

DOCUMENTS & RESEARCH

III

JEAN-BAPTISTE BLAIN

**SUMMARY OF THE LIFE  
OF L-M GRIGNION DE MONTFORT**

MONTFORTIAN INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

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**SUMMARY OF THE LIFE  
OF LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT**

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## INTRODUCTION

On 28 April 1716, in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, Apostolic Missionary, died. Throughout Poitou and Upper Brittany, in the country parts and the town suburbs which he had evangelised, but even more in the dwelling-places of notable people whose sympathy – or antipathy – he had gained, the news of his death caused a real stir<sup>1</sup>.

As early as 1718, Maître Arot, a barrister at the Parliament of Brittany, had been approached to prepare a biography of the missionary. In pursuit of this aim, he had received or had solicited testimonies. However, in October 1719, weighed down by his professional obligations, he had passed on his documentation to a priest of the diocese of Angers, Joseph Grandet<sup>2</sup>. This priest, who was already in the process of writing about “holy French priests of the 17th century”, undertook to produce a true biography. He asked for details or memories of his subject, even his writings, from the Grignion family, the Sulpicians in Paris, the Montfortian communities just coming to birth in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, his fellow-students in the seminary and his co-workers in the missions he had given. Of all the documents he received, two in particular stood out by the breadth and the quality of the testimony they provided: that of Pierre Arnaud des Bastières, a priest of the diocese of Nantes who worked with the missionary between 1708 and 1716; and that of Jean-Baptiste Blain, a canon of Rouen and the future biographer of M. de la Salle, who had been a fellow student of Louis Marie’s between 1684 and 1700, first of all at the College in Rennes, then at the seminary in Paris.

These two testimonies, both written by first-hand witnesses and even confidants of the dead man, differ in almost every respect. While the first author seems to be content with reporting, as though in raw metal, and in a prose which is simple and even ingenuous, on precise events in which he had participated; the second wraps his memories in a well-structured narrative, in quite an oratorical discourse, in a style which is verbose, emphatic, often heavy, and sometimes awkward and complicated. Even the title of Blain’s work, “Summary of the Life of...”, might lead to confusion today: even if the word “summary” was an apt one, in the understanding of the time, for an incomplete and non-exhaustive biography, we cannot hide the fact that the canon allowed himself digressions which swell his text. Yet, despite all this, Jean-Baptiste Blain, better than Pierre des Bastières, has left us, apart from the facts that he reports, an irreplaceable testimony to the personality of Monsieur Grignion: “I who knew him better than anyone else”<sup>3</sup>. The difference between the two was reflected in the fate of the two manuscripts: while the memoirs of the co-worker are known to us now only in quotations, implicit or explicit, included in Grandet’s biography, the work of the friend of his youth, written only in 1724, arrived when Grandet’s biography had already gone to print<sup>4</sup>. This meant that it would remain in manuscript form until the end of the 20th

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Baptiste BLAIN, *Summary of the Life of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort*, pgs. 354, 318, 319. All references to Blain’s work in this introduction and the body of the text are to the pages of the original manuscript, which are indicated in the text published below by the notation ‘/nnn’. See also: Joseph GRANDET, *La Vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort*, Nantes, 1724, pgs. 262, 428-434.

<sup>2</sup> Arot himself explained his position in a letter to Grandet, *op.cit.*, pg. 470. Some of the testimonies collected by Arot are to be found in Grandet, pgs. 453, 464 and 471.

<sup>3</sup> BLAIN, *Summary...*, pg. 94.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpts from Pierre des Bastières in GRANDET, *op. cit.* pgs. 131, 139, 194, 204, 211, 221, 286, 289, 302, 306, 329-334, etc. Grandet's book was published in 1724 under a royal permit dated September 1723. According to some authorities (P. Le Camus, pg. 1; 9; de Montillet, pg. 131; Msgr de Champflour, pg. 348), the text of

century. A first edition was produced, in parts, in the *Revue des Prêtres de Marie Reine des Coeurs*, in the years 1925 and 1926. The renewal of Montfortian studies called for a proper edition of this memoir which is of such special interest.

## BLAIN'S TEXT

In fact, we do not possess a memoir written in Blain's own handwriting. One would expect that the original manuscript would have been sent to Joseph Grandet, but it does not appear among his papers. In the archives of the Company of Mary (Montfort Missionaries) in Rome, two manuscripts dating from the 18th century exist, in each of which the handwriting is both different from that in the other and different also from that of Blain himself, as far as we can know it from various pieces<sup>5</sup>. In all probability, these two copies – or at least one of them – was brought to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, after the death of Blain (1751), by Charles Besnard, the first biographer to quote passages from Blain. This Montfort Missionary assures us, around 1770, that, in order to write a biography of his founder, he travelled “to almost all the places” where Montfort had worked, and made use of “all the writings left” by witnesses who had already died<sup>6</sup>.

