were the queen, Anne of Austria, and the queen mother, Mary of Medici. As soon as it was known that Mother de Chantal had arrived, the throng of visitors at the convent gate became so incessant, that on the third day the over-worked portress took to her bed. It had been hoped that Mother de Chantal's mere presence in Paris would calm the storm which was raging against her daughters; but it was not so. She determined to yield so far as to order Mother de Beaumont to return to Annecy, to make way for a fresh Superior. This admirable woman made no resistance to what seemed like the humiliation of disgrace, and she earnestly besought the queen not to intercede for her stay, as she had wished to do, but quietly set out for Annecy as she was bidden. She is said to have been stung with compunction, so as to send expressly for her confessor, St. Vincent of Paul, because she said once that she had been sacrificed to other persons' passions. Mother de Chantal sent for Mother Favre to take her place. Possibly this one meek and docile act of obedience wrought the change which all her efforts had failed to bring about; for soon things went smoothly with the convent, and the very people who had been loudest in finding fault now became excellent friends. This was but one of many similar instances of obedience in the new congregation.

Mother Favre, whose high spirit had been remarkable in its disdain of all curb, and whose saying it was that widows were the happiest of women, because they could act for themselves and had no one to control them, was once summoned to Dijon by Mother de Chantal from Montferrand, where she was Superior. The good town of Montferrand, knowing her worth, refused to part with a pearl of such price, and said that no carriage should be allowed her in which to go, nor should the town gates be opened. Mother Favre said that she must go, notwithstanding, and if no other way were possible, it should be on foot, and in



the garb of a peasant woman. In fact, she actually did leave the convent in the night, and got into the first cart she could meet with that was leaving the town. At Moulins, Mother de Brécharde was once ill in bed, when she received a letter from Mother de Chantal, asking for the four most efficient Sisters in the house for a new foundation,—those, in fact, upon whom she was reckoning to conduct it during her illness. ‘If our Mother had sent to me for one of my eyes or one of my arms,’ she observed, ‘I should tear out the one or cut off the other to show her my humble obedience.’ At another time, when Mother de Chantal had summoned Mother de Chatel (not knowing her state), and a consultation of doctors had declared that if she were to travel she would lose one of her eyes, which was inflamed, she said laughingly, ‘O! it does not signify having only one eye, but it signifies a great deal that I should be obedient;’ and she set off in spite of all that could be said to dissuade her. Another chronicle relates that Mother Fichet, going to Crémieux, fell off her horse, and was so hurt that she was unconscious for two hours among the snow-covered mountains. But in vain was she urged to go back again, though to pursue the journey might be to peril her life. ‘Obedience has spoken,’ she replied; ‘come, let us go forward!’ And when Mother de Blonay was blamed, or rather reproached, by several people for having parted with so precious a possession as the body of Francis de Sales, she said, ‘Ah! I would have given up, not only the body of my holy founder at the bidding of my revered Mother, but even the living Body of my Lord Jesus Christ, if I had Him in my keeping!’ When Sister Rosset was very old, she was one day sent for to the parlour to sing to M. Olier, the founder of St. Sulpice. At all times it is supposed that Sister Rosset had not a pleasant voice, and as it was now quite cracked, it was a considerable humiliation to exercise it for the benefit of a stranger. But the aged Sister, with great simplicity, went close to the parlour grating,<sup>2</sup> and sang until she was told by the Superior to leave off. As soon as she was gone away, M. Olier,

<sup>2</sup> A division with wide bars, like a paling, is often seen in the parlours of the Visitation.

who was one of the best living judges of true spirituality, exclaimed, 'Fifty miracles would not so thoroughly have convinced me of the Christian virtue of that nun as this act of heroic submission.'

It has been truly said that if women could so completely subdue their will, there was little else to which they could cling. Poverty, that true poverty which comprises the actual want of necessaries, was thoroughly well known in the Visitation, but it was never known to dismay the Sisters who suffered from it. The instances of providential interposition mentioned in the various foundations are almost endless, but a few of them must be recorded here.

At Orleans, the bursar one day went to Mother de la Roche, the Superior, and told her there was neither money nor corn in the convent. The Superior told her to go and bless the small remains of corn that were left, and to hope in God. The Sister hesitated to do as she was told, and the next day she was heard in the refectory accusing herself of her want of obedience in not having discharged the command. 'My child,' said the Superior, 'the community will now go and do what you have omitted ;' and getting up, she went, followed by all the Sisters, to the granary, where, after a long prayer, she bade all of them bless the little heap then before them. From that day, though it was freely used for the community, it never grew less. The Superior of another convent went one day to the money box in a moment of great need, but when she found only a single sou in it, the Sisters began to laugh at her face of dismay, and merrily asked whether the Archangel Raphael would make up what she wanted. Their Mother, however, was not to be put out, but looking up, began to pray, says the record, 'as if to waken up her dear Lord.' Almost immediately some one knocked at the convent gate, who had brought a hundred louis d'or for the Sisters. The Superior then quietly said, 'Children of little faith, are you now convinced that God is faithful in keeping His promises?'

Once in the convent at Crémieux there was nothing whatever to eat in the house, when a poor woman came to the gate

bringing her apron full of loaves, one for each of the nuns. Another time at Nevers, where the convent was small, the community were very much in need of a little garden which the owner refused to sell, and the Superior sent the Sisters to pray three at a time, saying that they should not leave off till they had obtained their request from God. At the end of the novena the proprietor came to the convent and offered to sell his garden. Mother de Chatel was once bidden to make some broth for a sick person, and she was lamenting that there was no fire, and nothing with which to make one, when suddenly a fire kindled in the grate of itself. Mother de Chatel immediately knelt down, and with that simplicity of love which shines through all the Visitation annals, said, 'In truth, Lord, I knew that Thou wast here, but I knew not that Thou wast here to serve in the kitchen.' And it seemed to her that a Voice answered her, 'I serve the Blessed in Heaven at My Table, and I am very willing indeed to serve even in the kitchen those who love Me upon earth.'

The prettiest of all these stories relates to an occurrence which took place when Mother de Blonay was building the chapel at Annecy and was stopped for want of money. During this time of painful waiting she was told one day that a poor lame peasant wanted to see her, and he said: 'My name is Esseve, and I have heard in the forests that you wish to build a church in which the body of my blessed patron Francis de Sales is to rest. He confirmed me when he visited Chablais, where I belong, and I am come to bring you my alms for the chapel.' Then kneeling down he gave her ten *quarts d'écus*, saying he had made it by gathering gum benjamin from the trees, and that he should now look forward to begging for the rest of his life; but that when he should fall sick and could not work any longer, there would be plenty of people to help him, and besides, he had always one good friend. Mother de Blonay asked him who this friend was; and the poor man replied, 'Everybody receives good from Him, but very few know Him. He is called Jesus Christ. Whoever trusts himself to Him and makes Him his friend never wants for anything. He plays a loving kind of game with souls; and though He needs nothing

of us, He wishes to win something of us, and that we should offer Him gifts, above all others the gift of our hearts, for this is the only one He accepts.<sup>3</sup>

The spirit of penance and mortification of the body, and the gift of prayer which is granted in such abundance only where self-conquest is thorough and habitual, joined to very remarkable lowliness and humbleness of mind, were also characteristics remarked in the Visitation communities, which seemed specially raised up to make a signal protest against the reckless frivolity, the brilliant wickedness, and the fast gathering unbelief of the age.

The marvels which we have related of the Visitation convents, and the growth of the spirit of their beautiful rule, must not prevent us from taking up the thread of Madame de Toulonjon's story, which is now incessantly meeting and crossing that of her mother. She had felt the death of Francis de Sales most acutely, for he had been the one guide, friend, and tender father of her life, and to her, as well as to Mother de Chantal, the loss was irreparable. But she was much comforted and strengthened by the renewed intercourse and more perfect understanding with her mother, which Francis had laboured to bring about; and during her first years of married life she had a fresh interest in her young niece, Jacqueline de Chaugy, who was brought up at Alonne under the care of her grandmother, old Madame de Toulonjon.<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline was a most loving and loveable child, full of grace and charm, exceedingly clever and intelligent, and altogether most interesting as a pupil and companion to her aunt, who was only eleven years older than herself. This interest was the more delightful to Françoise from the fact that her other daily companions were grave and elderly persons, her husband's mother, and her brother in law the Abbé de St. Satur.<sup>5</sup>

Francis de Sales once, on dining in the company of Jac-

<sup>3</sup> Life of Mother de Blonay. *Bougaud*, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> Baroness de Chaugy was the sister of Antony de Toulonjon.

<sup>5</sup> Claude de Toulonjon, abbé commendatory of St. Satur and prior of Mesvres.

queline at Marshal St. Gérard's, took an apple from one of the dishes at dessert and gave it to her, saying in his graceful way, 'I know that girls are fond of sweet things ;' and then he added, 'One day you will come to us.' She was at that time a pretty and very charming girl, delighted with her entrance into the world and eager for every pleasure. As, according to her aunt's account, she was 'only to be seen to be loved,' it is not surprising to find that when scarcely seventeen she captivated and became attached to a young man of great promise, whom she wished to marry. The gentleman was in the army, and soon after Jacqueline had made his acquaintance, he went out with his regiment and was killed. Mademoiselle de Chaugy, exceedingly unhappy, meeting with no sympathy from her stern mother, and scarcely knowing what to do with herself, went to stay a short time at Paray-le-Monial, where Mother de Chantal saw her, took her to Annecy, where she was greatly comforted. There, after much resistance, Jacqueline de Chaugy at last fulfilled the prediction of Francis de Sales. She became afterwards one of the most celebrated of the early Visitandines.

While watching from time to time over Jacqueline's early years, Françoise was the chief confidante and adviser of Celse Bénigne in his continual escapades. His marriage had not done for him all that was hoped. He was still a duellist, and quarrels occasioned by his haughty insolent demeanour and hasty tongue were of frequent occurrence. It is possible that no life of calm domestic happiness could long have satisfied his fiery, turbulent character, destitute of earnestness and persistent purpose. Once, on Easter Sunday, when he had been to communion in his parish church at Paris with his wife and family, a servant went into the church and summoned him with a message from Boutteville de Montmorency to be his second in a duel at the Porte St. Antoine. Without giving an instant's reflection to the terrible irreverence of the act or the scandal he was causing to the whole congregation, Celse Bénigne jumped up, left the church, and ran in his velvet shoes as he was to the Porte St. Antoine, and fought a duel (probably with the opposing second) with his usual headlong courage and unflinching success. But a

general outcry followed; the clergy spoke of the occurrence from their pulpits; the king was very angry; and Celse Bénigne was obliged to leave Paris and take refuge with his sister Françoise at Alonne. But the king's anger was a small affair compared with Richelieu's rage. He had Boutteville de Montmorency arrested and executed, and spoke of arresting Celse Bénigne also. Mother de Chantal even made her preparations for going to Paris to be present at his execution, and to exhort and sustain him under the sentence of death which was actually passed by the parliament of Paris.<sup>6</sup>

In 1627 an English force, under the Duke of Buckingham, sailed to relieve La Rochelle, then the stronghold of the French Huguenots, and an army was dispatched under the Marquis de Toiras to hinder the invaders from landing. Celse Bénigne, much disliking the disgrace hanging over him at court, and continually threatened by the king's bearing, offered himself as one of several noble volunteers on this expedition. He was much encouraged in this by his mother, who wrote him most beautiful letters, urging him to renew his faith and religious practice, and to make a good preparation for death and eternity. His young wife also poured out her entreaties and prayers for him, and they were heard and answered. Celse Bénigne made his confession and communion with every sign of earnest faith; and after having three horses killed under him and receiving seven-and-twenty wounds, he was seen to join his hands and implore the mercy of God, and fell with honour in a just cause.<sup>7</sup>

It was a long time before Françoise could be reconciled to the loss of her imprudent, impetuous, but generous-hearted brother; but having gone to spend some time at Autun with Mother de Chastelluz, she found in the peace and calm of the convent, and the soothing sympathy and lofty mind of the Superior, a source of fresh strength and submission to God's will. Not

<sup>6</sup> 'Le parlement de Paris . . . l'avait déclaré atteint et convaincu de lèse-majesté divine et humaine en qualité de second de Boutteville, et le condamnait à être pendu et étranglé en place de Grève.' *Les Deux Filles de Ste. Chantal*, p. 298.

<sup>7</sup> Bussy, *Généalogie Manuscrite*. Quoted by Bougaud, p. 439. Celse Bénigne was scarcely thirty when he died.



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long afterwards, a little son, who lived only a few days, was born to her ; but she had scarcely time to mourn for him when she was startled out of this new sorrow by the appearance of a dreadful epidemic, called at the time *la grande peste*, which was like the 'black death' of an earlier century. But what took place under this affliction requires a chapter to itself.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *The Plague of 1628.*

THIS *grande peste* was one of the most frightful plagues that had ever ravaged Europe. France, Savoy, Piedmont and Italy were all infected by it; and as pestilence without medical aid or sanitary measures would naturally create universal panic, the towns were soon deserted, and at length even the fields were left untilled. In the confusion and misery which ensued, the Visitation convents became the scene of many noble and heroic acts of courage and self-devotion.

It was then that Mother de Chastelluz called together the Sisters at Autun, and proposed to them what the Council of Trent in such cases allows,—to leave the convent and go to a large airy house in the country, of which her sister had offered her the use. But one and all the nuns declined the privilege of breaking their enclosure; and, saying that they feared no plague except the plagues of the soul, they embraced each other, promising to nurse their own sick till death. Mother de Chantal was so delighted when she heard this account, that she wrote a congratulatory letter to the Sisters, which is still preserved at Autun.

At Moulins the pestilence gained such force that, after it had lasted only a few days, no inhabitant remained in the town but the sick and dying, and a few miserable plunderers who braved the danger for the chance of pillaging the empty houses. M. de la Coudre, the confessor of the convent, was one of the first to die, but his last utterance was a prayer and earnest blessing for the Sisters, whom he besought neither to fly from Moulins nor to be afraid. They remained, therefore, for nearly eight months, deprived of all help and comfort both of body

and soul,—for it seems doubtful even if they were able to get a priest to say mass,—a state more forsaken and forlorn than it is possible for us now to realize. One good regular priest still remained at Moulins, serving the sick poor with great charity, and he went from time to time to the Sisters, begging them to pray for his poor patients and to have no fear for themselves. He touchingly told them that ‘he held his Master, being the Blessed Sacrament, every day both in his hands and on his breast, carrying Him to the sick ; and that he thus bore Him round the convent walls of His dear spouses, that nothing evil might enter the enclosure of those happy willing prisoners ; and that he never made this little procession without feeling sure that our Lord would preserve them ; which he told them as dear sisters, that they might renew their prayers to their adorable Master.’

At Paray-le-Monial the town was even more forsaken, and a Sister in the convent was seized with the plague. She was immediately carried out to a little hut, built on purpose, at the end of the garden, and as all earnestly begged to be allowed to join her, one of the Sisters was chosen by lot to be shut up with her to be her nurse. Some idea may be gained of the state of panic from the absurd fright of the town doctor on this occasion ; for he went away into the country, and could with difficulty be induced to come back as far as the ramparts, where he could just hear the Superior’s questions called out through the barred turret window. He shouted back to her that if the Sister were not bled, she must inevitably die, prescribed two or three petty remedies, and then went away again as quickly as he could ;—nothing could induce him to go into the convent to bleed her. That same evening a young man—a surgeon or student—came to the same place on the ramparts, and shouted out that he was willing to do anything for money, and would bleed the sick Sister if they would give him a hundred crowns. He was offered a hundred francs, for which he consented to go into the convent ; where he bled the Sister, taught the community how to bleed for themselves, showed them how to burn some kind of aromatic drug, and to com-

pound certain medicines which were but of little use. This was the whole sum of the medical help these poor nuns obtained as long as the plague lasted.

When it had reached Montferrand the priest who acted as Superior wisely judged that the experience of its ravages at Moulins and Paray-le-Monial was not to be despised; and he ordered the Sisters to go to Saint Flour, where another convent of the order had offered them shelter. Fresh trials, however, met these devoted women, even in their very act of obedience; for the unaccustomed sight of a troop of nuns on horseback or in wretched carts, and also the fact that they were flying from an infected town, struck such panic into the villages through which they passed, that every door was closed against them. They were even obliged to sleep in the woods, in the poor huts used by the charcoal burners; and when they reached Saint Flour they found the town gates shut to bar their entrance, and the populace assembled in crowds in the market place, threatening the Sisters with assault or ill usage if they were allowed to enter the town. It is not easy to think what might have been their lot, if the Bishop had not offered them the use of his own country house some miles off. There they made their quarantine; and when the townspeople became convinced that they could show a 'clean bill of health,' they consented to the removal of the nuns to the Visitation convent, where their coming had been awaited with great anxiety. The two communities at last were allowed to enjoy seven months together in great peace.

At Lyons there were now two Visitation convents; one at Bellecour, lying low down between the rivers, the other at Antiquaille, on the heights of Fourvières, the healthiest part of the town. Yet, strange to say, it was Antiquaille that was struck with sickness, and the poor Superior wrote in despair to Mother de Chantal: 'Alas, alas, Mother! what shall I say about our poor house? Out of twenty-two Sisters, seven are already dead. And such Sisters! true pearls of virtue!' Among those who died was one of the *tourières*, a poor girl, Sister Jane. She had been born in the country, and her father

and mother were so poor and ignorant that they seem not to have taught her even the simplest rudiments of Christianity.

Jane's sole occupation as a girl was keeping sheep, and while in the fields she used to ponder on the flowers and trees, the sun, the changes of day and night, wondering how and whence they came, and what they were. Whoever made all these beautiful things, she thought, must have been a very great and wonderful Being. So thinking, she would often kneel on the grass, and say in the simplest words, 'Thou deservest much to be loved, whoever Thou art, that didst make the earth and heaven, and me also.' For three years this poor girl continued thus to worship God, taught by conscience only; and then she heard some one speak of the Blessed Virgin as the Mother of God. From one question to another Jane then plodded on, asking and pondering, till she learnt the chief mysteries of religion; and being exceedingly delighted with each piece of religious knowledge she gained, her whole mind became fixed upon the thought of how happy she should be to lead some kind of life, where she need never do anything but learn and think of religion and holy things. When the plague broke out she had been two years in the convent at Lyons, springing forward with rapid steps in the path of spiritual perfection; but she was suddenly taken with the disease, and after the shortest illness, her soul took flight at once to that God Who had so marvellously drawn her to Himself.

Mother de Blonay was at Bellecour, having been through her term of government; and being now in the lowest place as 'Sœur déposée,' she generously suggested to the Superior to ask the nuns of Antiquaille to take up their abode at Bellecour. The community accepted the noble offer, but not till the whole air around their own convent was infected by unburied corpses, and not a single Sister left who was well enough to nurse the rest. On foot then, with their veils lowered over their faces, the sad procession of nuns was seen walking through the deserted city to the hospitable gates open to receive them; where, setting aside all thought of danger, the Sisters of Bellecour cordially met and embraced those from the stricken convent, taking them

immediately to the choir, where they sang office together. It is pleasant to learn that, during the whole of the time the two communities lived together, not a single case of sickness occurred among them.

In the convent at Valence, as soon as the pestilence declared itself, one of the Sisters, Marie Constance Orlendin, went into the chapel and offered her life to God, that the community might be spared ; and the offering was accepted as it was made, for Sister Orlendin was rapidly seized with the terrible sickness and died ; but 'the plague was stayed.' At Grenoble the like offering was made by the heroic Mother de Beaumont, who, it will be remembered, had been sent away by Mother de Chantal from the Paris convent, at Paris, and who, at Annecy, in her humility of self-rebuke, had begged leave to make her noviceship over again. Mother de Beaumont, now Superior at Grenoble, wrote out a beautiful and hearty act of self-sacrifice, which seemed to be visibly accepted, by the sparing of the convent from sickness when absolutely girdled with raging pestilence and death, though Mother de Beaumont's life was not taken. Another of these acts of self-sacrifice was offered by a much valued Sister at Crest, in Provence, where the plague raged with peculiar fury. Mademoiselle de Bachason, a very beautiful girl, possessed of great wealth, had endowed and entered the convent at Crest, and when the plague broke out she reproached herself for having exposed all the community, by drawing them thither, to the danger of a painful death. She went, therefore, into the chapel, where, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, she earnestly besought our Lord to spare the Sisters, and to strike her alone ; and being firmly convinced, at the same time, that her prayer was heard, she got up and went with a radiant face to the Superior, declaring that her own death was very near, but that she had reason to trust that the rest of the community would be spared. And it came to pass as she said, for she was taken ill that very evening, and knew at once that her time was come. Very wonderful and beautiful is the narrative given of her end : 'Then that most innocent dove began to pour forth very great thanksgivings before her Divine Spouse. All was



humility, contrition, and love. "Ah," she often said when her pains were at the greatest, "Ah, how my soul rejoices when I set before myself that as soon as it is out of this prison, the Blessed Virgin will present it to her Son, and my blessed Father will receive me!" She would not let them bring in the Capuchin father, who exposed himself to danger in order to administer to her the sacraments, fearing lest he might bring some new harm to the Sisters; but having been told that it was so allowed in cases of necessity, she told her sins to the Superior, who went to the window to repeat them to him, after which the good father gave the sick nun absolution from the street. She gained the plenary indulgence, and remained then in so great peace and serenity that the sweetness thereof spread itself from her to the hearts of those who waited upon her. Eight hours before she died she suffered strange pains with a very loving devotion; Jesus and Mary were her sweetest remedies. At last the long desired hour came, and in profound tranquillity, her eyes fixed on a crucifix, with a gentle smile of humble confidence, she gave up her holy soul, having been ill only five days; and, as this dear Sister said, the disease went no farther in the convent, although we were in evident danger.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of these multiplied acts of unselfish sacrifice, perfect trust in God, and joyous suffering undergone for His sake, where was Mother de Chantal? Surely we know enough already of her great motherly heart to be sure that she could not fail to share the sorrows and joys of her children. And at this time she most truly both suffered and was glad; for while she could not but rejoice at the heroic virtue shown so abundantly in every one of her convents, she could not help grieving like a true mother over the loss of her 'pearls,' and felt to her very heart's core the poverty, the absolute want, and the forsaken condition of her noble and beloved daughters. Her letters at this later time of her life, happily preserved, fully show her mind. 'I have sent you three or four letters, my child,' she says, in one of these, to the Superior of a plague-stricken con-

<sup>1</sup> Bougaud, v. ii. p. 371. From an unpublished account of the foundation of Crest.

vent : ' what are you thinking about not to answer me ? Do you not feel that I am upon live coals ?' Writing to another person, she says : ' Our poor Sisters are in such need that I should like to sell even myself, if I could, to be able to help them.'

But Mother de Chantal by no means confined herself to the numerous letters in which she seemed to send her whole heart to each convent by turns. She bent the full force of her energies and capacity, and all the influence she could bring to bear from without, to gather means and help. She sent supplies of corn to Lyons, Chambéry, Grenoble, and St. Flour ; medicines to Crest ; clothing and shoes to Crémieux ; and a whole flock of sheep to Autun. She obtained a consultation of the first physicians in Paris, to draw up a regular body of instructions for the treatment of the plague ; and while there she also besought a conference of eminent theologians, to decide whether the Sisters could conscientiously break their enclosure when threatened with the prevailing sickness. She regularly sent circular letters to all her convents, containing words such as she only could write, of encouragement, advice, and the tenderest comfort and support. During all the toil and incessant exertions for her nuns there runs through Mother de Chantal's life at this time the continuous golden thread of humble sorrow and self-reproach, which probably availed more for their help in pleading before God than everything done by her children. For if Jane de Chantal had changed at all, it was but the change of passing ' from strength to strength ;' she is still to be found putting herself in the last and lowest place, still reckoning herself as being nothing and worthy of nothing ; and while to her eyes every one of her Sisters was practising nobler virtues and shedding the fragrance of grace around her the sinner, she herself was doing nothing, and being so unworthy, was perhaps the cause of God's punishment to them all.

In the middle of her anxieties and exertions in Paris, the Bishop of Annecy, fearing that the capital would soon be visited by the plague, wrote to her and ordered her to return immediately to Annecy, without stopping at any of the houses in her road that were infected with disease. This was a cruel order to

Mother de Chantal; but she strictly obeyed it, passing by the very gates of some of her convents, racked by the double anguish of not being able to see her daughters, and of knowing how deeply they too would feel the disappointment. All that she could do was to beg diligently, as she went along, for 'her poor plague-stricken Visitations.' Near Paray-le-Monial Mother de Chantal wrote to her daughter Françoise, at Alonne, begging her to help the poor nuns whom she herself might not even see. 'My very dear child,' she says, 'we are come here, six miles from Paray, to learn some news of our poor Sisters. I have sent to their confessor, their only help next to God, and he tells me that four of the Sisters are now out of danger. Poor Sister Mary Margaret is dead; will you make it known to the convents, that she may be prayed for? As for the other Sisters, they are destitute of every human aid, except that of the good priest, who goes through the villages seeking what he can for their sustenance, and whose life is risked in consequence, for he has been almost killed already;' probably it was thought that he carried infection with him. 'If this good man should take the disease, one cannot see what would hinder our poor Sisters from dying of hunger. Besides that, they are in very great and evident danger of the disease like every one else in the town, and even more, for the burial ground for the plague-stricken is behind their house. Add to this, that it is impossible, humanly speaking—according to the opinion of the neighbourhood—that the town can be purified, as no arrangements have been made for that, and the bodies of the dead remain unburied in the houses. See what danger these poor daughters are in, and will be in; they have written to me, and the confessor tells me that they have no means of obtaining help. They are destitute of all aid. They still, however, have a little of your money left, and some corn and wine, but very little. Certainly, my dearest child, you must, if you please, provide for their wants.'<sup>2</sup>

To urge her request still more earnestly, Mother de Chantal went to pay a visit to Françoise at Alonne. From her house she wrote to Mother de Chastelluz at Autun, earnestly begging

<sup>2</sup> *Unpublished Letters*, p. 372.

her to leave the convent and go to the priory at Méière, of which Abbé de Toulonjon had offered the community the use. 'Do believe, my child,' she added, 'that we will serve you in all that is in our power, heartily and without reserve. There is a great fear at Autun of letting any one into the town, and people would like you to arrange some means by which you might be spoken to, and by which you might receive and return things over the town wall, which is to the right hand of your garden. See if this can be done, and let us know in every way what you wish of us while I am here. Ah, my God! what a great mortification it is not to see you and our poor Sisters, whom I dearly salute with yourself!'<sup>3</sup>

From some cause not mentioned, it was found impossible to establish the communication over the town wall, and Mother de Chastelluz obtained leave to go near the road along which Mother de Chantal was to pass, and wait for her in a field, where she intended to stand at some distance and against the wind. But when Mother de Chantal saw her standing in the field, she could not contain herself, and making the sign of the cross, she exclaimed, 'Let us meet in God's name!' then, almost running towards Mother de Chastelluz, she kissed her, and made her get into the carriage. At this unexpected step, Françoise, who had her little girl Gabrielle, six years of age, with her, was terribly frightened. 'If I had not been certain that my mother was a Saint,' she says, 'I should have been ready to die of fear.' Poor Madame de Roussillon, to whose château Mother de Chantal then went on, was in the same state, and going down on her knees openly said: 'Madame, if your sanctity did not put me out of fear, I should tremble and leave the house to my sister; but I am confident that no evil will happen to any one: give me the help of your blessing.' And it seems that no harm came to any of the party.

At Chalon-sur-Saone Mother de Chantal met with her nephew, the son of poor Margaret de Neufchèzes, who had just been appointed Bishop of the diocese; and the whole population seem to have vied with one another in doing her

<sup>3</sup> *Unpublished Letters*, p. 372.

honour. It was shown, indeed, in what we should consider rather too demonstrative a manner; for, after the Carmelite and Benedictine nuns had besought her to visit them, the Ursulines asked her to dine with them in their refectory, where they actually cut off a great piece of her veil. When Mother de Chantal took her veil off at night and found what had been done she grieved bitterly, and as soon as she could the next morning besought the Bishop to let her leave Chalons immediately, saying, with probably a spark of what her dear departed father had of old called her '*soudaineté*,' that 'the nuns did such unreasonable things to show their esteem for her that she could not bear it.' The Bishop was not at all of the same way of thinking, for he quietly replied: 'My dear aunt, the more you think they have done ill, the more inclined I am to think they have done well.' And instead of allowing Mother de Chantal to slip away as she wished, he insisted on her receiving every visitor who called in the great reception room of the Bishop's house; so that she had an enormous levée of all kinds and degrees of the townspeople, but characteristically sat as close to the wall as she could, that no one might cut off any more pieces of her veil. All her skill, however, was useless; and it is recorded that, as long as Mother de Chantal remained at Chalons her veil and habit lost some fragments of stuff every day. Towards the end of 1628 she reached Annecy in time to bury one of the Sisters who had just died, though not of pestilence, as the pure mountain air still preserved the town from disease. It is easy to discern from her letters that the perils she had passed through and the scenes she had witnessed had deeply impressed Mother de Chantal with a fresh conviction of the nothingness of life and all that it can give. In a letter to the Superior at Lyons she says: 'We shall die here as well as at Lyons; for the day before yesterday we buried one of our Sisters,—a treasure, a perfectly pure soul; and I believe, in the goodness of our well beloved Lord and Spouse, that she flew straight to heaven like a pure white dove. Ah, my child, how little it matters of what sickness we die, if we do but mount to that blessed eternity! O, holy Mother

of God's children, when shall we rest in thy bosom and undying arms? My child, our souls ought to pine away with this desire. But no, I am wrong; let us meekly wait for the hour which the heavenly Bridegroom has appointed to crown us with this happiness; and while waiting, let us only desire one thing, which is to please Him by fulfilling His holy will.<sup>4</sup>

It was not long before the dreaded pestilence invaded even this secluded spot among the Savoy mountains. During the Carnival of 1629 the Bishop mournfully prophesied that the folly and frivolity of the inhabitants would soon be punished. He had been praying at the grave of Francis de Sales, when he was met on returning home by a crowd of ridiculous and perhaps dissolute masks, and then he said to some of those with him, that before many days God's anger would visit the town. His words came true even more quickly than he thought; and in a day or two it was rumoured that the well known terrible plague spots had been found upon many bodies both of the dead and the living. Just at this juncture, while the whole town seemed breathless with the expectation of what was coming upon it, the mother house at Annecy reëlected Mother de Chantal its Superior, wisely thinking that there never was a time when they had greater need of their mother's presence and counsels among them. It was well that they did so; for the Visitation was on the eve of its greatest trial. News of the outbreak of the pestilence at Annecy quickly flew abroad, and from all sides letters poured in, begging Mother de Chantal to leave the old mother house and seek safety in some as yet wholesome town; but at the same time great exertions were made to collect money; and large sums were sent her to distribute according to their greater needs. The Prince and Princess de Carignano even urged her to leave Annecy, and said, if she refused, they should ask the Duke of Savoy himself to interfere, and order her to go. They little knew the determined courage and loving heart which burst out in reply: 'O, forgive my frankness; but I am not brave enough to for-

<sup>4</sup> To Mother Catherine de Crémeaux de la Grange, Dec. 8, 1628. Bougaud, p. 279.



sake my flock, for whom I ought always to be ready to sacrifice myself.'

Mother de Chantal stayed at her post; and amid the panic-stricken and suffering neighbourhood the convent at Annecy seemed a true haven of peace. She occupied herself first with writing a circular letter to the Superiors of all her convents, in which she gave full instructions concerning the rule, under the idea that it might be the last time she could give them advice. The copy of this letter sent to Mother de Blonay at Lyons is preserved at Annecy. Having thus discharged her duty to the order, Mother de Chantal gave herself up altogether to helping and comforting the sick poor by whom the convent was surrounded, and for whom, although she might not visit them, her heart seemed to find eyes and ears which passed through the enclosure walls, and discerned the wants of all. Again, as of old time at Bourbilly and Monthelon, she distributed with unsparing hand corn, medicines, comforts, and money, and had soon bestowed upon the town poor all the considerable sum that she had received from France; next she put herself and her nuns upon short commons, and stinted even the allowance of coarse black bread, till both money and food were gone. But after a while the generous measure which she ever filled for Christ's poor was repaid in the royal fashion of His promise—'heaped up, pressed down, and running over.' Twelve measures of corn given her by a priest increased to sixteen, and lasted until a fresh supply was sent in, while the provision of wine in the same way multiplied, and far outlasted its natural limits.<sup>5</sup>

But Mother de Chantal was not satisfied with giving temporal or temporary relief. She stirred up the Bishop's heart and kindled anew the earnest zeal of a few devoted priests, so that for ten long months they toiled incessantly between the dead and the living. She sent for the syndic and some of the leading people of Annecy to the convent, and excited them to such heroic charity that these noble men stayed in the town throughout the course of the plague, and spent their days in

<sup>5</sup> *Foundation of Annecy*, &c. Bougaud, t. ii, p. 282.

helping and comforting the sick and burying the dead. The syndic himself said that this unwearied mother sent him about two dozen *Agnus Dei*, with the assurance that no one who would wear one about him should be struck with the disease ; and he added that, having distributed them among his fellow labourers, they also shared his confidence, and not one of them fell ill. The Bishop himself, John Francis de Sales, acknowledged the help given by her prayers in very strong words : ‘ O my noble mother ! ’ he exclaimed, ‘ you are my Moses, and I am your Joshua. So long as you hold up your hands to Heaven I and mine shall fight against the woes of our people.’

The convent was indeed like some citadel of secret strength during all this long affliction of the neighbourhood. Through the desolate grass-grown streets, trodden only by the mournful funerals of the dead or the seekers for corpses yet unburied, the convent bell struck its silvery note of peace, calling the Sisters to prayer, as if life and death were indeed merged in that blessed eternity on which their souls were fixed. The sound of prayer and the holy office went on as usual, and none of the daily occupations were ever intermitted ; there was no change in the convent, except that certain exercises were added, which the Sisters heartily and cheerfully took upon themselves, for the staying of the terrible plague. With this intention the Sisters fasted daily by turns upon bread and water, and besides public penances in the refectory, they added sharp and cruel disciplines in their cells. Almost daily they formed in a little procession, and went through the cloisters barefooted and with cords round their necks, stopping at each of the oratories to implore forgiveness and health for Annecy, and all together taking a public discipline while the *Miserere* was said. Not one of the Sisters—had there been one so minded—could well have flinched from these prayers of intercession, when she beheld their mother on her bare knees in these processions, exclaiming aloud, with her eyes full of tears, ‘ Forgiveness, forgiveness, O Lord ! Pardon the sinners ! ’ The disease, as it turned out, never reached the convent ; if it had, the nuns had resolved not to expose their confessor to danger, as the sick Sister would have made her

confession to him at a distance, and he would have placed the Blessed Sacrament for her between two small slices of bread, which the nun waiting upon her would have taken to her as reverently as possible.

When she came afterwards to speak of this time, during which the convent had no communications of the ordinary kind with the world outside, Mother de Chantal used to say that she had never known such peace, and that but for the sufferings of the people, she would have wished it to last for ever. At length the plague ceased; it gradually left Savoy, Turin and Italy, and by the end of 1631 it was rare to hear of a case. It helped very mainly to the carrying into execution of the idea which, as we have seen, was in the mind of the founder of the Visitation from the first. During the whole course of the plague, throughout the long terrible days of weeping and praying and doing sharp penance for the people, one thought and sorrow filled Mother de Chantal's mind: this was her old, long relinquished, but ever living desire that religious women should visit and serve the poor with their own personal labour. She had submitted to the enclosure, almost forced on Francis de Sales; and the history of the rapid and wonderful development of the Visitation shows how providential was this change of plan. But Jane de Chantal's heart was unchanged, and to be barred from the sick and dying in their time of this supreme affliction, and that no religious women should ever be seen in the streets of the suffering and plague-stricken town, was to her so acutely touching and painful that she says herself she was obliged to drive the thought from her, lest it should weaken her and destroy her peace. It was singular that at the time of both these great pestilences that broke over France, Mother de Chantal was in Paris, was constantly seeing St. Vincent de Paul, and was under his direction. It can well be imagined how the force and enthusiasm of her grand character must have stirred up to new energy the gentle and prudent 'Saint of the Poor;' and as it had lain under the surface of her life for twenty years, the thought and wish for the institution of nuns to visit and comfort the poor must have taken shape in many earnest and

burning conversations with 'Monsieur Vincent.' Two facts at least are certain: in 1634, soon after the scourge of the plague had died out, the 'daughters' of St. Vincent de Paul were embodied in their first modest shape. And St. Vincent himself so entirely ascribed the first idea of their creation to the Visitation foundress, that he himself often called the Sisters of Charity 'Madame de Chantal's legacy.'

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *Madame de Toulonjon. Steps towards the Canonization of Francis de Sales. 1629-1632.*

THROUGHOUT the terrible visitation of the plague Françoise de Toulonjon had much felt her lonely life at Alonne, and the death of the little son whom her husband had never seen. Her mother's visit had come, therefore, as a special boon; for her presence never failed to raise the household to new life and vigour. It mattered little what she said, whether it were, 'Let us all be glad and resigned under the good hand of God,' or, 'How poor is this life; how vain are all its hopes!' Some good thought, full of solid comfort and refreshment, was always suggested, and when she went away, she seemed to leave a store of counsel and encouragement to sustain its inmates for a long time. Meanwhile Cardinal Richelieu still protracted the war, and it was not till the year 1629 that peace was made with him, and Louis XIII. entered Nimes in triumph. M. de Toulonjon, who now commanded a regiment of guards, accompanied him, and after two years' absence and almost innumerable perils and escapes, returned to Alonne and saw his wife once more. And then for a little while, for four short months, Françoise enjoyed almost untroubled rest.

These tranquil months seemed almost necessary for her to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of her husband, and to appreciate those great qualities which his modesty and simple every day manners and habits of speech rather hid from common observers. She could now watch him in his daily life, which, as it unfolded before her, continually increased her affection and deep regard. This little interval of home peace, 'rounded' by two periods of singular tumult, was brought to an

end by the outburst of war, newly declared by Cardinal de Richelieu against Savoy. The restless and ambitious minister had put himself at the head of his troops in person, and was already marching upon Susa when M. de Toulonjon was summoned. Antony was not the man to dally with obedience, but at the moment of parting with his wife and pretty little girl he was surprised to hear that Françoise had determined to accompany him as far as she could on the road, and that she would at least go with him to Annecy. Small comfort as there was in travelling then among the Alps, and being exposed for long weary hours to hunger, snowstorms, and delays, M. de Toulonjon knew his wife's courage and dauntless temper too well to oppose her wish, and in March 1630, they all arrived at Annecy, where Françoise bade farewell to her husband and went at once to the convent. Sore-hearted, and full of anxiety for the future, this young wife, already well accustomed to trials, crossed the threshold of the convent with a weary spirit. While frequenting those wellknown peaceful parlours and corridors, and the garden with its fountain, where she had so often sat at the feet of her beloved spiritual father, and heard from his sweet voice the maxims of Christian life, Françoise may well have turned with an anxious longing towards religious life, the kingdom of peace in this world. Ten years ago—ten years so filled with events and movement and emotion that they now looked like a long life—she had kissed those nuns and gone forth to see what the world contained. And now, while she kissed those very same nuns again, and read in their calm clear looks the solidity of their peace, and the strong pillars upon which they leaned, she was almost ready to repent having ever entered upon the chequered and ruffled course of married life.

But '*notre Françon*' was not a woman given to weak surrender, and whenever her anxieties and the cruel reality of the separation from her husband overpowered her, one look at her child was enough to bring her again to the level of a firm resolve to do and endure cheerfully to the end. She had one great pleasure at Annecy, besides the constant solace of her mother's society and counsel. Her niece, Jacqueline de Chaugy, had



now been a novice in the house nine months, and had made such rapid progress in spiritual knowledge that her aunt might sit down at her feet and become her pupil. But Jacqueline had no wish to teach any one, and persistently refused to give the advice which Madame de Toulonjon would have sought from her, laughingly referring her to the professed nuns, who alone, she said, were really able to help and guide. As Jacqueline generally managed to secure the worst and shabbiest things for her own share, Françoise was quite shocked one day to see her in an old patched veil, and sent for a new one for her. Mother de Chantal, however, more clear-sighted than her daughter as to the principles of religious life, would not allow Jacqueline to wear the new veil, and gave it to another novice. For a little while, a little peaceful time of great rest and help to her soul, Madame de Toulonjon remained in the convent, but as the French army was about to invade Savoy, she was obliged to go home to look after her people and her own interests at Alonne. Before she went she heard of her husband's safe arrival and share in the famous passage of the Doire, where he, among others, beheld that very marvellous sight of the great Cardinal on horseback at the head of the army, girt with a sword and pistols, wearing a bright steel cuirass, and a brown surcoat embroidered with gold. In such guise Richelieu made his horse caracole in front of the army, pluming himself rather loudly on knowing all the tricks of *manège* then looked on as necessary for good horsemanship. As we are all fond of lamenting the evils of our own special time, it is well also to acknowledge that such sights as these are among those that are past and gone for ever.