There are numerous variations between the two copies of the Summary, often enough insignificant, but occasionally quite important. One of the manuscripts, consisting of 359 pages, is in a very legible handwriting with good spelling, and contains certain later modifications. In the other manuscript, consisting of 255 pages, the handwriting is less legible, the spelling quite faulty. Looking at these two manuscripts from an external point of view, the first offers more guarantees: on the one hand, on page 200, some crossings-out are said to have been made “on the advice of M. Blain” himself; on the other hand, it is from this copy that Besnard borrows those passages from Blain that he quotes in his biography of Montfort<sup>7</sup>. This why we call this one Copy A, leaving the letter B to the other manuscript. If we look at the two manuscripts in themselves, we can ask ourselves which is the earlier of the two. A certain detail suggests (but not very convincingly) that Copy A is the earlier, but that does not mean that Copy B was copied from A<sup>8</sup>. But above all the study of these two copies leads us to discern a whole evolution of the text itself of Blain.

Both copies have additions in the margins, not only the titles of subdivisions, but also pointers to people, places, dates and sources; it seems that these explanatory notes were added during the first attempt at publication, in order to complete a text which was extremely sparing in precision. Now, in both manuscripts, these notes are written in the same hand as the rest of the text itself. Perhaps, through these marginal notes, we can entertain the possibility of an evolution of the text even before the two copies themselves.

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Blain was written between 1722 and 1724. The pilgrimage to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre mentioned by Blain at the end of his text is dated as in 1724 in copy B (pg. 250). A reading of the end of the text leaves the impression that the text was written a short time after that pilgrimage which took place in September.

<sup>5</sup> We compared both copies with an authorisation granted to Bro. Barthélémy, written by Blain on December 4, 1716, and with Blain's will written on January 26, 1750. Blain's own papers were destroyed in the conflagration that burnt down the Château d'Orival in 1940.

<sup>6</sup> Charles BESNARD, *La vie de Messire Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort*, (manuscript kept in Rome, in the Archives of the Daughters of Wisdom), pg. 3.

<sup>7</sup> BESNARD, *op. cit.*, pgs. 46-48 and 171-178 which tally with pgs. 259-262 and 330-344 of copy A.

<sup>8</sup> On page 221 of Copy B, there is found the number 323 in the margin: this is, in fact, the number of the page in Copy A that corresponds to this passage.

The text was to further evolve after the two copies were first made, through various additions, crossings-out and corrections. These changes, which are not to be found at all in manuscript B, which appears to be fixed, done once and for all<sup>9</sup>, are contained, in various handwritings, in manuscript A. Leaving aside certain corrections too brief to allow us to identify their source, we find around fifteen changes which could well have been made in Blain's own time. This is the case for all the marginal additions on pages 284, 320 and 327, which are done in the same handwriting and with the same ink; the third of these points to Blain himself: "Father Dutemps... told me this." This is the case also for the crossings-out, corrections and additions on pages 200, 218, 227, 229, 230, 240, 242, 248, 323, 348 and 353, all of which resemble one another, either in the way the crossing-out is done or in the handwriting; page 200 provides a key which no doubt applies to all of these changes: "To avoid giving offence to the successors of those named, I have deleted these lines, on the advice of M. Blain..." These acts of censorship might well date from the years following 1733, when the Canon of Rouen was criticised for having, in his biography of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle which had just been published, "spoken bluntly of a number of respectable people, and in particular against orders or congregations which have always edified the Church"; now, the majority of these changes are intended to delete the names of Jesuits or Sulpicians who did not approve of Monsieur de Montfort. Finally we need to take note of another alteration, the longest of all: pages 259-262 are not only written with a different ink and in a different hand, but also on a paper with a different watermark to the bulk of the manuscript. There is no doubt that a substitution has been made for two sheets of the original (the text of which we find in a shorter version in manuscript B) with two new sheets in a more cramped handwriting, containing a text which is longer than the original pages. This substitution, intended to supply further information, in all probability comes from Blain himself who, having received information from two new witnesses on a point he had already treated, wanted to make his memoir more accurate.