The fortress of Pignerol, the key of Italy, was soon invested and taken, and M. de Toulonjon was appointed governor of it and the surrounding district, when he immediately wrote to his wife to tell her the joyful news, and bade her to prepare to rejoin him shortly in this settled and honourable post. Before the fortifications could be prepared, however, the two large armies, which had passed through Pignerol in the greatest heats of a hot summer, engendered so virulent a fever that the chronicles

of the time declare that the roads were strewn with the bodies of dying soldiers, and that at Pignerol itself the very air was so poisoned that birds fell dead as they passed over the town. Meanwhile the whole army—for generals and soldiers then shared alike—was put upon one meal a day, and it was only marvellous that the whole expedition did not prove a disastrous failure. Whether the imagination of evil had really taken undue possession of the people or not cannot now be known, but it is actually stated in the *Richelieu Memoirs* that, for the fifteen months of that visitation, not a single child was presented for baptism at Pignerol, and that out of the whole population there remained only five hundred persons in sound health. This fact of the absence of baptisms is actually noted in the parish registers. One fact at least is certain, which is that this cruel scourge turned the minds of the inhabitants in the right direction for cure. The town council assembled, and after consulting, resolved unanimously that all the members should make their confession and communion on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, after which they should bind themselves by vow to build a new church to our Lady the Deliverer. This noble act of faith aroused the confidence and hope of the people, and the pestilence soon afterwards began to die away. During all this time M. de Toulonjon's courage and presence of mind were of the utmost service, and wherever the greater amount of sickness and misery was to be found, he was always there, using every means of remedy and encouragement. Meanwhile his wife was suffering intense anxiety on his account, and it seemed to her that the love of her children, her sister, and her brother, scarcely affected her heart at all, in comparison with the probability of her husband's death; for now she had really learnt to know his noble character, she loved him with the warmest and most devoted affection.

Following the pestilence as a matter of course, came the other horrors of war, which in these days we seem fully able to realize. The grass and grain were mown down as green fodder, no fresh crops were sown, the mills and villages were in ruins, the vineyards were a barren waste, the wretched starving pea-

sants were wandering about in bands, seeking a little food from the richer townspeople, and everywhere disease, destitution, and wretchedness met the eye. At length the very ripeness of the evils wrought their own cure, and on the death of the King of Savoy, Charles Emmanuel, the peace of Cherasco was signed, and Pignerol was made over to France. Madame de Toulonjon was by that time safely installed in the fortress with her husband. She then felt thoroughly happy. The gloomy old fort, the vast dingy barrack—which then served as the governor's house, and which now does duty as the Bishop's palace—the storms of snow and hail which swept the little town, hung up as it is like a birdcage against the mighty rocks, might well appal the heart of a young bright spirited woman, accustomed to the society of a number of cheerful friends. But Françoise was a very true wife, and she now set herself to make every use of her talents to help her husband in his office, and to make him beloved by his people. Besides fulfilling all these duties, she studied the character and wants of the neighbouring poor, that she and her husband might consult and form plans together for bettering their morals and condition. One chief means taken for this end was to establish a convent of Franciscan monks at Pignerol, who soon won the confidence and affection of the townspeople, and made a great change in their habits and views. M. de Toulonjon spared no pains to fulfil the onerous duties of a wise ruler over an alien population, and resisted with great firmness the exactions and severities of D'Etampes, the French magistrate and comptroller of the customs. Against him and Marshal de Villeroi, the commander-in-chief—both of whom did all they could to trample upon Savoy, and treat Pignerol and its district as a conquered country—M. de Toulonjon strove long and successfully, and while standing between his people and the exactions of their tyrants, won their ardent love and devotion, as well as the respect of their insolent oppressors. As some acknowledgment of his unwearied services, the town council was sent as a deputation to offer the governor a splendid gold chain, which M. de Toulonjon accepted on a kind of condition that he might bestow it, if necessary, in alms. He and his wife ac-

cordingly made a present of it to the Friars Minor whom they had brought to Pignerol. The event was celebrated in the heartfelt and picturesque manner of those times; the Brothers were called together by the tolling of the great bell, and the Latin memorial drawn up to commemorate the gift still exists at Autun. It requires that, in return for the alms, the convent shall be bound for ever to pray for the King of France and for Antony de Toulonjon, and to engrave this obligation on a marble tablet placed in the parish church.

After matters were amicably arranged, and the French were thoroughly settled in Pignerol, the governor found himself obliged to make himself and his country popular by keeping open house, living in a good deal of state, and entertaining the Italians who flocked from Turin to Pignerol, either for business or pleasure. The French became, as we should say now, the fashion, and Françoise especially was the centre and idol of every society in which she mixed. Her beauty, her grace, her charming manners, and, we are bound to add, the solemnity of her gowns, became the theme of all conversation, both among the Pignerolese and at Turin, where she was often bound to go to attend upon the Queen of Savoy, Christina of France, the daughter of Henry IV. and wife of Victor Amadeus I. This amiable and beautiful woman soon made Françoise her personal friend, and asked her to all the court balls, plays, and amusements of Turin. But while entering heartily into these gaieties, the Queen also sought Madame de Toulonjon's society, that she might profit by her experience and the maxims of St. Francis de Sales, for she too had known and loved him and Mother de Chantal, and was delighted with the conduct and tone of their pupil and child. Françoise communicated all she had learnt from the Bishop with so much tact, prudence, and clearness, that the Queen was exceedingly delighted, and the friendship of these two celebrated women was cemented for life. During the next year the King of France raised Alonne to the dignity of a countship, or what we should call an earldom, under the title of Toulonjon. This was a very great honour in those days, and every joy life could give seemed now showered upon the heads of Françoise and her

husband. Mother de Chantal, with all her mother's heart doubly stirred by her spiritual insight, wrote to Françoise, congratulating her upon 'the prosperity which God was lavishing upon her with full hands,' and reminding her gently that He showered these gifts upon her that she might love Him the more, not that she might turn them to vanity and pleasure ; entreating her also to watch carefully over Gabrielle, that she too might always put God in the first place, and let nothing come between Him and her heart. She ended by an earnest appeal to Françoise never to allow herself to treat any one disparagingly or with the least tinge of haughty contempt. Thus did this Christian mother continue to watch and guard the one child still left her on earth, and, while loving and cherishing her accordingly, yet never fail to lay her hand gently upon the weak spots in her character, and bravely though tenderly to hold them up to her view.

Before returning to Alonne, which was henceforward to be called Toulonjon, Françoise and her husband spent some time very laboriously in perfecting their work at Pignerol. While he was improving, cleaning, and fortifying the town, she was busied in establishing a convent of Visitation nuns, that some such education and training as she had herself received might be bestowed upon the less cultivated Pignerolese girls. In the midst of her useful labours, Madame de Toulonjon fell dangerously ill of fever, and was nearly brought to death's door. Like the wisest people of that day, M. de Toulonjon relied more upon supernatural cures than upon the rash and unskilful medical aid of the period ; and finding that the longer the doctors wrought over his wife, the more violent her fever became, he dispatched a messenger to pray at the tomb of Francis de Sales, and at the same time to carry the news to Mother de Chantal, that she might also lend the aid of her prayers. She, according to her wont, hearing that the messenger had bad news to tell, clasped her hands together and waited patiently to hear it, and then said : 'God has given me this daughter, and has left me no other than this one—no other. If it pleases Him to take her away, may His holy name be blessed !' At recreation with her nuns she looked much as usual, but when it was

over she told them that her daughter was very ill, and begged their prayers 'either for health, or the holy will of God; for that is our only comfort.'

Next morning Mother de Chantal received at communion one of those assurances of immediate answer to prayer which are among the sweetest and most wonderful of God's dealings with His dear children. Her brother, the Archbishop of Bourges, came in to bid her good-bye as he was starting to see Françoise at Pignerol, and as a last word to ask her to continue praying for her recovery. He was surprised when Mother de Chantal said to him: 'Courage, my lord, you will have a joyful journey, for my daughter, as I earnestly hope in God's mercy, will recover. By God's help you will find her doing well.' So, in truth, it came to pass, and when the Archbishop had crossed the Alps and reached the fortress, he found Françoise rapidly getting better. He could not help feeling the charm of that home, and of that sweet return to life and health which the young and happy cannot but taste after standing on the edge of life, and apparently bidding farewell to all they love on earth. Françoise's pale delicate face, beautiful eyes, and exceedingly sweet smile, had now an added softness and spiritual beauty, from the chastened joy of being allowed to return once more to her husband and child. That noble and loyal man, and the fair loving child, were now always in her room and at her bedside, forestalling her wants and wishes, and attentive to the slightest change of expression. The Archbishop was not wholly insensible, either, to the worldly side of the picture. He appreciated the lofty antique rooms and halls of the castle, and the dignified position which Antony de Toulonjon held; he rather enjoyed the grave antique state in which they lived, and the consideration shown to his niece; and it was with satisfaction as well as thanksgiving that he gave them all his hearty blessing, and again went his way over the snow peaks to Bourges.

However, Heaven has many mansions, and it is by a most merciful arrangement that some are allotted to the little servants of God as well as to the great. The next visitor to Pigne-



rol was of another sort, sent by the unsleeping desire of Mother de Chantal for the good of her dear child's soul. This was Dom Guérin, the Barnabite monk who had visited M. de Chantal on his deathbed, and who was now on his way to Rome to expedite the canonization of Francis de Sales. Dom Guérin took with him one of the most delightful of all Mother de Chantal's letters, in which her mother's heart seems to expand and overflow with the deepest and most cordial tenderness. After hoping that her many engagements might not hinder Madame de Toulonjon from conferring with Dom Guérin about her soul, she says: 'We must live, no doubt, with a view to this life, and take everything as it comes, patiently, as from God's hands, Whom I beseech always to be your generous Father and Protector, that your dear soul may not be encumbered with earthly things, which are made of such sorry stuff, whatever brave outside they show, that they are only worthy of a thought that we may despise them. Think of this, my very dear child, how lovely and valuable are the true riches of life, which are real virtues and the holy fear of God. The love of God and charity towards our neighbour comprise everything.' Madame de Toulonjon read this letter over and over again, with tears of delight and tenderness, while Dom Guérin was sitting with her in her room; and the holy monk, a very austere and simple man, did not fail to deepen the impression it made upon her, by telling her plainly that her own high position, and the honour in which she was held by the world, were but that 'sorry stuff' of which her mother had spoken, and that she would do well to value these things at once in their true light, and to lay up for herself eternal treasures. The good monk spoke somewhat bluntly, and with the utmost plainness and simplicity of speech, but Françon's high spirit and noble character could bear that, and when Dom Guérin went on to describe her mother's extraordinary virtues, and the perfection she had attained in spiritual life, Madame de Toulonjon felt her heart swell with joy and reverence, and she resolved not to be altogether unworthy of such a mother.

Mother de Chantal was herself much occupied meanwhile

in collecting the now multiplied proofs of the graces obtained by the intercession of Francis de Sales. As we have said, she had once been heard to say that, but for the sufferings of the poor, she could wish the time of pestilence to last through her life, for during its continuance she could enjoy some kind of peace. There is no doubt that in many ways it gave her great repose, for first there was the cessation of her continual journeys, when journeys were a serious fatigue; and of letters, coming and going to all parts of Europe, and necessarily of the demand for fresh foundations, which must be arranged and started on their way. Mother de Chantal could now at least pray, and hold undisturbed intercourse with her community, and pursue the even tenor of convent life, while providing for the wants of her beloved poor. She could also labour—as she did at every interval during 1629—at the completion of the Visitation Rule, which it had been impossible to finish while moving incessantly from place to place. This year of the second pestilence was, in fact, the only rest, such as it was, given to Mother de Chantal during her long life. She took advantage of it, also, to carry out another of the objects of ten years' toil, which was no less than the opening of the canonization of Francis de Sales.

The years of the pestilence, 1628-9, had witnessed the most marvellous manifestation of the power and efficacy of this beloved Bishop and father of his people in their hour of need. It mattered little under what form he was invoked, or in what way his relics were used; for still true to his character on earth, his charity seemed to embrace all, and to be available for every possible need. Mother de Beaumont nailed his likeness upon the convent gates, and was saved from the plague; another community cherished a breviary that had belonged to him; at Lyons, pieces of his linen were distributed; and at Orleans, Mother de la Roche having laid one of his relics in a jar of water, the townspeople came for vessel after vessel of the water, till as much as a barrel of it was given away every day. In several towns the magistrates went publicly to the churches, and offered a solemn vow to make a pilgrimage to his grave if they were delivered from the plague; which came to pass, and the vow was paid.

In others, the whole population vowed to found a Visitation convent for the same intention. At Arles, the most extraordinary popular demonstration established a Visitation community in place of a house of Poor Clares, which had become relaxed. The Visitandines had been invited to reform it, but some obstacles had arisen, and meanwhile the Sisters had retired to a hired house near the gates of the town. When the plague broke out in the town, and had soon made frightful havoc among the people, a man was heard crying aloud in the streets: 'Good magistrates of Arles, who take such care of the people, and keep such good order in the town, make St. Clare's a holy place, by bringing in the daughters of St. Mary!' This cry was taken up by the people, till the whole city rang with the clamour, and the archbishop, magistrates, and residents so pressed the Visitation nuns to come, that before the day was spent, the Sisters, surrounded by crowds of the excited and rejoicing populace, entered the convent. Not long afterwards the plague began to die away, and the townspeople used to go and shout for joy round the convent walls, saying that no greater miracle was needed to show how God loved the blessed Bishop of Geneva.

To Lyons, where the nuns had made so signal a sacrifice in cheerfully giving up the body of their father at the call of authority, there seemed to be a special reward. They had been allowed to retain the heart of Francis, which, having been touched by Louis XIII., cured him of a severe illness, and had been then enclosed in a magnificent gold reliquary, as his offering of thanksgiving. From that time an incessant stream of pilgrims had flowed to the convent, to touch and be cured by this blessed relic; and among these were kings, princes, bishops, and a vast number of credible witnesses. From the relic continually flowed a sweet liquid resembling fragrant oil, from which remarkable circumstance the Lyonnese called the nuns the *Daughters of the Heart*.

Mother de Chantal herself attested on oath that the whole convent at Annecy was frequently filled with a delicate subtle fragrance. She expressly forbade the Sisters to burn or use any kind of perfume in the church or sacristy; notwithstanding

which, not only the choir, but even the cloisters and walks, were pervaded by the same most delicate fragrant scent, which, as the nuns said, seemed to lift up their hearts to God. The whole chapel in which the body of Francis lay gradually became a shrine filled with both costly and simple offerings; where the richest gold and silver, pictures, and *ex votos*, were mingled with handfuls of hemp, flax, wheat, and fowls. Priests came to say mass in the chapel from all parts of France, Savoy, and Italy in such numbers, that it became necessary to put up two altars in the nave, and to open two new doors to enable the crowd of pilgrims to pass through without filling up the church.

Thus was the sanctity of the meek Bishop of Geneva proved beyond denial, and he was thus canonized with greater acclamation even than usual by the popular voice, a very short time after his death. Mother de Chantal felt exceedingly comforted, and rejoiced at these marks of veneration, and by every means she could conceive added her weight to the general testimony. She had copies of his works on the *Devout Life* and the *Love of God* distributed among the pilgrims, and dispersed through France, Italy, Germany, and Canada, and she collected with the utmost pains and care every scrap of his letters, sermons, and treatises, to form a thoroughly good edition of his works. These she sent to M. Sillery with a letter, urging him to embody them in the 'thick volume' now projecting of the Bishop's writings.

It was then, while turning over all the manuscripts left by Francis, that Mother de Chantal found among his papers the precious bundle of all her own letters to him, from the very beginning of their acquaintance, filed according to their dates, and with marginal notes added by his own hand; which most unfortunately for us, the Bishop had not committed to the care of one of his family to be preserved.

Mother de Chantal was so astonished and confused at this evidence of her director's affectionate admiration that she shed many tears, and without the slightest regard to the value of this record of spiritual experience to others, she impetuously seized the packet and threw it into the fire. It was, in fact,

only her own genuine humility which ever brought the fact to light, for in a letter to M. Sillery she says :

‘Indeed it grieves me to the heart to find the things which the Blessed one has said of me in some of the letters. I have experienced and felt the sorrow of knowing what his opinion was of me then, considering what I am now, when I am in a state of utter poverty and misery, having the greatest need of your holy prayers, my very dear Father. I ask them in God’s name, and those of the reverend Father-General of the Oratory, and of M. Vincent. I implore all of you to do me this act of charity, for I have great need of it.’

Mother de Chantal’s prudence was no less shown in this matter than her exceeding dislike of praise, and of being in any way held up to admiration. She had that unerring instinct of a good woman, which discerned the world and its ways without in the least sharing or being touched by them ; and she disliked extremely the publication, entire, of the affectionate expressions lavished in the Bishop’s letters to herself, which were meant for her eye alone, and poured forth with the freedom and child-like spontaneity of his crystalline purity of heart.

‘My very dear daughter,’ she wrote to Mother de Blonay—next to herself, perhaps the best beloved daughter of Francis—‘I shall never trust anybody as to our blessed Father’s writings ; indeed, I shall look them over myself with the greatest care, for you must know that I feel greatly displeased that so many affectionate words have been left in the letters. The world is not fit to understand the incomparable purity of our Saint’s affection. Ah, well, we must swallow all this meekly. Send me word if in correcting I shall cut any of them out, but get an opinion from some capable person.’

In spite of her own strong bias, however, Mother de Chantal was advised to retrench nothing, but to allow the letters to be printed as they stood, upon which she again wrote to Mother de Blonay :

‘Yesterday I spoke of this matter to the president (prefect) of this town, a man of good judgment, and he said that if the affectionate words were cut out of the letters, the spirit of the

Blessed one would be taken away too, and that he had never seen anything of consequence enough to retrench. The Bishop of Geneva says the same, and so, my very dear daughter, every one has his taste.'

While diligently occupied in gathering up every morsel of writing from his own hand, Mother de Chantal also set all her nuns to work to write down whatever they could recollect of their own personal intercourse or experience with Francis, to serve as notes for his Life, the arrangement of which she intrusted to Charles Auguste de Sales, and to a Friar Minim, Father de la Rivière. In this joint work she took the utmost interest, relating to them carefully the details of the various facts, reading with them again and again the different chapters for correction in the convent parlour, and not only praying for its success, but asking a general communion from all the Visitation houses for the same intention. For Mother de Chantal most justly felt that, without special light from God, it is not possible to understand or record the actions of the Saints with any real truth.

The three apostolic commissaries or commissioners, appointed by the Congregation of Rites at Rome to open the inquiry into the virtues and miracles alleged to have been worked by Francis de Sales, Archbishop Andrew Frémyot, Bishop Camus of Belley, and M. Ramus, a canon of Louvain, met in the convent parlour at Annecy, where they received depositions six hours a day for a week. The first witness examined was Mother de Chantal, who then gave that account of herself which has since been spread by her children through so many countries as a household word.

'I am called Jane Frances Frémyot, commonly called de Chantal—a native of Dijon, the capital city of Burgundy—and fifty-five years old. I am the daughter of Messire Bénigne Frémyot, the second president of the parliament of Dijon, and of Dame Margaret de Berbisey; and I am the first nun and the first Mother Superior of the Order of the Visitation of our Lady, and in that quality the first spiritual daughter of the blessed Francis de Sales, our founder.'



Mother de Chantal spent, on the whole, forty-two hours in answering the questions put to her as to the life, works, virtues, and miracles of Francis de Sales, which none living knew so thoroughly and intimately as herself. These depositions, as they are called, have been only lately given to the world by M. Baudry; and it has been well said that the true life of St. Francis is contained in these records.<sup>1</sup>

After receiving and noting whatever facts they could glean, the commissioners separated, and nothing more was done for six years after the pestilence had subsided. It was Mother de Chantal once more who then urged on the termination of the inquiry, when a number of other eminent persons, among whom were the Prince and Princess de Carignano, hastened to Annecy to be present at the opening of the Bishop's grave. A certain number of responsible persons, among whom were several Bishops, were admitted within the church, and the doors locked; while outside the population of Annecy gathered in crowds, scrambling up to look through the windows, and knocking impatiently at the doors, in a fever of excitement to see their Bishop's face. Mother de Chantal and the Sisters were all gathered within the convent grating, with their faces unveiled.

After the opening ceremonies, the commissioners counted the various offerings at the shrine, and found more than two hundred and fifty costly *ex votos* of gold and silver, while all along the walls of the church were hung lamps, statuettes, pictures, crutches, and staves, each one witnessing to the multitude of sick persons who had been cured. Whole towns were represented by some of these offerings, and acknowledged themselves in the inscriptions to have been delivered from pestilence or the inroads of heresy by the intercession of the great servant of God, Francis de Sales. The workmen in attendance were then ordered to open the grave; and when they had removed the stone, the double coffin was taken out and laid upon the altar steps. The wooden one was then seen to be destroyed, but the leaden enclosure was quite sound, and as soon as it was unsoldered, one exclamation of recognition broke from all

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Monseigneur Rey, Bishop of Annecy, to M. Baudry.

assembled, 'There he is! There is the blessed Francis de Sales!'

The spectators then beheld that marvellous and solemn sight of the saintly Bishop lying in his coffin, unchanged and serene, as if placed there only a few days since—his very vestments unstained, though a little yellowed by damp, the body perfect and incorrupt, and the calm face and brown hair and beard fresh as those of a living man. More wonderful still, the beautiful hands were as delicate and sculptured, and the arms as supple and easy to move, as they were in life. And above all, the grand restful face bore so beautiful an expression of peace and joy, that even the most stolid witnesses were moved to new feelings of reverence and devotion; and as they stood looking on in wonder, every one present was made aware of the same subtle and exquisite odour which had so often pervaded the convent with its fragrance, and had lifted up the hearts of the nuns to a fresh remembrance of Him Whom they followed with their lifelong consecration: 'Draw me, and I will run after the odour of Thy ointments.'

While the bystanders gazed in wondering joy at a sight not granted to many, the people of Annecy, having also discerned the faint sweet evidence of their Bishop's undoubted sanctity, clamoured still more vociferously for entrance, often repeating with the impetuous faith of old Savoy, 'We shall die, we shall die, if we do not look upon our pastor!' while others, who had brought ladders and climbed up to the windows, were suddenly hushed at the solemn sight, and were seen to join their hands in reverent prayer. This made the heaving and surging crowd below still more frantic to see the body of the Saint; and they pressed with such force upon the doors, that the hinges of one gave way, and, as it fell inwards, the whole church was filled with the excited crowd, crying out aloud and shouting for joy, and pointing out their beloved Bishop to one another, declaring that they should know him again directly, and nearly falling over one another in their eagerness to touch the body with their medals, rosaries, crucifixes, handkerchiefs, and bracelets. Before they had nearly satisfied their devotion the evening closed in, and the Archbishop of Bourges, then

lifting up his hand, spoke to the multitude in a loud voice, and commanded every one, under pain of excommunication, to leave the church.

During the whole of this extraordinary scene Mother de Chantal had remained on her knees, perfectly motionless, behind the nuns' grating, rapt in prayer, and, as it seemed, in a kind of ecstasy; but as soon as the populace had retired and there was perfect quiet, she returned again with the Sisters to the church, and spent some hours in prayer before the body of the Saint. The commissioners had forbidden it to be touched, under pain of excommunication, and Mother de Chantal had therefore carefully abstained from her great desire to kiss one of the hands. The next day, however, having obtained leave, she was rewarded for her minute obedience by a distinctly supernatural sign. As she bent her head to touch the hand of Francis with her lips, his arm was lifted up and laid upon her head with a gentle pressure, exactly as if he had been living, and not only did Mother de Chantal feel the act, but several of the Sisters who were present saw the movement of the hand and fingers as it was done. The veil which she then wore is still preserved as a relic possessing a twofold value.

As soon as the depositions or accounts of all the facts of the opening of the grave had been drawn up and signed, the Bishop's remains were re-enclosed, first in a leaden, then in an oaken coffin, clad in a fresh alb, chasuble, and mitre. A written inscription was laid upon the body, and it was again buried with great care.

Although Mother de Chantal was allowed to receive this great consolation in her latter days, twenty years were still to go by before the long process of canonization was ended and Francis de Sales was declared a saint. Nevertheless, the dauntless energy and the patient waiting, the ever ready will and the meek obedience of this devoted woman, were rewarded by the certainty that, whether she lived to see the end or not, her unwearied exertions and her ceaseless prayers had been answered, and would gradually ripen to fruit after she had entered into her rest.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *Deaths of Marie de Coulanges, Antony de Toulonjon, and M. Favre. 1632-1634.*

WHEN Françoise de Toulonjon was daily expecting the birth of another child, news came to her that the young widow Marie de Coulanges was dangerously ill, and Françoise at once started on the long and then difficult journey to Paris, determined that nothing should prevent her from seeing her dear Marie once more. She did not undergo this great fatigue in vain; and after several days of sweet though sorrowful intercourse, Marie died most happily, leaving in her sister in law's charge her little girl, Marie de Chantal, afterwards the famous Madame de Sévigné. While they were in Paris, Louis XIII. and Cardinal Richelieu consulted frequently with Antony de Toulonjon, and both the king and his great minister were so struck with all that he had done to conciliate the Pignerolese and strengthen the French position, that he was made governor for life, with largely extended powers. After all these affairs were arranged, Françoise and her husband returned to Pignerol with sad hearts, thinking of their dear sister in law, dead in her prime, and with an indescribable gloom weighing upon them both, which Françoise afterwards understood to have been the foreboding of evil. During the journey, M. de Toulonjon seemed even more weary and shaken than his wife, and on their arrival at Pignerol he found a pressure of business and an accumulation of work which left him not an hour's leisure to rest or lie by. In a few days' time, during which he was incessantly occupied in carrying out the Cardinal's wishes for the district, and always on the move, he was attacked by serious illness, and no sooner were the doctors called in, than

they immediately announced to Françoise that they feared for his life. Well did she know now that some heavier blow than she had ever yet known had been secretly weighing her down by its approach, and that God had been mercifully preparing her for it. But her bitterest sorrow was that she was seized at this moment with the pains of premature childbirth, and while giving life to a little son, she was obliged to be entirely banished from her husband's sickroom, and might not be with him at the last. But no grief or shock seemed to disturb Antony's steadfast and noble soul. He had his boy brought to him, gave him his blessing, and ordered that he should be baptized Francis, after Francis de Sales. He then sent for Gabrielle, now in her eleventh year, and to her he spoke at great length, bidding her be very patient, loving, and obedient to her dear mother. The child promised with great earnestness to do everything that he desired, but begged her father with many tears to get well, and not to go away and leave them all alone. But he only gently shook his head, and, ordering the children to be taken away to their mother, this brave and loyal gentleman girded himself for his last battle against the terrors of death. With unshaken faith and love he offered his life and all his dear ones to God, and having received the last sacraments, he calmly departed to reap the fruits of his many victories over sin, the evils of the time, and himself. Thus died Antony de Toulonjon, as he had lived, modest, silent, laborious, prudent, and Godfearing,—a truly valiant man of France.

Torn by the contending emotions of joy at the birth of a son so long desired, and bitter grief at the departure of her husband, Françoise fell dangerously ill, and it was thought that her very earnest and passionate prayer to rejoin her husband would be granted her. While her sorrowing family and her brother in law, the Abbé of St. Satur, were looking on in powerless consternation, a deputation of the authorities at Pignerol appeared to present an address expressing the deep grief of the inhabitants at the loss of their beloved governor and father; and not long afterwards Françoise, perhaps roused by their really heartfelt sympathy, recovered little by little from her

sickness, and by degrees took up again the broken threads of daily life. And then she began to realize, as her mother had formerly done, how far more difficult to bear are the long dreary years of blank widowhood than the first sharp anguish of the immediate loss, when the deserted soul seems to follow its companion soul into the heavenly kingdom, and to lean far more palpably upon the Divine Master Who has given and taken away. Françoise's first throb of rest was that raised by the thought of her mother, upon whose large heart and spiritual strength she could fully lean. But she could not yet safely expose her baby boy to the autumnal cold of so long a journey, and she was obliged to be content at present with writing to Mother de Chantal, who, when she received the news of this second stroke, turned pale, and exclaimed: 'O, how many dead!' Then instantly regaining her usual equal balance, she added the beautiful words: 'Nay, rather, how many pilgrims hurrying to their everlasting home! Receive them, O Lord, into Thy merciful arms!'

It was very hard for Françoise to take leave of the castle at Pignerol, where she had hoped to spend so many happy years, and to bid farewell to her dear husband's grave in the church of the Recollets, where he lay under a low white marble monument in the centre of the choir. The two anniversaries of their marriage in 1622, and their separation in 1633, were henceforward always solemnly kept by Françoise.

Madame de Toulonjon was now only thirty-four, and if she had been told that fifty long years of pilgrimage were yet before her, perhaps even her dauntless heart would have failed her. She and her children at last arrived at Annecy, where the meeting between the widowed mother and daughter was so touching that the nuns stood near, shedding many tears. The whole community strove by every means to comfort and soothe their beloved pupil and friend. After the society of her mother, and in some ways even equally with it, Françoise found consolation in conversing with Jacqueline de Chaugy, who had known her husband and seen them together, and who could recall and enter into so much of that happy united life that



was now for ever broken up. The whole of this time spent at the Annecy convent was very soothing and precious to Françoise, whose grand noble character began now to cast out for ever the deepseated worldliness which had infected it and had continually drawn her back within its enchanted influence. It may be said that it was only now, at five and thirty, that Madame de Toulonjon experienced that true conversion of heart which at once leads to lasting peace and great results in life. While this good work was silently building up, amid the tears and devout prayers and blank desolation of her first widowhood, Françoise was obliged by the urgency of her affairs and duties to return to Alonne. Besides providing for the Christian education of her children, she had also to make arrangements to secure their property; and as the Abbé de St. Satur's management turned out to be very unsatisfactory, Françoise was obliged to encounter a host of unpleasant and wearisome details of business, and much anxious conflict with her brother in law. It was a sad moment to the poor widow when the vast walls and towers of Alonne, looking down from their grassy mound, came in sight, and Françon's grief seemed freshly renewed by the familiar heights and the wide rich plains grazed by the great white oxen of the country. Nevertheless it was at Alonne that, surrounded by her poor neighbours and dependents, and occupied with their welfare, Madame de Toulonjon really sanctified her widowhood. Here, besides relieving or removing the wants of the destitute, she was fully occupied in educating her children, and regulating the many details of a large landed property, which the Abbé had involved and impoverished by his continued outlay and useless expense. Françoise for a long time scarcely ever left Alonne, except to pass a few days' retreat at Autun, and now and then to visit her kind old uncle, André Frémyot, Archbishop of Bourges, who had now resigned his see and lived in happy retirement at the Abbey of Ferrière, rejoicing in his garden and his trees, and spending his latter years in study and prayer and preparation for death. The friendship of this kind and congenial old man was a great relief to her, as a change from the vexatious and

restless character of the Abbé, who never left her in peace for many days together, was always raising some fresh turmoil or cause of anxiety, and who once disturbed Mother de Chantal with the gratuitous news that Françoise was about to marry again.

This false and vain alarm was, however, soon succeeded by the real and deep sorrow of the death of Francis de Sales's faithful priest, M. Michel Favre.

This excellent man, of the genuine old Savoyard strain, had entered the Capuchin noviceship at the age of seventeen; but finding the austerities of the order too severe for his weak constitution, he became a secular priest, and was ordained by Francis de Sales. Some little time afterwards he happened to go to Annecy to study plain chant. An accident led him to assist the Bishop one day at mass, one of his chaplains being absent. Francis asked him to dinner, and in his simplicity he stayed in the Bishop's house three days running, waiting to be told when to go away, which never occurred to Francis. Francis was so charmed with his priestly modesty, his piety, and his great frankness, that he said to him, 'M. Michel, would you be willing to charge yourself with the conscience of a Bishop?' 'Yes, my lord,' he replied after a short pause, 'of a Bishop like you; otherwise I should be afraid of the burthen.' Francis thenceforward made him his own confessor, and although M. Favre was then only five and twenty, he appointed him confessor to the convent at Annecy also, that the children might have the same guide as their spiritual father.

From that moment M. Favre was thoroughly devoted to the Visitation. He was very useful as a sort of secretary. He wrote out again and again the Rules, Constitutions, Directory, Custom-book, and Ceremonial of the Order; and as books were then scarce and very dear, he also wrote out in a clear legible type, almost like printing, little office books for all the nuns. From this a good idea may be gained of the painstaking and laborious spirit in which he served the Sisters. As the congregation spread, and new houses were opened, M. Michel generally accompanied the young swarms to their new hives, taking charge of the Sisters with the most scrupulous care, and

at the same time setting them an example of unbroken recollection and unruffled peace of soul. He was a man of much prayer and exact observance ; it was difficult to say which observed best what was laid down in the Constitutions of the Order—the Sisters in treating him as their visible guardian angel, or he in respecting them as the spouses of Christ. He had also so thoroughly made the tone and spirit of Francis his own, that some of the Sisters who had been to confession to the Bishop found his place almost supplied by M. Michel ; and he gave them admirable brief instructions, in which a few short sentences contained thoughts which abundantly supplied them with points for their meditation.

Three and twenty years had this true pastor faithfully fulfilled his office with the Visitation, when he now took to his bed, and felt sure that his end drew near. When the sad news was brought to Mother de Chantal, she exclaimed : ‘ Is it God’s will that I should see this also ? ’ and closed her eyes for a few moments in earnest prayer. Then firmly clasping her hands she repeated several times : ‘ May His holy will be done ! ’ That evening, as she returned from the chapel, she said to the Sisters : ‘ This is a fresh bereavement ; this good man is going to eternal rest, where his dear master is. I had scarcely any sweeter comfort left than in talking to this excellent son of my blessed father ; but as God wills him to die, we must not wish him to live. ’ As M. Michel had a great natural fear of death, Mother de Chantal wrote him a little note, full of trust and self-abandonment to God’s mercy, which comforted the dying man very much ; and he afterwards sent her word that all his dread of death had vanished, and that he was now in perfect peace. Before he died, M. Michel thought it right to declare aloud what he thought and knew of Mother de Chantal, remarking that a deathbed is the veritable chair of truth. He therefore expressed his opinion in these words : ‘ My true opinion is, that our revered mother is one of the greatest servants of God now on earth. For twenty-three years I have admired in her a conscience purer, brighter, and clearer than crystal. I have always wished to write down something upon this subject ; but

have been hindered by my own unworthiness, and also because I have often heard our blessed father say that he was not worthy to speak of that holy woman. And seeing that, I held my peace.'

On Holy Thursday, after a kind of ecstasy, he said : ' To-night we shall go to the Feast.' Whereupon the Bishop, John Francis de Sales, who heard the words, wished to send some messages by him to Francis. This direct expression of the Bishop's opinion of him reawakened M. Michel's intense humility and fear of presumption, and he answered that he was not worthy to be acknowledged by Francis as his servant and son, having made such poor use of his example and instructions. He received with great joy the Bishop's blessing, begged him to convey his farewell messages to Mother de Chantal and the community at Annecy ; and a little while after midnight, the morning of Good Friday, which that year was also the Feast of the Annunciation, he departed to his rest.

One of M. Michel's last wishes had been to establish a second convent of the Visitation at Annecy, and two days after his death Mother de Chantal was summoned to the parlour there to see a number of young women, who knelt down and begged her to allow them to take the habit of the Visitation. She was of course much surprised at the appearance of so many postulants at once ; but on reflection she felt convinced that M. Michel had obtained in Heaven his long cherished wish on earth, and it was decided that the second convent should be opened. Mother de Chantal would much have liked to regain the beloved old Gallery House for this purpose ; but as the time for that restoration had not yet arrived, a house near it was bought, and the necessary arrangements were entered upon with the authorities of the town. It seemed scarcely credible, after all that had been done for Annecy during the pestilence, and the enormous benefits accruing to the town through the Bishop and Mother de Chantal, that the ungrateful inhabitants demurred, and vehemently opposed the erection of a second Visitation. There followed, indeed, a kind of insurrection of the whole town against it, during which the most miserable

slanders and evil reports were spread against Mother de Chantal, some of which were even carried to the court of Savoy.

She was much surprised and grieved at the shortsighted folly and thankless spirit which could engender such evil, but firmly persisted in the building and arrangement of her convent; and leaving Annecy to enjoy the narrow wisdom of its own conceits, Mother de Chantal in due time quietly established her Sisters there on the Trinity Sunday of 1634. Exactly four and twenty years before, Bernard and Louis de Sales had accompanied the Mothers de Chantal, Favre, and de Brécharde to the Gallery House, the one solitary seed of an order which, by this second foundation at Annecy, now fulfilled its tale of sixty-five communities.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *The Visitandines and their Convent Schools. 1634.*

IN these sixty-five houses, of one mind and heart, and genuinely imbued with the loving and meek spirit of Francis de Sales, were now to be found a multitude of holy women, who had originated and kept alive a variety of works of charity. On Sundays especially the Visitation convent parlours were frequented by numbers of visitors, ranging from princes and court ladies to poor dressmakers and beggars at the gate, who came for counsel, advice in difficulties, or religious instruction. Our old friend Anne Coste had been the first to suggest to Francis de Sales the catechizing of the beggars who came for dole, and whose vice, idleness, and gross animal ignorance grieved her to the heart. Francis undertook the work, and Anne was present to superintend and keep order; and after the Bishop's death she continued this catechism herself, and thenceforward the portresses in the Visitation convents were allowed to carry on the same good work.

On Sundays it also became the custom to assemble ladies and young women in the parlours for religious instruction and familiar conferences on religion, and it is recorded at Annecy that women had actually come sixty miles to hear Mother de Chantal's sweet, earnest, and practical addresses. Mother Favre and Mother de Brécharde also attracted crowds to their Sunday meetings, and Mother de Brécharde's masculine good sense and vigour of character were of great service in giving her influence over several eminent men and Calvinists, who had hitherto refused to listen to others. At Dijon, Mother Michel was the means of putting an end to a dangerous sedition in the city; while at Tours, Mother Louise de Mardilière was the



adviser of the famous Abbé de Rancé, who came to ask her to help him in the choice of a good director. At Moulins, as is well known, Madame de Montmorency gathered round her many eminent persons, who sought her sympathy or counsel, among whom were the Duchess de Longueville, Queen Christina of Sweden, Louis XIV., and the queen mother Anne of Austria. But the most celebrated of all the Visitandines, who exercised in the seventeenth century this great and transmitted gift of counsel, was Mademoiselle de la Fayette, Sister Louise Angélique—a most wise, noble, and pure hearted woman, though the object of a king's secret love.

The story of the attachment between Louis XIII. and Mademoiselle de la Fayette has been variously coloured, according to the minds of those who have told it; but it is not perhaps known to all that this young girl, whose noble character, strong virtue, and singular discretion were acknowledged even by a very corrupt court, used her powerful influence with Louis only to urge him to break the yoke of Cardinal de Richelieu and to draw him towards his queen, from whom mischievous and slanderous tongues had divided him. For two years Mademoiselle de la Fayette remained at court, where she was one of the queen's maids of honour, striving to impart some of her own lofty and dignified independence of thought to Louis XIII.; but finding her efforts vain, or at least productive of little result but that of the farther growth of an attachment which might lead to great danger, she resolved to break all the many and strong ties which bound her to the world and to enter the Visitation. There followed a general outcry from those who wished to flatter the weak king's wishes at the idea of this beautiful and graceful girl, barely seventeen, burying herself alive within cloistered walls. When Louis was asked for his permission, he sank down on his bed as if all power had left him, but had still faith and courage enough left to reply: 'No doubt, if God calls her, though she is very dear to me, I shall not hinder her.' When he was urged to allow Mademoiselle de la Fayette to leave the court speedily, the king burst into tears, and asking why everybody was in such a hurry, begged that she would wait a few

months till he had joined the army, which would help to occupy his mind and drive away the thoughts of the great loss her leaving court would be to him.