In view of this evolution, we have decided, for this edition, to use manuscript A; we indicate in a footnote where passages from manuscript B seem to be clearly better. In publishing this Summary, our aim is to make this evolution clear while at the same time providing a text which is easy to read today. To this end, we have corrected the spelling, even of proper names, expanded abbreviations and restructured the punctuation, to the point of dividing up certain paragraphs. Any words we have felt it necessary to add, here and there, for a better understanding of the text, are placed between square brackets. To show the evolution of the text, we have left the marginal notes in the margin, except for titles of subdivisions, which we have inserted between paragraphs. We have put words or passages which have been crossed out in the manuscript in smaller type, while putting in italic script those words or passages which were written after the bulk of the manuscript. To facilitate access to the original and to provide a system of reference which can be used also in any further editions, we have indicated the pagination of the manuscript in the text itself, using the notation '/nnn/'. A collection of footnotes is intended to supply, not only any corrections of Blain's text which seem useful, but also explanations concerning the people and places mentioned, the dates of the events recorded, information about institutions mentioned, and references to explicit quotations. Occasionally they serve to sort out the meaning of a text which is occasionally rather confused. Finally they attempt to make correlations with other sources of the time, even with later works which may provide confirmation, complementary

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<sup>9</sup> Only one important detail found in copy B is missing from copy A, namely a date, 1724, opposite the journey made by J.-B. Blain to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, pg. 250.

information, or even nuances or corrections to the words of Blain<sup>10</sup>. Even presented in this way, this Summary will not be understood in depth, and will not deliver its special interest as a direct witness to Grignon de Montfort, except in so far as we can measure the value of the information that Blain has made use of.

## BLAIN'S INFORMATION

Unlike what he did in the case of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Canon Blain, when writing about his fellow-student Louis Marie, did not make use of or carry out research on a mass of detailed documentation. He was content to add scraps of news gleaned from others on his friend to what he knew from his own experience. He seems to have sought to produce an account which was more pleasant to read than accurate, any precisions seeming to have been added later. So it is even more necessary to examine the limits and the quality of his information.

Jean-Baptiste Blain was born in the rue de la Charbonnerie in Rennes on 22 October 1674 (so 21 months after Louis Marie). We know nothing about the social standing of his family; if we can go by the profession of his godfather – a master tailor – we might guess that it was quite modest, but this is really too weak to allow us to draw any conclusions. He entered the Jesuit College in Rennes in 1684, along with Louis Marie, since he followed the whole of the humanities course, then rhetoric and philosophy, with him. But of the five years of humanities, he gives no information, since in a class of 400 pupils, he hardly knew the young Grignon at that time at all, since the latter “had practically no commerce with the other students”<sup>11</sup>. No doubt he later learnt some details of the adolescence and even the childhood of his friend, either from Louis Marie himself, or from M. Bellier, a priest of Rennes, from Fr. Descartes, a Jesuit, or especially from M. Alain Robert, a priest and Louis Marie’s maternal uncle, three first-class witnesses that he met around 1712 during a visit to Rennes. Unfortunately, however, he remains very reticent regarding these details, partly perhaps because the biographer, Grandet, must already have been in possession of a memoir (now lost) from the uncle Alain Robert<sup>12</sup>.

Starting in 1690-1691, during their three years of rhetoric and philosophy, Jean Baptiste and Louis Marie formed a close friendship, as is witnessed by a journey they made together to the country home of a friend who became a Capuchin, and a stay at the Grignons’ manor in Iffendic<sup>13</sup>. This friendship enhances the value of the testimonies, often accompanied by facts, that Blain gives to the piety of Louis Marie, his purity, his Marian devotion, his trust in Providence, and even his artistic tastes, not to mention certain difficulties between the Grignon son and his father<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> For these notes, we are very much indebted to Abbé André Fouré, who is carrying out research on J.-B. Blain, to Father Raoul, the archivist of the French Capuchins, to M. Irénée Noye, the archivist at Saint-Sulpice, and finally (and above all) to Father Stefano de Fiore who has passed on to us the fruit of his own research in the archives of the Sulpicians in Paris, and the Jesuits in Rome. We must also thank M. Jacques Le Brun, professor at the Centre National de Téléenseignement, who gave us precious advice on the preparation of this edition. The text itself has been established thanks to the efforts of the General Secretariat of the Company of Mary in Rome.

<sup>11</sup> BLAIN, *Summary of the Life...*, pgs 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the meeting with these three priests, see BLAIN, *Summary...*, pgs. 7, 14, 95, 152, 279. We can pick out a few details supplied by the uncle Alain Robert in GRANDET, *La Vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignon...*, pgs. 2-8.

<sup>13</sup> BLAIN, *Summary...*, pgs 17-19. From now on, all notes consisting of numbers alone, without any other indication, will refer to the text of Blain.

<sup>14</sup> Pgs 6-19.