In the end, however, in spite of the anguish he endured, the king showed real faith and a just mind ; for when his confessor, Father Caussin, suggested that Mademoiselle de la Fayette's going might be delayed, Louis made him an admirable reply : ' No, no ; if I hinder her now and she should lose her vocation, I should be sorry for it all my life. Nothing has ever cost me so much as what I am now doing, but God must be obeyed. Go and tell her that I give her leave to depart, and that she may go whenever she pleases.' Mademoiselle de la Fayette meanwhile was sitting in her room, waiting for this permission with the utmost impatience, and having received it, she flew to make all her arrangements as fast as she could, so that in a few hours everything was ready. She then went to the queen's apartments, as usual, at her hour of rising, and told her with much respect, that whereas she enjoyed at present the great honour of being one of her maids of honour, she was now going to be one of the servants of our Blessed Lady, for she could not, without lowering herself, choose a lesser mistress ; and as the king had consented, she begged her also to dismiss her. While she was saying these words, the king came in all in tears, and the queen also began to weep ; but Mademoiselle de la Fayette did not shed a tear, and her whole face shone with the great joy which must always spring from true self-sacrifice. In this spirit she took leave of the king and queen and of the world ; but when she was gone Louis could not endure the very sight of the rooms where he knew he should see her no more, and hurrying to his carriage, he drove away to dine at Versailles. Mademoiselle de la Fayette was still in her own rooms sitting ready, and when she heard the lumbering coach pass by, she flew to the windows to look at the king for the last time, saying mournfully to the Countess de Fleix, ' Alas, I shall never see him again !'

No sooner was she housed in the Visitation convent in the Rue St. Antoine than crowds of visitors besieged the gates ;

and probably Mother Lhuillier, a woman of considerable tact and discernment, thought it wise to allow a certain latitude in this extraordinary case. Many visitors were received, among whom some of the first were the queen and the royal princesses. The king could not make up his mind for some time to go; but after walking for several days round and near the convent, he summoned up courage and called when no one expected him to do so. Mother Lhuillier herself took the postulant to the grating, and then respectfully retired to some distance, that the king might feel himself at liberty and unwatched. She also told him that she put perfect confidence in him; to which Louis replied that she had nothing to fear, for he had not come to persuade Mademoiselle de la Fayette to give up her vocation. The king's suite remained with him on that side of the grating, but at some distance, and Louis actually remained standing at the grating and talking to Mademoiselle de la Fayette for three whole hours. No one could distinguish a single word that was said, but it was observed that on each face there were both tears and smiles.

This was by no means indeed the king's only visit; and in the end Sister Louise Angélique succeeded in bracing him to a more manly state of mind, to trample upon the depression and listless weariness which clouded and unhinged his life, and to be entirely reconciled to his queen, from whom he had hitherto been estranged. To the end of her religious career this remarkable nun seemed to carry out her special mission of counsel to crowned heads, for which a mixture of gentleness and tact with fearless truthfulness fitted her in an unusual degree. Louis XIV. succeeded his father in the parlour at the Rue St. Antoine; and later on our own Charles II. when a fugitive from England, and James II. in his exile, sought and found comfort from Sister Louise Angélique. She prepared the English Princess Henrietta, afterwards Duchess of Orleans, Princess Bénédicte, afterwards Duchess of Brunswick, and Mademoiselle d'Aumale, afterwards Queen of Portugal, for their first communion; and scrupulously watched over the early life of Princess Louise of Bohemia, the granddaughter of our James I. And while strength-

ening and enlightening the faith of these princesses, she drew about her a crowd of other noble and highborn girls, whose temptations were fully on a par with their position in the world, and whose example, as she well knew, would either sustain or ruin a multitude of other people in their own class of life.

More than one royal and afflicted woman, indeed, having sought and found the blessings of the Visitation charity and counsels, clung to the convent walls, although without a vocation to the order. Queen Henrietta Maria, the widow of our Charles I., was one of these; for she persistently declined the suite of rooms generously offered her in the Louvre, and for twelve years took up her abode in the convent of the Visitation at Chaillot. There she enjoyed the salutary friendship of Mothers Lhuillier and De la Fayette, and there, according to her funeral sermon, preached by Bossuet, she grew wise with the wisdom of the Gospel and of the Cross, and fixed her heart upon that heavenly kingdom where neither rivals nor usurpers are to be feared.<sup>1</sup>

To Chaillot also repaired Mary Beatrice of Modena, the unfortunate widow of our James II., who also found there the comfort of religious peace; and Anne of Austria, as regent, and afterwards Marie Thérèse, the unhappy queen of Louis XIV., retreated thither to seek a brief respite from the world or to grieve in secret over the troubles of their lot. And much earlier in the long succession of these eminent women, whose stories would furnish the most remarkable chain of life's reverses, Richelieu's cruel execution of the Duke of Montmorency drove to Moulins the widowed duchess, who subsequently entered the convent, and became one of the most remarkable members of the Visitation.

Whilst the several convents of the order were thus to fulfil their labours, in christianizing the various classes of society, a new and more continuous work was developed among them; which, like the rule of Enclosure, was entirely foreign to the first idea of Francis de Sales. This was the gradual forming and establishment of higher schools for girls. The very idea at first

<sup>1</sup> *Oraison funèbre de la reine d'Angleterre*, ii<sup>e</sup> partie. Bossuet, p. 406.

seemed repugnant to the Bishop, who once wrote to a Superior in these words: 'God has not chosen [formed] your institute for the education of little girls, but for the perfection of married women and young ladies.'<sup>2</sup> And he feared that the incessant anxiety and endless occupation which the presence of children involve might disturb the peace of cloistered life. Nevertheless, according to his usual breadth and sweetness of interpretation, he did not absolutely refuse the entrance of children under certain conditions. He began by allowing a few girls about twelve years old, who showed some aptitude for religious life, to 'await' their vocation in the Visitation convents; 'for,' he said, with his unvarying grace, 'is it better to have thorns with the roses in our garden, or to have no roses because of the thorns?' Still, Francis jealously watched over the introduction of this fresh element into his convents. 'Notre Françon' was the first scholar in the Gallery House, and then came little Anne Colin, with her mother, from Lyons, and a niece of Francis. And while they were being taught by Mother de Brécharde or another Sister, several other children from outside, who could be depended upon, were allowed to join the same class, and before long other children, whose mothers were eager to obtain for them such teachers as Mothers de Brécharde and de Blonay, were sent for daily lessons, so that the numbers continued to rise.

One day, when Mother de Blonay had gone to speak to the Bishop in the parlour, she observed that both the doors on his side of the grating were open, and begged him to close at least one. Francis got up to do this, but coming back smiling, said that the passage was full of little girls, who were all looking at him so unfearingly, that he had not the heart to shut the door in their faces. Mother de Blonay therefore sent little Anne Colin round to shut the door for him.

Many needs and circumstances, therefore, concurred to induce Francis de Sales to allow the matter to grow and develop itself to any degree of usefulness that did not injure the spirit of prayer and peace of the nuns. He himself planned and cut out a sort of little habit for some of these pupils, who came

<sup>2</sup> The 356th letter.

therefore to be called the 'Sisters of the Little Habit.' It was to be 'black or tan' (brown), he wrote to Mother de Chatel, but was afterwards definitely settled to be black by Mother de Chantal, who gave farther full particulars about it in the Customal Book of the Order. These aspirants, in fact, paved the way for the systematic schools, for which a number of Bishops soon made eager and pressing requests. Nor is it surprising that they should have done so, when Lutheran and Calvinist instruction abounded on all sides, and the progress of error made it absolutely needful to secure the future generation by a good foundation of enlightened instruction. After establishing schools in Savoy, Mother de Chantal allowed the same liberty to the convents in Paris, Lyons, Autun, and many other towns; and when she made visits to the convents, we find that the school girls went to meet her, singing or reciting verses of welcome; and it is recorded that she always received them with great pleasure, caressing and giving them her blessing; and always adding some little pious practice with her rewards.

The scholars also quickly caught and carried out the spirit of the founders of the Visitation, and a most interesting collection might be made of the examples set by many of these girls in their homes and among their companions. At Pont à Mousson, for instance, a child of twelve, Anne Henriette d'Harau-court, was about to be withdrawn from the convent that she might be made abbess of St. Pierre, in place of an aunt who was seriously ill. When the plan was proposed, Anne did not make the least remonstrance in words, but before she went to bed that night she cut off all her beautiful hair close to her head, and the next morning took off her cap, and showing her head, said to her astonished mother, 'Here is a beautiful mother abbess for you! I cannot be a nun in any convent where they dress their hair.'<sup>3</sup>

A very pretty story is recorded at a later time of the school at Annecy during the conclave at Rome which ended in the election of Alexander VII. The great desire of the nuns was that a Pope might be elected who would carry on the canoniza-

<sup>3</sup> *Fondation inédite de Pont à Mousson*, p. 261. Bougaud, p. 406.



tion of Francis de Sales. We find by these records how nobly the Sisters strove by every means to win this declaration of their founder's sanctity from God. They fasted on bread and water, observed strict silence, wore a hair shirt all the morning, took a discipline every evening, did penances in the refectory, and spent nearly the whole of their days in prayer. And the living spirit of love and earnest self-denial, with which these acts were done, no doubt obtained great results for the whole community. The Sister who relates what follows was one night lying awake rather late, when she saw that a little picture of Francis, which had been given her by the Marquis de Sales, the son of Louis, and which was always hanging at the foot of her bed, was all shining with light; so that the twelve little pupils, who were all asleep in the same dormitory, were wakened by the light and the fragrant perfume which filled the room. They were much astonished, got out of their beds, and knelt down before the picture, which the Sister held in her hand. One of these children, only four years old, was a niece of Francis, and she threw herself out of bed, and kissing the Sister said: 'I know what it is, darling mistress! It is my holy uncle come from Heaven to tell us he will soon be a Saint. Do not cry; we will tell our good mamma about it' (Mother de Chantal). The child then took hold of the picture and kissed it lovingly, and by the light which seemed to stream from it ran to the end of the room and picked up a rosary which the Sister had lost, and brought it to her, saying, 'It is my holy uncle who has brought it to me.' Soon afterwards the light gradually faded out of the picture, and disappeared.<sup>4</sup>

The schools of the Visitation, in short, spread and flourished, and, like the nuns who directed them, the children grew up in that spirit of loving union and bright rejoicing labour which was essentially the spirit of Francis de Sales.

<sup>4</sup> *Recueil des Miracles de notre Saint Fondateur.* In the convent at Dijon. Bougaud, t. ii. p. 412.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *Question of a General Superior of the Order. Mother de Chantal visits the Convents. 1635-1636.*

CONSIDERABLE anxiety was felt, now that sixty-five houses of the Visitation were spread over Europe, as to what would be their bond of unity and how their discipline would be maintained as time went on, and especially after the death of Mother de Chantal. St. Vincent of Paul, who had directed Mother de Chantal for many years, and many eminent Bishops, were of opinion that the question of electing one General Superior for the whole congregation ought now to be discussed, and that any risk of relaxation and change of spirit would thus be most effectually guarded against; and as the general assembly of the French clergy was about to be held in Paris, it was thought well to discuss the question there. The Bishop of Geneva (De Sales) was written to, and he determined to send Mother de Chantal to Paris. First, however, he wished to hear what she thought of the question herself, and having called to see her in the parlour, he asked what her own mind suggested as to taking this journey. She made him this remarkable answer: 'For a long time I have left off consulting my own mind upon any subject; and when I do so, it has nothing to tell me, nothing except that I ought to obey.' The journey therefore was decided upon by the Bishop, but as the six years appointed by the rule for her superiority were just ended, he waited to preside over Mother de Chantal's deposition and the election of a new Superior for the mother convent of Annecy.

This 'deposition' took place on the 19th of May; and when all the Sisters were ranged in their order in the choir, Mother

de Chantal knelt down before them, and laid down her office with such genuine meekness and joy, that her face was seen to shine with light. She made the customary self-accusation (*coulpe*) in these words: 'My lord, I accuse myself very humbly of having often broken silence, even at night' (the great silence) 'without necessity; of having dispensed myself from meetings of the community without urgent need; and of not having served the Sisters as I ought, for which I very humbly beg pardon of them and of you, my lord, for the dissatisfaction I have given you.' The Bishop returned answer that, through God's goodness, he had never seen anything that went amiss in the house; but to observe the good customs of the Order, she should say for her penance three times the 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary.' After performing this act of reparation, Mother de Chantal took the last place in the choir. Five days afterwards Mother de Chatel, 'our Peronne,' was elected in her room.

Just as everything was thus prepared for Mother de Chantal's departure, the excellent Bishop de Sales was taken dangerously ill, and died a very holy death; so that her journey was again delayed by this fresh and severe blow, which, however, gave her some small interval of rest, in which, moreover, she had the joy of living in the company of her two first Sisters, Mother de Chatel and Mother Favre, who had also just laid aside her 'superiority.'

Mother de Chantal reached Paris in July 1635; and the very day after her arrival several Bishops, St. Vincent de Paul, M. de Sillery, and some of the chief benefactors of the institute, met in the parlour of the elder convent to discuss in full the question of a General Superior of the Visitation. The Bishops inclined to think that some special bond or tie was needed to preserve the different houses from isolating themselves, and thus acquiring habits or a spirit differing from the original. Upon this point all were agreed; but when it came to the practical work of proposing a remedy, there was a variance of opinion. Some advised that Mother de Chantal should be immediately elected Mother General for life, and that after her death this government should be perpetuated in the Order.

Others doubted whether a woman's single rule could govern so widely spread and scattered an Order, and proposed the stronger bond of an ecclesiastical Superior. When every one had spoken, Mother de Chantal, who had hitherto maintained a prayerful silence, began to speak. She reminded the assembly that this was no new question; that it had been opened in the lifetime of Francis de Sales; and that the whole of her last conversation of two hours with him had turned only upon this point, when he had distinctly declared that it was God's will that there should not be one General Superior for the Visitation. Then opening the book of the Constitutions, she referred the Bishops to that part of it in which Francis de Sales had foreseen and provided for this vital point—the maintenance of one spirit in the Order; that to secure this union he had recourse, not to authority, but to the spirit of charity, which was the nobler and more effectual bond, and which probably was open to less objection than any other. All this Mother de Chantal advanced with great modesty, in the clearest and most vigorous terms, and in that fearless but perfectly unassuming way for which she was ever remarkable. Her words carried conviction to the minds of all. The assembly unanimously agreed to rest content with the founder's own opinion, and to trust the perpetuation of his spirit to the golden bond of that charity which he planted within it, and which has ever since been so singularly living and fruitful throughout the Order.

Mother de Chantal took the opportunity afforded by this assembly to obtain the Bishops' advice upon several difficult points of the Custom-book and Ceremonial, and to secure their authorization of an edition of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin for the use of the Visitation.<sup>1</sup>

Being in Paris, which was a kind of central point from whence to start, Mother de Chantal resolved to take advantage of the opportunity to make a general visit to all her convents. She had received letters from all parts, beseeching her to allow the multitude of religious who had never seen her to look once

<sup>1</sup> From the Circular Letter of Mother de Chantal to the Order, preserved at Annecy. Bougaud, t. ii. p. 459.

upon the face of their mother in this world. And she, on her side, earnestly wished to see her much loved children and sisters, and, above all, to examine whether the spirit of the blessed Francis was maintained intact. She first wrote to Annecy for permission to make the visit, and, having obtained it, she went on to Melun, Montargis, Blois, Orleans, and Tours, where she fell ill, and was obliged to return to Paris, and remain there for the whole winter.

During this visit, Mother de Chantal grew rather anxious at seeing the prosperity and flourishing condition of the two convents at Paris, and she began to fear lest they might hereafter be tempted to some assumption of authority, instead of preserving a humbler spirit of union with the poor and remote house at Annecy. The whole time of her visit, therefore, she continually urged upon the nuns 'union with Annecy,' as a kind of watchword for their remembrance, and often said, 'There is our wellspring, the source of our life ; there we were born, and there only shall renew light and strength.' She said she could instantly give her life, if that were all that were required, to maintain this union. And again, 'Ah, Sisters, our well beloved Visitation is a little kingdom of charity. If union and holy love do not rule there, it will be soon divided, and then, as must follow, it will become desolate.'

The nuns in Paris ingeniously took advantage of their mother's exhortations to secure what they had much desired—the legacy of her heart after death. If the mother house at Annecy possessed her body, and the first convent at Paris her heart, the union, they alleged, must be greatly cemented. The first mention of such an idea as the preservation of her miserable remains gave Mother de Chantal a great shock, and she exclaimed that her wretched unfaithful heart deserved only to be thrown into the common sewers. But when the Superior said that the request was made rather because the nuns thought that the possession of her heart would secure their unity, she consented to sign a paper, formally bequeathing her heart to the convent at Paris after death, provided that her body should not be exposed or opened in the usual way, and that the heart

could be extracted through the side, and, if possible, by one of the Sisters.<sup>2</sup>

It was April 1636 before Mother de Chantal started again on her tour of visits, when she left Paris with M. Marchez, her confessor, Mother Favre, and the well known Sister de Chaugy, and went to the convent at Troyes, where she was received by all the nuns in procession with the cross, and singing the *Benedictus*, while the bells rang a merry peal. This reception gave the Mother actual pain; but though she repeatedly ordered them to stop singing, it was entirely in vain. The Sisters were so transported with delight that they crowded round her all the rest of the day, asking for her blessing, telling her their temptations and troubles, and asking her advice. She then made a careful visit of the convent and Sisters, to see if the rule and regulations were faithfully observed. It so happened that the convent had been newly built, and was not even yet entirely finished, and Mother de Chantal was sorry to find it prettily decorated, and too much like a secular house. She almost made up her mind to have all the tasteful details destroyed. She contented herself, however, with requiring that the rest of the building should be finished in the plainest manner, as befitted the houses of Him Who had not where to lay His head.

The next day Mother de Chantal paid a visit to the Carmelite convent in Troyes, where the nuns had shown great kindness to her Sisters. She thanked them most heartily, and said that a good understanding between different religious Orders was the stamp of their perfect union with God, and the sign that they were in truth the dearly beloved children of the same Heavenly Father. The Carmelites welcomed her with infinite joy, and showing their regard after the manner of the Ursulines at Bourges, they managed to cut off part of her habit to keep as a relic.

In this convent Mother de Chantal met once more Mother Mary of the Trinity, now Prioress, who thirty years before had prophesied that she should be the sister, but never the daugh-

<sup>2</sup> The original paper is preserved by the Count de Hauterive, formerly in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at Paris. Bougaud, t. ii. p. 402.



ter, of St. Teresa. These two eminent women sat and talked together at recreation, till the community felt—according to the chronicle—as if they beheld those seraphim spoken of by the Prophet, who cry, Holy, holy, holy! continually before God's throne. At parting, Mother de Chantal gave the Prioress a very small coloured drawing of a rose, enclosing a head of the Infant Jesus, which Francis de Sales had once sent her on her feast day, and upon the back of which she had pasted some words in his accompanying letter :

‘ Ma mère, en cette rose  
Notre vie est enclose.’

She had always carried this memento about her folded in a copy of the Constitutions, and when she gave it to the Prioress she said : ‘ I give you, as to my dearest mother, what I love best in this world.’<sup>3</sup>

Mother de Chantal went from Troyes to Dijon and then to Autun, where she was exceedingly delighted to be able to visit the whole convent and see thirty-nine nuns in three hours. Every person and every detail of this convent was in perfect order, and none of the Sisters had any special communications to make or great wish to see any one but their own Superior. Mother de Chantal spoke of this fact again and again to Françoise de Toulonjon, who accompanied her, with delight and admiration, and repeated that it was the very best evidence of the excellence of both the Superior of a religious house and those she governed. She continually pressed this fact upon her Superiors, and besought them to oppose themselves to any extraordinary manifestations of conscience by the nuns, which are often connected with levity, curiosity, and the love of change. She had an admirable saying upon the subject, well worth bearing in remembrance : ‘ *Let us live upon our own bread ; that is the best.*’ As she left the convent, the Superior said that there was a want of perfect recollection, through her own fault, on which Mother de Chantal answered, that she would believe

<sup>3</sup> *Chronique de l'Ordre des Carmélites.* Troyes, 1856. Bougaud, t. iii. p. 465.

that this was said out of humility, as a convent without recollection was a place of disorder rather than of religious observance.

From Autun Mother de Chantal went to Macon, where the whole town seems to have turned out to meet and welcome her, and the chief ladies of the place went to visit her in eager throngs, headed by Madame de Framaye, the president's wife, with a charming little girl of two years old in her arms. Mother de Chantal, according to her wont, caressed and petted the child, and said, 'Here is a little one who will be for us.' And so it came to pass; for this child, when scarcely grown up, was so persistent in her determination to be a Visitation nun, that she climbed over the walls of the convent in the night, and would not be driven away. She died young, after showing great virtue. At Macon Mother de Chantal reprov'd both the community and the Superior for singing in her honour an elaborate *Stabat Mater* in four parts, which she said was contrary to the simplicity of taste required of the Visitation. The Superior took the rebuke like a true daughter of the Visitation, kneeling down immediately on the floor, and receiving it humbly and in silence.<sup>4</sup> The next visit was to the two convents at Lyons, Bellecour and Antiquaille, and in the latter convent Mother de Chantal was delighted to find the Villefranche community,—making in all ninety Sisters,—living in great regularity, peace, and perfect union, which was especially to be observed between the new Superior and her lately deposed 'predecessor.' At Valence one of the nuns gave Mother de Chantal on leaving a box of *Agnus Dei*; saying she much regretted having so little to offer. Mother de Chantal received it very kindly and thanked her, but replied: 'My child, I should have been still more content if I knew that your poverty was so thorough that you had nothing at all to give me.'<sup>5</sup> At Pont-Saint-Esprit Mother de Chantal found the community suffering from extreme poverty, and, having encouraged them to bear their troubles patiently, she went out into the town and bought a proper site for building a convent, telling the Superior that money would soon be received

<sup>4</sup> Archives de Macon.

<sup>5</sup> Fondation de Valence.

to pay for it. This actually happened after a little while, when alms were sent in some unusual manner.

Mother de Chantal continued her route through very stormy weather down the Rhone to Avignon, where she arrived on Whitsun Eve, and was received, as at Troyes, with a procession, the *Benedictus*, and holy water, with which, however, she always refused to sprinkle the nuns. Here the ingenuity of their gladness had suggested to the Sisters to dress the children of the 'little habit' like angels, who came forward, saying verses, to welcome their venerable Mother. This convent detained Mother de Chantal five days, during which she lived entirely in community, and spoke continually to the Sisters of 'the love of God and of their little institute.'

She next went through part of Provence, which contained many Visitation convents; and it is recorded that, whereas the country had been hitherto burnt up by a severe drought, Mother de Chantal had no sooner entered the province than gentle rains began to refresh the earth, and the people everywhere joyfully exclaimed that it was a miracle. At Arles a lady not known to her asked Mother de Chantal to dine at her house, which was contrary to her custom when there was a convent of her Order on the spot. To the great surprise of the Sister who accompanied her, she not only accepted the invitation, but allowed the lady to wait upon and serve her at table; but the mystery was soon explained when the lady knelt down before Mother de Chantal, and said that for three months she had been suffering incessantly from fever, but that her coming to the house had entirely cured her.

At Aix she was received with honours unusual even in the records of this journey, a large number of ladies coming to meet her, some to the distance of a day's journey from the town. The Archbishop openly declared his conviction of her sanctity, and the Bishop of Rennes, who happened to be there, with the frank simplicity of the Bretons, knelt down and asked for her blessing. Poor Mother de Chantal was so shocked and touched that she could not speak a single word, but stood with the tears in her eyes, trembling all over; and the Bishop,

still more impressed, said he should go to see her in Savoy. At Marseilles none of the Sisters had ever even seen her, and were transported with joy when she arrived; they gave her a new habit, veil, and underclothing, taking away all that she wore to keep as relics. This visit afforded Mother de Chantal peculiar pleasure, and she wrote of it in these words: 'O, if you could see this house, you would wonder at it. I do not know when I have felt more satisfaction, on account of the true spirit of prayer, union, exact observance, and very great simplicity which reigns in it.'<sup>6</sup>

Very touching and beautiful was a conference or meeting at Aix which afterwards took place; for as many of the convents in Provence lay at a distance, and it was feared that the fatigue of travelling to them would be too great, the Superiors of Sisteron, Digne, Draguignan, Grasse, and Forcalquier met Mother de Chantal at Aix, and reported to her the spirit and condition of their convents. A fortnight was spent in this work, during which time a multitude of practical difficulties, springing from the considerable difference between the character, habits, and customs of the north and south of France, were discussed and settled, and greater union and interchange of mind stirred up. When the day came for the separation, these strong-hearted and eminent women were seen grouped round Mother de Chantal, shedding tears like children about to bid farewell to their mother and to see her face no more. It was not that she wore her age feebly, or that she showed any special symptoms of approaching change; but they read in the light of her eye and brow, and in the fragrance of charity and thorough self-renouncement given out in every word and act, that the golden grain was bowing its full ripeness to the sickle, and that the heavenly reapers were drawing near to the last labour of gathering in. Her farewell charges to all the Superiors chiefly consisted of three observances for their communities to practise, and three points of charity for them to cherish. First, the strict observance of their rules and customs; secondly, the banishment of all softness as to body or soul; thirdly, the careful inculcation of

<sup>6</sup> *Fondation inédite de Marseille.*

our Lord's teaching, that if any one will come after Him he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him: and to these three practices of self-denial, taking the cross, and the following of our Lord by a generous exercise of virtue, they were to join three loves: the love of God, the love of their neighbour, and the love of their own abjection. If they carried out these points she hoped, she said, that they would all meet in Heaven, and dwell there in eternal joy. Then she blessed and embraced them every one, and charged them to carry to all the Sisters the most earnest assurances of that motherly love which nothing could ever weaken in her heart. It is easy to believe, as we read, that so long as they lived, all these excellent women who were happy enough to take part in this scene were never weary of narrating it, and recalling all its details again and again; and that the lapse of years never weakened the effect of the words then heard, and the voice that uttered them as a last legacy of her deep and enduring love.

At Montpellier one of the Procureurs du Roi, M. Ramisce, who had doubted for a long time whether he should join some religious Order or not, paid a visit to Mother de Chantal, and consulted her on the subject. 'But, sir,' she said to him, 'what would become of the boat of this world if every good man left it?' And she went on to show how much good a man in his position was able to do. From that time M. Ramisce returned to his usual life, happy and with a settled mind, and occupied all his leisure time in good works. At Nîmes Mother de Chantal found that none of the inns were kept by Catholics, so much was the south of France then overrun with Calvinism. Chancing to inquire for a lodging at a miserable little hovel where wine was sold, and finding that the owners described themselves as good Catholics, but very poor, she replied, 'Ah, how rich you are to have purity of the faith!' She slept there in a broken old bed, which she made herself with great gaiety of heart, and declared she had never slept better in all her life. Mother de Chantal then returned to Avignon, where the August heat and the fatigue she had undergone began to weigh heavily upon her nearly seventy years. For the last few months

she had been incessantly on the move, while all her days during her visitation had been spent in constant work and nearly uninterrupted conversation, and her rest and sleep had been shortened. Frequently she had risen soon after midnight to secure the hearing of mass before starting on a fresh journey, and had fasted from that time till three or four o'clock in the afternoon, being then able to procure only milk, black bread, and new cheese. But whether aching and weary, faint with fasting, or sharing with her companions the scanty and unpalatable food provided, Mother de Chantal was always bright, cheerful, and uncomplaining, taking the weight of every burthen upon herself, and shortening the way by the gaiety and charm of her conversation and society. She was continually doing something which was an act of humility, poverty, mortification, or the love of God. She would not even let Françoise de Toulonjon know when she was going into Burgundy, lest she should convey her in some state to the different convents. 'What should we do there with it all?' she said to Mother Favre. 'God knows what a comfort it would be to have my child with me; but it is such a misery. There must be litter and coach and train; all that displeases me exceedingly. When we got to any town people would say: "It is the Mère de Chantal going to Ste. Marie's." All that smacks of the world, and goes against my soul.' Then she would say, 'I like so much our close litter, our priest, and our two mule-drivers.' Whenever, therefore, as sometimes would happen in spite of all her efforts, splendid rooms, and state beds in which royal personages had slept, were prepared for her coming, Mother de Chantal would call the Sister who travelled with her to come and help her fold up the grand silk and satin coverlets, and put them carefully aside; sometimes with the quick, characteristic remark: 'For God's sake, Sister, let us be up early and get away from all this worldly pomp!'

Carrying out the same spirit through every detail of her life, Mother de Chantal would never take the Superior's place in choir or at meals, nor say grace or the *Benedicite*, or address the nuns in Chapter. Sometimes she would find her table



covered with a little green cloth, and a cushion or hassock put for her to kneel upon in the chapel; but everything was instantly pulled off or ordered away, with such words as these: 'Are we fine ladies? Do we want a drawing-room? Take away these things, Sisters; where is our poverty?' When she did speak in the ordinary meetings of the nuns it was in very earnest, short, and pregnant sentences. She exhorted them to love and practise humility, self-abjection, and, above all, charity; and in words which tore away every mask of self-deceit, she laid bare the thousand and one petty failings and feeblenesses which may lurk unseen under the religious habit. With a glow of earnestness, and in a voice which touched all hearts, she besought them to be of one mind in their own house and with all the other houses; to bear one another's burthens sweetly; to avoid all vanity as a source of dissension; to practise humility, obedience, and, above all, charity. So warmly and so unweariedly did she return to this cardinal point, that Sister de Chaugy once said to her: 'Mother, I shall write to every one, that in your old age you are like your Godfather St. John, and say nothing but "Love one another."' Mother de Chantal looked rather grave at this, but answered with her usual sweetness: 'My child, do not make this comparison, for we must not profane the Saints' names by likening them to wretched sinners; but it is true that if I followed my own bent, and were not afraid of tiring our Sisters, I should never speak to them of anything but love.'

Nothing, indeed, so deeply stirred Mother de Chantal as the possibility of foundations spreading too fast for the certainty of securing nuns trained in solid virtue; and she dreaded receiving postulants on account of their dowries, about which she left another of those sayings with which the Visitation annals are jewelled, as if with a pattern of precious mosaics, — 'Do not look out for dowries, look out for vocations. Whoever seeks novices made of money will never get novices made of gold.'

<sup>7</sup> An untranslateable *mot*: 'Qui veut avoir des filles d'argent n'en aura jamais d'or.' Bougaud, t. ii. p. 482.

Filled with the abounding love with which her heart overflowed in speech, Mother de Chantal wrote incessantly and faithfully to the Superior and the Sisters, to the old friends and companions of her early privations and struggles, and to the novices and younger nuns whom she had never seen. Before her eyes closed in death, eighty convents were spread before her loving heart and watchful eyes, like a rich vineyard in which she planted and dug, pruned and watered, with a true householder's care, that she might offer the fruits to God. And surely if any religious foundress could say that her vineyard had never brought forth wild grapes, Mother de Chantal could bear this marvellous witness of hers. She might almost indeed echo the blessed words of our Lord before His Passion: 'Those whom Thou gavest Me I have kept; and none of them have perished.'<sup>8</sup> Her own vast energies and three or four secretaries in constant work did not now suffice to keep up the enormous correspondence which forms so magnificent a commentary upon Mother de Chantal's vigorous powers, extraordinary sagacity and experience, the gradual perfection of her Christian character, and above all, the increasing depth and sweetness of her love. In a letter to Mother de Blonay she says—and this is only one of a multitude—'My darling, it is only to show you your fault and to tell you not to treat us (me) like this, letting pass opportunities of writing without doing so. Indeed, if I had hold of you, I should give you a hug that would mortify you. Ah, well! I look over all that is past, but do not fall back again. Do you not know how well I love my poor old child and her letters too?'

<sup>8</sup> St. John xvii. 12.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *Interior Trials and Losses. 1636-1641.*

MOTHER DE CHANTAL was about to leave Avignon for Grenoble, whence she intended to pass on to visit the convents at Franche Comté, Lorraine, Picardy, and Normandy, when she received a letter from the Bishop of Annecy, who, fearing that the extreme fatigue would completely exhaust her strength, ordered her to return immediately by the shortest road to Annecy. She returned accordingly to obey and suffer; for 1637 opened for her a new series of trials, which lasted for nine entire years. The valiant woman indeed 'put out her hand to strong things.'<sup>1</sup> We have hitherto been following Mother de Chantal's life from strength to strength like a gradually swelling river, which grows at the same time deeper and more calm as it nears the sea. But now that majestic strength was to be broken up, and the gold, which had already become so purified by loss of its alloy, was to be thrown into the fiery furnace for its last burning. She had for many years been subject to the most terrible interior temptations, and these were now to be increased as she drew nearer to her end.

One day at recreation Mother de Chantal, who was spinning, suddenly fell into an ecstasy, so that the distaff she was filling remained suspended in her hand. When she had a little recovered consciousness, she tried to hide her state by singing and making others sing; but after a time she began to speak of the martyrdom of love, which had been the lot of so many of the Saints and Fathers of the Church who had not been slain for the faith. This she was about to undergo, and the next day the interior trials and temptations began in their intensity.

<sup>1</sup> 'Manum suam misit ad fortia.' Prov. xxxi. 19.

Doubts of the mysteries of religion, blasphemous thoughts against God's goodness and mercy, and the harshest judgments of others, by turns tortured her imagination, till she compared her mind to a field swarming with frightful reptiles, which she could neither drive out nor destroy. She spoke of these trials with streaming eyes, often could neither eat nor sleep, and in the night was heard to groan in agony. It seemed to her that God had forsaken her, and that she was driven away from His loving care. Whenever she began to pray or prepared for communion, she felt that He looked at her like an offended Judge or a Master Whose commands she had set at naught, and Whose punishments she was now awaiting, instead of as the loving Pastor and Spouse of her soul. The burthen of her own sins and the holiness of God were, in fact, two thoughts that pierced her mind till she could not even hear the reading in the refectory without feeling as if she were being transfixed. And what was now added to the humbling and depressing effect of this extraordinary state of suffering was, that her ministry with others was so impaired by it, that when the Sisters consulted her upon any temptation or difficulty of soul, Mother de Chantal immediately seemed to suffer with the same interior trial and to commit the same fault. Once, when Mother de Blonay began to consult her about the state of her soul, she touchingly exclaimed with clasped hands, her eyes full of tears: 'Ah, mother, do not go on! I shall be overwhelmed with the same temptation; I see it coming; I feel it now!' Thus was the force and power of this grand soul seemingly beaten down for a time by the same fatherly hand which had built it up to such vast and noble proportions. She seemed unable to see anything clearly for herself, after having been so full of light and wisdom for others. But while passing through a trial so bitter that she herself said, 'Nothing on earth gave her the least relief but the one word DEATH,' and she was often reckoning how long her father, grandfather, and ancestors had lived, in order to seek some comfort in the thought that her days were numbered, she was still as bright and cheerful as ever with the Sisters, meeting and conversing with them continually with an unchanged face. Thus, in the quaint,

picturesque words of Mother de Chaugy, 'In vain did the storms beat upon this rose of love; it was always fresh and shedding its delicious fragrance.'

At the same time, as may well be conceived, many graces and helps were afforded Mother de Chantal, which interrupted her sufferings with the most precious comfort. Once, when she was in the depths of grief, Francis de Sales appeared to her, bright and glorious, seated on a majestic throne. Throwing herself on her knees immediately, Mother de Chantal said, 'Blessed Father, what do you wish me to do?' 'Daughter,' was the reply, 'it is God's will that you should fulfil with love and courage what love has urged you to begin.' At other times she heard voices telling her to read such and such a chapter in the *Imitation* and in the *Confessions of St. Augustine*. But what relieved Mother de Chantal far more than any vision, or supernatural help vouchsafed to the singular anguish of her soul was her simple obedience to her Superior, at that time 'our Péronne,' Mother de Chatel, whose sagacity and experience, together with her strict adherence to the principles of direction laid down by Francis de Sales, were of the utmost use to Mother de Chantal during her intensely suffering state. Mother de Chatel bade her never dwell upon her doubts and temptations, even to examine or pray about them. She was to hide them even from herself, and to fix her mind upon God alone; and having experienced the benefits of exact obedience to this method, Mother de Chantal obtained leave to make a vow—which was only to be renewed every morning for ten days—to carry it out, which afforded her some relief.

But she was now to be gradually stript of all things, so that one blow followed another rapidly. Out of six children, the widowed Françoise only remained; and as her spiritual father, Francis de Sales, had followed M. Frémyot to the grave, so now, after the losses of Marie Aymée and Celse Bénigne, her spiritual daughters were to go down before her into the valley of the shadow of death. The first to whom the message came was her 'great daughter,' Mother Favre, who had borne with her all the first burthens and deprivations of the Visitation,

who had been Superior at Paris, Lyons, Dijon, and Chambéry, and had founded Troyes, Montferrand, and Bourg-en-Bresse. Mother Favre was a woman whose example in the practice of poverty, purity of mind and heart, and courageous self-sacrifice was unequalled in the Order. Docile as a little child and fearless as a lion, she was absolutely incapable of surrender to weakness or discouragement, and had thus carried many communities through times of destitution and suffering under which many women would have sunk. The same courageous spirit made her persist in keeping her enclosure to the last, when she was advised to leave the convent for a while, to drink certain mineral waters. Her heroic persistence probably hastened her end, and at the still vigorous age of eight and forty, Mother Favre died at Chambéry with extraordinary peace and joy, on the 14th of June 1637.

It was then as if one blessed spirit already released had obtained leave for others to enter into their rest ; for no sooner had Mother de Chantal returned to Annecy from burying Mother Favre at Chambéry than she found 'our Péronne' making ready to depart, which she did with the calmness and methodical certainty of a traveller starting on some accustomed journey. She was only fifty-one years old, and her health was good ; yet she seemed to know that her end was at hand. She bade Mother de Chaugy, to whom she was dictating her recollections as to the commencement of the Order, make haste, as she had but little time left. One day she had a vision of Mother Favre, beautiful and radiant, holding out her arms to her ; and it had been agreed between them that that one of the two who was the first to see God should ask permission to come and fetch the other. The approaching departure of Mother de Chatel, on whom she leaned so much, was an immense grief to Mother de Chantal ; but she watched tenderly over the progress of the slow malady which was depriving her of so valued a support. One whole night was spent by Mother de Chatel in words of prayer or rejoicing, or often repeating, as if making a profession of faith : 'I am a Christian ! I am a Christian !' Mother de Chantal would then say, 'Live Jesus !' and Mother



de Chatel answer, 'And may my soul live with Him!' Or, 'Jesus and Mary!' to which she would reply, 'And great St. Joseph too!' Early in the morning she sat up and opened her eyes, looking up to heaven and striking the coverlet to show that the last hour was come, for she could no longer speak. The priest then gave her the last absolution, and Mother de Chantal, whose tears were falling fast, said, 'Depart, then, my dear Mother; go in peace into the arms of God Who calls you. Remember us, dear Mother, and take all our hearts to heaven with you!' Then, as if she had waited for this permission, 'notre Péronne' fixed her eyes lovingly on Mother de Chantal, bowed her head to receive her last blessing, and gave up her soul into God's hand. It was the end of October 1637.

Three weeks afterwards Mother de Bréchar d died at Riom; and so many and signal heroic acts were declared of this first of all the 'foundation stones,' that the Acts of her canonization were begun at the same time as those of Mother de Chantal. Eight years after death Charlotte de Bréchar d's body was found supple and undecayed, and giving out the fragrant perfume known only of the Saints. It must be left to the imagination to conceive what Mother de Chantal felt when her three chief pillars and hopes for the years to come were thus carried off in so short a time, comparatively in the prime of life, leaving her in her old age and increasing infirmities to take up the burthens they had for ever laid down. She wrote to another of her Superiors that 'her wretched old age was thoroughly stript; that her dear first companions were gone to heaven, leaving her full of miseries on earth; that they were ripe fruits meet to be served at the heavenly King's table; but that she was left hanging on the bough still green, or mildewed and wormeaten.' And while thus writing the letter was blotted with her tears.

Nevertheless, the burthens had to be carried onward, and in obedience to that beautiful law which in some lives brings completeness by the recurrence of cycles in which events repeat themselves like a melody in music, Mother de Chantal was once more elected Superior at Annecy, and again took her

place at the head of the convent in which she had borne the departure and loss of nearly all she had ever possessed or loved on earth. And once more that strong heart roused its energies, and those aged eyes kindled with fresh fire, as she addressed the Sisters in chapter, and told them that, with God's help, she should consume herself in their service, devote to that end her whole strength of body, mind, and soul, towards helping and serving them all she could. 'I could not expect to live so many years, nor that my pilgrimage should be thus prolonged. No one thought it would be so,' she said; 'but since it is God's good pleasure that I should have these three years of rule at the end of my life, I will put my last hand to this vine, and spend all my strength and substance in making it fruitful.'

She went on to say, that she could not tell whether she should live out the whole time, or die in the middle of it. It was indifferent to her; yet she hoped in God's goodness that she should be allowed, at the close of the time of her government, some months or years of repose, to think about herself. For seven and twenty years she had been thinking of others. God would dispose of her as He chose,—she was not anxious about it; but the Sisters must not be surprised if she showed great vigilance in governing them, for she felt that it was necessary that these three years should make their mark, and that she should have, at the end of her life, the consolation of seeing them more than ever active in coöperating with God's designs upon them and with her poor service, which was entirely given up to them. These words, spoken with deep feeling, seemed to sound through the whole Order, and as they were passed from one convent to another, the Sisters knew that very soon their Mother's place should know her no more.

This last reëlection was in 1637, and the following year Mother de Chantal was obliged to go in person to found a new convent at Turin. It had been contemplated in the lifetime of St. Francis, but various causes had conspired to hinder the accomplishment of the plan. The Court insisted on the presence of Mother de Chantal herself. On her way she stayed some days at Chambéry, where she took part in all the observances; and

one Wednesday, when the nuns were taking the usual discipline, a Sister continued her strokes after Mother de Chantal had given the signal to stop. She caused this Sister to be pointed out to her at recreation the next day, when she said to her in her grave earnest way, 'My child, you ought to know that the blows you gave yourself beyond the number were so many sacrifices offered to the devil.'

From Chambéry Mother de Chantal went on to Tarantaise, where the Archbishop went out to meet her with his Vicar General, Charles Auguste de Sales, who bore his testimony to the honour everywhere paid to her as a saint. The peasantry left their villages in crowds, and lined the roads along which she passed, kneeling down to ask for her blessing. The Archbishop accompanied her part of the way across the Little St. Bernard Pass, which Mother de Chantal chose because she wished to visit the convent at Aosta. There again she was received in triumph; the bells were rung, and the churches decorated as if for a great feast.

'At first we thought her a little grave,' wrote the nuns afterwards, 'but so humble, recollected, and heavenly, that if even we had not known she was our venerable foundress, we should still have knelt down to reverence the temple of the Holy Ghost, as several lay persons did, and one very devout canon of the cathedral, who went to render her an account of his conscience. Pieces were cut off her veil to be kept as relics.' On leaving Aosta one of her porters, a gigantic man renowned for his strength, was seized with such a strange attack of weakness, that he was obliged to give up the attempt to carry the litter. It was afterwards found that this man's life had been a very miserable one, and in the end he was executed for his many crimes. Many years after this Peter Francis de Sales, the Bishop of Aosta, wrote a letter to Pope Benedict XIV. stating this fact, adding that the finger of God seemed to be shown in this matter, and that it was evident that so great a criminal was not allowed to bear a precious burthen like Mother de Chantal.

She reached Turin in the September of 1638, and there completely won over the Pope's Nuncio, who had hitherto mis-

understood and opposed the Visitation ; but some months' toil were needed to establish the convent on a firm footing, so that it was in 1639 that Mother de Chantal returned through Pignerol and Embrun to Annecy. She spent her Easter at Embrun, and at recreation on Easter Sunday was seen to be completely rapt in a kind of ecstasy, repeating again and again, 'Alleluia ! Sisters, Alleluia !' The war between France and Spain, ceasing only to begin afresh, had again broken out ; for Victor Amadeus of Savoy having died and left a son under age, the two disputants for the regency at Turin called in respectively Louis XIII. of France and the King of Spain ; so that Mother de Chantal left Piedmont in great anguish of mind about the safety of her convents. That at Turin was certainly in great danger. The French soon invested the capital, pushing the siege with vigour ; and as the Visitation convent lay just between the French and Spanish batteries, cannon balls were continually falling in the enclosure, the chapel, and refectory. The nuns' chaplain, an excellent man, worked day and night, casting up a strong earthwork against their enclosure wall. At night he mounted guard, while the Sisters spent the hours kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament in prayer. There was a lay sister in the convent who was generally employed in the garden, and she asked the Superior how many cannon balls she was to count before she left off gathering the fruit and vegetables as usual. The Superior told her she might stay while counting three. Sister Jeanne Bénigne Gojos obeyed this order to the letter, and was thus exposed to a perfect rain of balls, which ploughed up the ground beside her or flew over her head while she walked on, carrying her baskets of fruit and herbs just as usual, with her eyes cast down, and perfectly silent and undisturbed. Once a ball cut one of the trees short off as she was under it, and another time her basket was struck and splintered. The French at length took the city by assault, but they neither broke into the Visitation enclosure nor even stole a single apple from the nuns' garden.

The convent at Pignerol also ran great risks, and Count d'Harcourt, who commanded the French troops, wrote to Mo-

ther de Beaumont for prayers, sending her at the same time an alms of 500 livres, as the house was exceedingly poor. A few days afterwards the Spaniards were beaten in an engagement, and Count d'Harcourt, feeling sure that he owed his victory to the nuns' prayers, made them many gifts, in which other generals followed his example. Before the war had ended the Pignerol convent became thus so enriched, that the Sisters bought a large new house with the alms they had received. Mother de Chantal was overjoyed to find that thus even war and every kind of social confusion wrought good to the 'houses of peace' and the loyal servants of God. She was just then engaged in establishing a house of Lazarist Fathers at Annecy, about which she says, 'For you see that when I think these good fathers are searching bush and briar to bring back some of our blessed Father's sheep from error and vice, I seem to grow young again, seeing them in his diocese.'

In 1640, Françoise de Toulonjon went to Paris, and while she was there her kind and loving uncle, Archbishop Frémyot, died, full of faith and joy. She was able to be of service to him on his deathbed, in the absence of her mother, who for some years had been of essential use to him as a counsellor in the ways of holiness. Mother de Chantal grieved very much over her brother's death, and wrote everywhere to beg prayers for his soul. She had not, however, much leisure allowed her to indulge in this latest of her sorrows, for the time of her superiority had run out, and she had so earnestly besought the Bishop to relieve her henceforward from all charge, that he forbade the nuns to put her name on the Superiors' list again.

Once more, therefore, and for the last time, on the Saturday before the Ascension of 1641, Mother de Chantal laid down her office in chapter, and very humbly begged pardon before all the assembled nuns for the faults she had committed. Never before had she so looked or spoken, or so urged them, with loving energy and the utter self-forgetfulness of true holiness and union with God, to persevere in His service. When she had made an end of speaking, she asked the Sisters to

place themselves in their due order, and went round to embrace them and bid them all a last farewell as their Superior, saying, in sweet and touching words, that she should never love them less, but feel for them all exactly as poor old grandmothers feel towards their grandchildren.

But while the nuns felt her loss to the very core of the heart, the work of electing a fresh Superior had to be gone through, and they turned their eyes to Mother de Blonay, the 'Cream of the Visitation,' now the only remaining nun of the first few who had been elected by Francis de Sales. The Bishop therefore begged her of the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons, and when the petition was granted, Mother de Chantal could not contain her joy. 'Alleluia, my very dear child, alleluia!' she wrote to Mother de Blonay. 'At last, thanks to our good God, the word of man has had power. Our good lord of Geneva has received a very honourable and very favourable answer from his Eminence the Cardinal. Soon, please God, you will be wholly our own. Alas! you know how many years I have toiled for this.' And soon afterwards, with an overflowing heart, she poured out her delight to Mother de Blonay in a fresh letter: 'It seems to me that no other joy is equal to mine—seeing my dear youngest child come back to me, that I may spend the rest of my days with her, have her for my very dear mother, for my child beloved like no other, for my sister in perfect confidence. Everywhere I shall write of my gladness.'<sup>2</sup>

This abounding joy of a holy soul burst from Mother de Chantal without measure. She talked of nothing but Mother de Blonay's coming, and by her words and example stirred up in the community a fresh zeal for obedience to the Superior and the rule, and for perfect union with each other. Like the beloved disciple, to whom Jacqueline de Chaugy had compared her, she came and went to recreation or other times of meeting and converse with a face all radiant with happiness, and with these words on her lips, 'Dear Sisters, love, love!'

<sup>2</sup> Life of Mother de Blonay. Charles Auguste de Sales, p. 174. Quoted by Bougaud, t. ii. p. 320.



Mother de Blonay reached Annecy on the eve of Corpus Christi, and as soon as her arrival at the gates was made known, the whole community went out to welcome her, and Mother de Chantal, kneeling at her feet, said, while kissing her, 'At last, my mother, sister, and my very heart and soul!' Mother de Blonay was so disturbed at seeing her venerable Mother kneeling before her in this way, that she threw herself also on her knees, scarcely able to utter a word. They then all went, as Mother de Chantal proposed, to thank our Lord for this blessed arrival, and turning to one of the Sisters, she said, 'What have I to do now with life, since our dear Annecy is so well provided with the Mother I so longed for?'

The next day she went early to Mother de Blonay's room, to wish her good morning and hear how she had spent the night, and then made herself over, as it were, altogether into her Superior's hands, begging her to enforce the obedience of which she had so great need as if she had been a novice. She told her all her little practices, and asked if she should continue them; showed her, and asked permission to keep, the written professions of faith which she wore about her neck in a little bag, with a picture of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in her copy of the Constitutions, opening even her table drawer, where, in the true spirit of poverty, she had nothing but a scrap of green taffety, which she sometimes used as a shade for her eyes.

Then there was witnessed for some time that rare sight of a genuine daily strife between the Superior and the deposed Mother. Mother de Blonay could not endure that their venerable foundress should be seen in her old age accusing herself before her and doing penances in the refectory. Every day, when Mother de Chantal, according to the rule, took the lowest place at meals and recreation, Mother de Blonay would go and take her by the arm and lead her to another seat, or, just as she was going to kneel down and make her accusation, she would gently hinder her or lift her up again, when Mother de Chantal would say, 'Ah, Mother, you deprive me of all my joy!' Little devices and stratagems were invented by the

Sisters to hinder her from going to wash the dishes in her turn, and to send her to the parlour or provide her with occupation during chapter time. But all these little loving plots were of no avail, and, in some way or other, Mother de Chantal would watch and remember, and was always ready at the moment. Once Mother de Blonay assembled the chapter for faults unexpectedly after recreation, when Mother de Chantal had been summoned to the parlour; but suddenly the door opened, and she was in her place. The Superior bade her withdraw, said that the chapter had begun, she might come next week. Mother de Chantal withdrew to visit a sick nun in the infirmary to ask her prayers, saying that she herself was not worthy to be with the community, and the like. At last the Bishop interfered, and Mother de Chantal pleaded her own cause so efficaciously before him, that he ordered Mother de Blonay to allow her foundress to humble herself as she would, after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, though He was the founder of this world and of the Church, made Himself the last of all, and wiped the feet of His disciples. 'Would to heaven,' added the Bishop, 'that I might now die, and that there might never be any contention but such as this between the Superiors elect and the Superiors deposed of the Visitation!' And all this time, as the old memoirs of the convent tell, Mother de Chantal seemed so extraordinarily sweet and amiable, and so continually occupied with God and eternal things, that some of the nuns trembled to see it, fearing that the shining light of her sanctity was now at its last blaze of brilliancy.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *Last Journey and Death of Mother de Chantal. 1641.*

OUR readers will not have forgotten that among the crowd of eminent or remarkable women called to the Visitation Order had been the widowed Duchess de Montmorency. She was by birth Maria Felicia Orsini, a niece of Pope Sixtus V., and a greatniece and goddaughter of Queen Marie de Medici. She had married at fourteen the Duke de Montmorency, the representative of the oldest noble house in France, as his war cry or legend still attests: 'God aid the first Christian baron!'<sup>1</sup> The duke, having joined with Gaston duke of Orleans in an effort to overthrow Richelieu's power, was defeated at Castelnaudary, taken prisoner, and condemned to death. The pitiless Richelieu would not spare his noble prey, and Montmorency suffered on the scaffold with all the valour of his race. Even the widowed duchess was not spared the anger of the vindictive minister, and she also was arrested and sent under guard to the castle at Moulins. As she was travelling through Lyons to her destination, she heard that Mother de Chantal was there, and wished to see her; but Richelieu's orders were so imperative, that the poor prisoner was not allowed to do so. The duchess, therefore, was obliged to content herself with writing to Mother de Chantal, and begging a remembrance in her prayers. Mother de Chantal had returned an answer, assuring her that her present troubles were so many steps by which she should reach a great height in Christian virtue. At Moulins she was frequently visited by the *tourières* of the Visitation, and having become well acquainted with the Order, the duchess had made up her mind, as soon as she was allowed, to exchange her prison in the castle for the convent without its

<sup>1</sup> 'Dieu ayde au premier baron Chrétien.'

walls; and in spite of all that the king, queen, and Duke of Orleans could urge, or the Duke of Bracciano, her brother, who besought her to live in Rome, she made her home in the convent at Moulins, where she lived not as a religious, but in great austerity and poverty, and dispensing her wealth freely upon the neighbouring poor. Her progress in the spiritual life became so remarkable, that Mother de Brécard employed her in instructing the novices, and Mother de Chastelluz even put herself under her direction. Louis XIII., when passing through Moulins in 1642, and even Richelieu her injurer, sent messages to pay her their respects. She acknowledged all these honours with dignity; but begged that Richelieu might be told that her tears had never ceased to flow.

Madame de Montmorency had never seen Mother de Chantal but for a few hurried minutes in 1635, and as now in 1641, after her nine years' widowhood, she had made up her mind to enter the Visitation, she earnestly begged to receive the veil from the hands of the holy foundress herself, and wrote letter after letter to Annecy, beseeching that this consolation might be granted her. The difficulties in the way were many and great. The nuns at Annecy implored their Superior not to allow Mother de Chantal to go, and neither Mother de Blonay nor the Bishop at all liked the idea of her undertaking a long journey from Savoy at so advanced an age. The town magistrates also put in their word, and with their outspoken Savoyard simplicity of faith represented that, considering Mother de Chantal's infirm state and advanced years, she might die in France, and then they should never be allowed to have her remains among them. They even sent a deputation to the Duke of Savoy, begging him to forbid Mother de Chantal to leave his dominions.

Nevertheless, as it was in France that she drew her first breath, it was also to be in France that Mother de Chantal should die. Many considerations weighed on the Duchess de Montmorency's side, and the journey to Moulins was decided on. The parting at Annecy was very sad, and every Sister seemed to know by intuition that it was the last. For the last

time, in truth, Mother de Chantal spoke to them, assembled in tears around her, while her own strong brief words were broken and choked with feeling, though she shed no tears. 'My very dear Sisters,' once more they heard, in that beloved and well known voice, never raised but to lift their eyes and hearts to God—'my very dear Sisters, I conjure you all to live in the love of our good Saviour, and to love one another heartily in Him. Let Him be Himself the sacred bond of your love. Honour one another, as our holy rules say, as the temple of God; and if you do that, my dear children, your union will be wholly divine. You honour God in your Sisters, and your Sisters in God. Live all of you in unity, that is, having only one heart and one soul in God. Pray to Him for me, my dear children. I love you all, I know you all. I think I leave you in the grace of God; I beg of His goodness to keep you in it, and to give you His blessing. Never depart from our holy observances. Farewell, my dear children! farewell for still a while, my dear children! I know not if we shall see one another again in this life; we must leave all things to Divine Providence. If it is not in this world, it will be in the holy eternity. Often I shall behold you in spirit; for you are all very present with me. I know not what it means; but I know them all so well—'<sup>2</sup> Her voice was choked, and suddenly breaking off, she embraced them all, saying to each one some little single word of counsel and remembrance; and with emotion too deep for tears, she turned towards the gates.

A Sister having said to her, 'Dear Mother, we shall see one another no more,' she replied with a smile, 'Yes, we shall, my child.' 'But ask it of our Lord!' insisted the nun. 'Not so; His will be done,' answered Mother de Chantal. 'We shall meet again, either in this life or the next.' To another person, who was expressing a fear of not seeing her again, she said, 'Be sure that, dead or alive, I shall come back here.' When M. Piotton showed his surprise at seeing her undertake so long and wearisome a journey in such spirits, she said to him, 'You

<sup>2</sup> Her very words; perhaps with a prophetic view of the generations still to come.

see, my dear brother, I wish for nothing but God's will, and if I knew that He wished me to drown myself, I should go instantly and jump into the lake.'

As soon as Mother de Chantal stepped out of the convent, she found herself in the midst of a dense crowd, which filled up the whole road to bid her farewell; and she was then seen to do what she had never done before, to give her hands right and left to all who wished to grasp them. The poor people all came out of their doors to look at her, and the sick even dragged themselves to the windows to see her pass, waving their blessings and farewell greetings. And as Mother de Chaugy said, their Mother looked so strong and vigorous that they had no reason to think she might not yet live for many years, while it was the last time that Annecy saw her alive. On her way she paid short visits to Rumilly, Belley, Montluel, and Lyons, and on reaching the neighbourhood of Alonne was met by her daughter, Françoise de Toulonjon, who had remained in Paris after her uncle's death, and was much rejoiced to hear that her mother had at last received permission to go to Moulins. She set off, therefore, immediately for Alonne, and had scarcely reached home when she started again to meet her mother and convey her to Moulins in her own carriage, in which they could converse at their ease. There was much to tell on both sides, and Mother de Chantal heard from Françoise with thankful emotion the whole details of Archbishop Frémyot's death, and the earnest faith and piety of his latter days on earth. In her turn she related to Françoise many interesting particulars about Jacqueline de Chaugy, whom she called her very right hand.

In this way, mingling also the tenderest and most comforting instruction with every topic discussed, Mother de Chantal reached Moulins, where they found such bad news of Madame de Chaugy, Jacqueline's mother, that Françoise left her mother at Moulins and went on immediately to Alonne, where she was just in time to be with her sister in law when she died. Mother de Chantal, however, feeling the time to be very short, wrote for Françoise to return immediately to her, which she hastened to do. Never had she known her mother so expansive in her ten-



derness, so communicative, or so ready and even eager for intercourse. It seemed as if her love and ardent desire for her daughter's happiness overflowed all usual bounds, and filled these last days with a fertilizing charity which left effects never to be obliterated or lessened. At last Mother de Chantal tenderly blessed Madame de Toulonjon and her two children, and sent them away to Alonne, saying that all the time she had left for Moulins must be entirely devoted to her nuns.

Madame de Montmorency had met her with a reverential joy which words cannot express, and these two grand women, who had both known such extraordinary losses and sufferings, seemed to understand and appreciate one another at once.

The duchess had made arrangements on taking the veil to found, with half her property, a Visitation convent at Toulouse, 'for the daughters of the men who had slain her husband;' and to give up the remaining half for the use of the convent at Moulins. But Mother de Chantal refused both these offers. Looking now steadfastly from the border land on which she dwelt into the eternal life to come, she numbered up the infinite snares and delusions into which wealthy religious orders fall, and she obliged the duchess to promise to make over her whole property to her own family. One day when Mother de Chantal found the young widow dwelling upon the remembrance of her husband with tears, she had said to her a few earnest faithful words about the character of true resignation, which sank deeply in her heart. Madame de Montmorency then locked herself into her room, took out the one single beloved likeness of the duke, which for ten years had been blotted with her tears, and after looking at it as if to stamp the sacrifice upon her heart, she threw it into the fire. When Mother de Chantal heard of this heroic act, not required but voluntarily offered, she said that there was no need to interfere in any way with the duchess's direction, for she was a true saint visibly guided by God Himself. And then she, on her part, made a sacrifice of a little miniature of Francis de Sales given her by himself, and having written on the back of it a few words, she gave it to the duchess, who valued it as a double relic. This is what Mother de Chan-

tal wrote : ' My blessed Father, obtain for Madame that sovereign love of God which may comfort and gladden her noble heart in all her afflictions. Amen, amen.'<sup>3</sup>

When the queen, Anne of Austria, heard that Mother de Chantal was at Moulins, she sent a messenger and a letter to bring her to Paris, and went out to meet her in a carriage with the dauphin (Louis XIV.) and his brother, the little Duke of Anjou. Having brought Mother de Chantal to the palace at St. Germain, the queen made her sit in an armchair near herself, and talked to her a long time about her spiritual state and her affairs, kissing her hands and treating her with every sign of affectionate respect. When their conversation was ended, the queen brought in her two sons, and made them kneel down to receive Mother de Chantal's blessing.

In the convent at Paris she was received and welcomed with such a burst of enthusiasm, that she was obliged to get up at three o'clock in the morning to confer with the crowds of different persons who asked to see her. The community was occupied from morning till night, bringing her rosaries to touch from the multitudes who besieged the convent. In the midst of all the concourse she remained always calm, modest, affable, her face beaming, as it were, with divine love and humility. Those who conversed with her during this time of her life said that they had never before seen her as now, and that it was like the broad noon of holiness when compared with the early dawn. For, in fact, the continual presence of God made her entirely lose sight of herself.

Mother de Chantal had one great satisfaction in Paris, which was a last sight of St. Vincent de Paul, when she opened her conscience fully to him once more. He was now sixty-four and Mother de Chantal sixty-eight, and both were drawing near to the close of a life which had been devoted to God's service and the spread of good works with marvellous success for half a century. Mother de Chantal had been travelling here and there, opening a fresh and deeper spring of Christian life in convents

<sup>3</sup> *Mémoires originaux de la vie de feu N.V.M. Marie Félicie des Ursins douairière de Montmorency* (MS. d'Annecy). Quoted by Bougaud, t. ii. p. 566.

of nuns, while 'M. Vincent' had built hospitals, rescued orphans, instituted the Priests of the Home Mission, opened seminaries, revived the faith and zeal of the secular clergy, and dispersed a whole army of Sisters of Charity through the world.

While thus, for the last time, catching from the words and face and mind of this eminent Saint the vivid reflection of his Divine Master, Mother de Chantal was finally delivered from the nine years' anguish of interior trials which had oppressed her, and thenceforward, for the brief remains of her life, she tasted without interruption the purest spiritual joy. She made at the same time a review of her conscience to the Archbishop of Sens, Monseigneur de Bellegarde, and this contributed much to the peace which she enjoyed for the remaining three months of her life. One very memorable visit was made by Mother de Chantal in Paris. Overwhelmed as she was with occupation and claims, she went to Port Royal and spent two days in deep and earnest conversation with Mother Angélique Arnauld, who had obeyed Francis de Sales in the letter by remaining in her abbey, but not in the spirit by renewing and humbling herself. On the contrary, it is a sad truth that with that proud, self-asserting, and acrid character, which had completely regained ascendancy under the Abbé de St. Cyran, Angélique spent the precious opportunity of Mother de Chantal's visit in dwelling upon and bewailing the imagined scandals and evils in the Church, instead of turning her eyes inward upon herself, with which only she had to deal. Mother de Chantal, still not fully awakened to the inroads of Jansenism, seems not to have clearly discerned the danger hanging over Angélique Arnauld.

While visiting the Carmelites in Paris, Mother de Chantal was told by Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, the daughter of Madame Acarie, that her end was near. 'What do you say, Mother?' replied Mother de Chantal, with quickness. 'O my God, what good news!' And she spoke of this during the whole day with great joy. She remained in Paris till November 5. When she bade the nuns good bye she said to them, 'Farewell, my children, until eternity!'

From Paris she went (Nov. 11) to Melun, where a postulant

asked her to let the Superior, whose six years had run out, remain in office. Mother de Chantal's countenance instantly changed, and looking very gravely, almost severely, towards a picture of Francis de Sales which hung in the room, she said, 'My child, I love that Blessed one very much, but I love our Rule still more.'

At Montargis, Mother de Chantal opened her conscience for the second time to the Archbishop of Sens, who was struck with amazement at the meek, calm, untroubled love which seemed altogether to fill her soul. When she was leaving the convent, she took him a little aside and said, 'Ah, father, tell me once more in what state and mind I ought to die; I wish not to forget it.' At Nevers she felt ill; but when the nuns begged her not to get up at five o'clock as usual, she said, 'My children, we must always wish what God wills, and die when He pleases.' As they were contriving to get for her some food better than usual, she said, 'No, no, let it alone! Poverty, humility, and simplicity are our rules.' The Sisters at Nevers were building their church, but when Mother de Chantal saw the front porch, which was very beautiful, she said, 'All that is contrary to poverty, and gives me great pain.' She was inclined to get them to pull it down. 'If any one would buy it,' she said gaily, 'it would be well to sell it.' She got them at least to write to all the Visitation convents and acknowledge their fault, as an example.

While travelling from Nevers to Moulins, Mother de Chantal felt more and more ill. The nuns at Moulins found her looking quite changed since she left them, and she herself was convinced that she had only come back to them to die. On the eve of the Immaculate Conception, though still very ill, she went into the refectory and knelt there while the Sisters were at collation, repeating thrice, with her arms extended in the form of the cross, '*O Mater Dei, memento mei;*' adding, 'O most holy Mother of God, by thy Immaculate Conception, remember to help me always, but specially at the hour of my death.' The morning of the Feast she got up at five o'clock with the community and went down into the choir, where she was immediately attacked

by the shivering of fever. The nuns wished her to go back to her bed, but she begged that she might remain till after communion, saying that it was exactly that day one and thirty years that Francis de Sales had bidden her, unworthy though she was, go every day to communion. As soon as mass was over, she was obliged to be taken up to bed, and when the doctor came he said she was seriously ill. The Blessed Sacrament was then immediately exposed, novenas were begun, and all the convents at Moulins began to pray for Mother de Chantal's recovery. Madame de Montmorency and several of the nuns offered their lives to God for her ; but as Mother de Chaugy, in her beautiful memoirs, observes : ' The wings of that dove, now soaring to the eternal home, were far stronger to bear her thither than all the means that were used to keep her upon earth.'<sup>4</sup>

No sooner did Mother de Chantal discern the approach of death than she sent for the Jesuit Father de Lingendes to hear her confession, her usual director being away ; and afterwards she asked the nuns' confessor to write to all her convents to beg every one of the Sisters, as her last wish on earth, to be faithful to their Rule. The next morning, December the 12th, Mother de Chantal received the Viaticum. When she saw that our Lord was coming to her, she raised herself up, bravely overcoming the great pain and difficulty, and said in her usual clear distinct voice, ' I firmly believe that my Saviour Jesus Christ is in the holy Sacrament of the Altar, and I have always believed and confessed it. I worship Him, and confess Him as my God, my Creator, my Saviour, and my Redeemer, Who has redeemed me with His precious Blood. I would heartily give my life for this belief, but I am not worthy to do so. I acknowledge that I owe my salvation to His mercy alone.' After communion she called for the confessor of the convent, and, in the presence of the community, said, ' Father, while my mind is in full vigour, I ask with my whole heart for the Holy Oils, begging you to give them to me at the proper time.' She was very ill during the whole day, and towards evening it was proposed to her to make her communion once more at midnight, as after Viaticum

<sup>4</sup> *Mémoires*, p. 282.

she was obliged to receive fasting. But she humbly refused this favour, saying that the community and the time of silence must not be disturbed. The offer was then made to anoint her, lest she should die in the night, but she replied, 'Not yet, not yet; I am strong enough to wait.'

This was a kind of prophetic knowledge, for the next day Mother de Chantal was able to sit up in bed, and dictate her last words and instructions to the Order. In this her last will and testament, written, as she said, on her deathbed, she once more recommended to the Sisters obedience to the intentions of Francis de Sales, peace with one another and union between all the houses, great faithfulness to the observances, sincerity of heart, simplicity and poverty of life, and holy charity, adding with touching solemnity, as if to seal her words, 'This is everything I can say to you in my last hour of suffering.' She then begged the Sisters one and all to show great respect, reverence, and confidence towards Madame de Montmorency, a holy soul whom God was moulding at His will, and to whom the whole Institute owed infinite obligations. 'She lives among our Sisters,' continued this letter, 'with greater humility, simplicity, and innocence than if she were a peasant. Nothing touches me so much as her tender sorrow for my leaving this world, for she fears that you will blame her for my death. But, my dear children, you know that Providence has ordered our days, and that they would not have lasted a quarter of an hour longer. This journey has been of great use to the houses we have visited on the way and for the whole Order.' Mother de Chantal ended this beautiful last letter by heartily commending herself to the prayers of all her children, promising to ask their blessed Father to give them the spirit of humility, which alone could preserve the Order.

When the letter was dictated and copied, she signed it with her name; and having done that, she laid herself down again, saying that her conscience was in great peace, and that she had no more to say. Towards evening the oppression of the chest and difficulty of breathing became more and more troublesome, and she suffered much; but without once losing consciousness.



Her sayings during this kind of agony were carefully gathered up by those who watched round her bed. 'What is a nun without the observance of her Rule?' 'The only happiness in this world is prayer.' 'O, how beautiful will to-morrow be!' Sometimes she opened her still bright and beautiful eyes and looked at Madame de Montmorency, who never left her bedside, or at the Sisters who were watching and weeping around her, and said to them some little, sweet, comforting, motherly word.

Through all that last night Mother de Chantal never slept, and being weary, she asked to have read to her St. Jerome's account of St. Paula's death, giving it her fixed attention, and every now and then repeating, 'What are we, poor things? We are only atoms beside those great and holy religious women.' She asked also for the account of the death of Francis de Sales, that she might conform herself to his example in death as well as in life. Then one of the Sisters read to her the ninth chapter of the *Love of God*; and when she came to the passage, 'If I am ill, or my mother—for it is one and the same—I must be indifferent to God's goodness,' Mother de Chantal pressed Madame de Montmorency's hand, whose tears fell fast, and looking kindly at her said: 'That is for you, Madame!' A little while afterwards, while listening to St. Augustine's account of St. Monica's death, where among other things it is recorded that she did not grieve at dying far from her own country, she said pleasantly, 'And that is for me!'

In this way the night wore onwards; and before the dawn of the morning which was to brighten into her eternal day, Mother de Chantal sent away the Sisters, and spoke at great length to Madame de Montmorency about her vocation, begging her again never to enrich the convent, to make over all her wealth to her relations, and to give herself wholly and heartily to God. After that, feeling perfectly exhausted, she said: 'Farewell, Madame, we must now part. Sometimes think of me!'

About nine o'clock Mother de Chantal received Extreme Unction, still in the possession of her full consciousness, and

answering all the prayers herself. When this was over, Father de Lingendes asked her to give the Sisters her blessing, which she at first refused; but being again bidden by him, she joined her hands, and looking up, said: 'My dear children, as this is, then, the last time I shall speak to you—for so is God's will—I recommend to you with all my heart respect and obedience to your Superiors, seeing God in them. Be thoroughly united one with another, but with the union of hearts—the union of hearts—the union of hearts! Live in great simplicity and observance; for by this means you will draw upon you the blessing of God. I beg of the Divine mercy to pour [that blessing] upon all the daughters of the Visitation.' After blessing them she added: 'My children, make no account of the things of this life, which passeth away; think often that you must come one day to the same state in which you see me now.'

The Sisters all wept around her, and Mother de Chantal herself was much moved, and spoke with such earnestness that Father de Lingendes shortened a scene which was too much for her failing strength, signing to the Sisters to withdraw. She saw this, and said: 'We must part now; we must bid one another the last farewell;' and as they came forward one by one to kiss her hand, she looked at them with her true motherly look, and spoke a last little word of advice to each.

From that moment Mother de Chantal's words were about God alone. Her eyes turned alternately to the pictures of the crucifix and the Blessed Virgin which were fastened to her bed curtains, and when first the Passion, and then the Profession of Faith according to the Council of Trent, were read, she repeated her firm belief and her desire to die for it, and often said, '*Maria, Mater gratiæ*,' &c. At her own request the commendations of a departing soul were then read, when she remarked upon the beauty of the prayers. She asked then to be left alone for a little while, but suddenly recalling the priest, said, 'O, father, I assure you God's judgments are terrible!' But on his asking her if she felt frightened, she answered, 'Not so; but I assure you the judgments of God are terrible!' after which she was quite silent. Towards evening the community

filed quietly in to say the last prayers for the departing soul. One of the Sisters asked if she was in pain, and Mother de Chantal answered, 'O, yes! but what is it compared with the sufferings of Christ for me?' Father de Lingendes said to her, 'Mother, have you reflected on what the goodness of God is? It is so great, that having given us our soul through love, it is love which causes Him to take it back to Himself.' A thrill of joy seemed to pass through her as she made answer, 'O, how sweet is that thought!'

A blessed taper was then lit and put into one hand, and the crucifix, with the little bag containing several professions of faith and her vows in the other, and the prayers being now ended, she was breathing with difficulty. Father de Lingendes said to her, 'Mother, these sharp pains are the cry which is made for the Bridegroom's coming. He is here—here at hand; will you not go forth to meet Him?'

'Yes, father,' she answered, 'I am going. Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!' and immediately her soul went forth with these last words, and sought its rest in God.

'Lovely and comely in their life, even in their death they were not divided,' says holy David of Saul and Jonathan. We have seen how Jane Frances de Chantal had received, in secret, intimation of the death of her holy father, when at a distance from him, and it seems certain that Francis de Sales was present to her at the moment of her own death, so many years after. She was asked in her agony whether she did not hope that her blessed father would come down to meet her, and she answered that she was confident he would do so, as he had promised it. St. Vincent of Paul, not ordinarily visited, as he said, by visions, has left on record how he had been praying for her at the time of her death, and had seen the vision of two globes of fire, which were joined to another larger and brighter than all in the heavens, which represented the Divine Essence; and how when saying mass for her, and thinking that she might be in Purgatory, he had again the same vision.<sup>5</sup>

Seeing that all was over, Madame de Montmorency closed

<sup>5</sup> See Bougaud, t. ii. p. 381.

the eyes and kissed the feet of the Saint, bathing them with her tears. While preparing for the burial, she and the Sisters discovered and venerated the sacred name of Jesus, branded indelibly on her side. They also opened the little bag which she always wore, and read aloud the professions, vows, and the like, written in long past years at Dijon, at Notre Dame d'Etang, at St. Claude, Annecy, Paris, and Lyons; looking upon them as so many waymarks and signal memorials of unspeakable victories and grace.

The body was embalmed by Madame de Montmorency's orders, and lay in the chapel for two days to satisfy the devotion of the crowds who came to pray beside it, touch it with their handkerchiefs and rosaries, and to implore her aid in heaven. Thither, among the rest, came poor Françoise, to look for the last time upon her mother's grand sweet face, so serene and peaceful in death, that those who saw it could scarcely tear themselves away. And then even that, 'the blessed body where so noble a guest had lodged,' was carried away to its resting place, and Françoise felt indeed bereaved. For when the two days were over, Madame de Montmorency had the body carefully and secretly carried away to Annecy, that, according to Mother de Chantal's own wish, she might rest not far from Francis de Sales.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Mother de Chantal's heart was, however, retained at Moulins, and placed in a rich jewelled reliquary, by Madame de Montmorency. Probably the Paris convent waived their right, in consideration of the eminent services rendered by Madame de Montmorency to the Order. The wooden bedstead, mattress, and coarse bedding are still to be seen in the convent at Nevers.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### *Death of Françoise de Toulonjon. 1684.*

WE may conclude this story by a few paragraphs concerning the remaining years of Françoise de Toulonjon—the only child of Mother de Chantal who survived her, and the lot in life of Jane's three grandchildren, Marie de Chantal, Gabrielle de Toulonjon, and Francis de Toulonjon.

Both the girls were exposed to peculiar perils in life. Marie de Chantal was an orphan, an heiress, exceedingly pretty, and very witty and attractive. She missed several excellent marriages, and at last made an unsatisfactory choice in the Marquis de Sévigné, who died in a duel, and left her early in life to the frivolous and heartless influences of the court of Louis XIV. Gabrielle de Toulonjon made even a more singularly unfortunate marriage; for her dissipated cousin, Roger Bussy de Rabutin, fell in love with her when he came to plead his aunt's cause as Marie's guardian, and unhappily the fair and innocent girl was completely carried away by Bussy's 'large soft eyes,' mobile speaking face, and wily beguiling tongue. Two Bishops also fell victims to what Madame de Sévigné long after wittily called *Rabutinage*, and even Mother de Chantal caressed her greatnephew and prophesied that he would be the saint of his family. In short, Bussy and Gabrielle were married, and the wedding was scarcely over before poor Gabrielle learnt that her husband was everything that she could not desire, and that her only resource was to persuade him to buy a lieutenancy in the Prince de Condé's light cavalry, and to get him as much from home as possible. It is but fair to say that Bussy's love and almost reverential regard for his wife, whenever he was with

her, increased with each time of his return; and during the whole period of their brief married life, Gabrielle's influence prevented him from breaking out into the wild excesses by which he afterwards disgraced the family name. Still, if Mother de Chantal had lived, she never would have permitted her grandchild to come within reach of so much evil. They had three little girls, Diana, Charlotte, and Louise Françoise, and with the birth of the last Gabrielle's short life was brought to an end, after giving so bright an example of wifely affection to a faithless husband, and of unvarying sweetness and cheerfulness amid the ruin of her dearest hopes, that the Capuchin friar who preached her funeral sermon said he scarcely knew which of the two—Madame de Chantal or Madame de Bussy—would receive the brightest eternal crown.

The noble tree, which by degrees had been stripped of its blossoms and fruit, still seemed to lift its head even the more bravely to the sky; and Françoise, after her daughter's death, returned to the Visitation convent at Autun, where she spent much time henceforth in solitude and prayer. It is interesting to learn from the Visitation annals that the grand and solid devotion of this noble widow extended over hours of time, and that although she never could understand or practise what is commonly known as meditation, she would pray for four or five successive hours in a very simple, modest, heartfelt way, and speaking to our Lord as if she heard Him and saw Him before her. She also made a point of persisting in the course she had laid down for herself, and as soon as her retreats were over, returned immediately to carry into practice what she had learnt in prayer. At Alonne the poor and needy were always diligently sought out, and the sole office of her waitingwoman was to scour the villages and find out if there were any who were too sick and weak to go to the castle for what they required. Her kitchen was an exceedingly busy one, but it was chiefly busy for the sick and maimed, and all the dainties of her own table were sent away to those specially afflicted. But Françoise did not give herself up to any stiff routine of charity; she had an immense variety of duties to fulfil, and they were fulfilled to



the utmost. Her son Francis and her three granddaughters gave her ample occupation and anxiety; but Francis, after a childhood of very indifferent health, grew up and married well. Diana and Charlotte de Bussy both became nuns, though the Benedictine observance which Charlotte followed allowed her to return home from time to time to be with her father. Louise, after being very carefully educated by her grandmother and the Visitation nuns, went to keep her father's house in Burgundy, and probably there never was a task of no ordinary difficulty attended with happier results. Louise became under her father's guidance a very intellectual and accomplished woman, and her charms of cheerful wit and literary acquirements made even Bussy Rabutin contented in the country in forced exile from Paris. After gradually inducing him to lead a Christian life, Louise de Bussy at length married the Marquis de Coligny, but his early death left her very soon a widow, and her life became less satisfactory than before. Nevertheless, by her devoted efforts and continual watchfulness, Françoise had thus managed to rescue these three souls from many dangers of the time. Her son, born at the time of his father's death, who, as we have said, married Bernarde de Pernes, left no issue.

And at last, after very many years of trial and labour, and many bitter sorrows and vexations from her son and granddaughter, the end was come. '*Notre Françon*' was now eighty-five years old, and it was the autumn of 1684, and the month in which the pilgrimages of Notre Dame de la Certenue, a sanctuary on the mountain above Alonne, took place. In spite of her eighty-five years, Madame de Toulonjon joined the other pilgrims, and though fasting, climbed the mountain with wonderful activity and strength, probably revolving in her mind the long years of her own pilgrimage through life, and the many chequered phases she had been so wonderfully carried through. When the sanctuary chapel was reached, she heard mass and received communion, and having made her thanksgiving with much joy, she left the chapel and stood for a while gazing on the scene she loved so well; the distant plains and fertile broad valleys, and the old castle, where such vivid joy and such bitter

sorrow had been lived through, and had, each in its turn, helped to ripen and strengthen her soul.

When Françoise had gazed on this scene in silence for some time, she turned to go down the mountain, and then it was observed that she looked dreadfully worn and fatigued. As soon as she got into the castle, which she did with difficulty, she was taken to her bed and never rose from it again. Her son and his wife were soon with her, and messages were sent to beg prayers in all the churches and monasteries in Autun. While Françoise lay in bed, tranquilly saying that it was now no time to ask for her cure, but for her good passage to the next world, she had sentences read to her from the letters of St. Francis de Sales, and seemed to make her dear lost father and friend still her director and guide. Then she asked for the Visitation habit, which was joyfully given her; and thus she also, like her sister Marie Aymée, ended her days under the special protection of the congregation. Holding the lighted taper in her hand, and in the habit and veil of the daughters of St. Francis de Sales, Françoise de Toulonjon earnestly besought her son and his wife to follow courageously the narrow way of the Gospel; and having given them her blessing, and received Extreme Unction with the utmost composure and reverence, she closed her eyes and died on the feast of St. Barbara, whose intercession she had always asked for a happy death. She was buried as she had wished, in great poverty, as a Visitation nun.

The story of Jane Frances Frémyot and her children is told. Both the teller and the hearers will alike close it with one thought, the beautiful watchword of her life: 'Vive Jésus!'

THE END.

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