Starting in 1692, the two friends began their study of theology, still at the College in Rennes. But, after a short time, the generosity of a benefactress gave Louis Marie the opportunity to go to continue his studies in Paris. The testimony of Blain and the echoes of letters he received from his friend give us a picture of the difficulties of the journey, as well as showing us Louis Marie's taste for the bohemian life-style and the warm friendship between the two compatriots. Soon, Jean Baptiste himself went to the capital, there to join his friend and pursue his studies<sup>15</sup>.

So the two of them were to live close to one another for more than seven years. This was first of all in the shadow of Saint-Sulpice, in the community of M. de la Barmondière (1693-1694), then in that of M. Boucher (1694-1695), and finally in Saint-Sulpice itself, in the "Minor" Seminary reserved for poor clerics<sup>16</sup>. At a certain date, not made clear, Jean Baptiste had to leave this house, though he did not move far, and he continued his close relationship with Louis Marie: he came back to see him, had some confidential talks with him, and received news of him from mutual friends, a M. Le Clerc or a M. de Montillet, just as, before 1695, he learnt certain details about his friend from fellow-students such as M. Le Vallier<sup>17</sup>. These friendly relations lasted until 1700, the year when Louis Marie was ordained a priest, on 5 June. Blain, who was present at the first Mass of his friend, gives us a picture of one who was preparing himself with ardour, for the next few months, for the missions, either in France or, preferably, in "barbarian countries"<sup>18</sup>.

These six years of living together or of close relationship in Paris, constitute the period of Montfort's life on which Blain is best informed, and especially the period during which he knew his friend best, whether in the exercises of common life, or their outings together, their following of the study courses or especially their confidential conversations. It is not surprising therefore that the pages devoted to these years – padded out, it is true, with digressions into the later life of the missionary and especially with certain dissertations inserted for the sake of justification – represent 45% of the whole Summary, even though this period covers only 7% of the life, itself short, of M. Grignon.

It is no doubt a rather rare happening in the biographies of priests of the 17th century to have such long passages on the years spent in the Seminary, years which are normally rather obscure. Thanks to Blain, we can follow the principal events that took place during these seven or eight years that Montfort spent in the Seminary: his moves from one community to another, his serious illness in 1695, the cessation of his studies at the Sorbonne, his pilgrimage to Chartres, his vow of chastity taken in Notre-Dame de Paris<sup>19</sup>. Also thanks to Blain, we have some idea of his intellectual work: his success in his studies, some of his preferred reading (Boudon, Surin), his writing of canticles of piety as well as an order of ceremonies; particularly suggestive is the division of his time during the nights he spent watching over the dead<sup>20</sup>. Blain also informs us of a certain number of Montfort's precise deeds, and even some of his words, for example, his charity towards a poor woman, his reaction to the death of M. de la Barmondière, his reflection while hospitalised at the Hôtel-

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<sup>15</sup> Pgs 19-25.

<sup>16</sup> Pgs. 36, 57, 63, 66-67; it turns out that Blain went over to the Minor Seminary before M. Grignon entered there.

<sup>17</sup> Pgs. 84; 81, 104, 112, 150-151; 110-111; 35, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Pgs 197-200.

<sup>19</sup> Pgs 28, 56, 64-65, 59-63, 70, 181-187.

<sup>20</sup> Pgs 51, 55-56, 64, 78, 115, 116, 36.

Dieu, etc...<sup>21</sup>. But, in all, this is little enough over a period of seven years, even in the uneventful life of a seminarian of the time.

It is more from quite another point of view that this long passage of the Summary affords us important information concerning Montfort. Himself a seminarian, the author is most interested in three essential aspects of the training of candidates for the priesthood. First of all, he is interested in his relations with successive directors, relations which were affectionate with M. de la Barmondière and M. Baiÿn, but difficult with M. Leschassier and M. Brenier, who imposed on our seminarian trials which Blain has courage enough to describe in detail<sup>22</sup>. Secondly he describes his relations with his fellow-students, and in particular their teasing and criticising of him, but also Louis Marie's apostolate in their regard<sup>23</sup>. And finally, and above all, he shows an interest in the spiritual attitudes of Louis Marie himself, sometimes illustrated by certain of his ways of behaving: his obedience, his zeal, his mortification, his patience, his Marian devotion, his love of the poor, his trust in Providence, and his taste for retreats and meditation. If he speaks quite extensively of the "virtues" of his friend, it is because he was, throughout these years, his close confidant. In very truth he could say of this period: "I who knew his depths more than any other person."

After Montfort left Saint-Sulpice in the autumn of 1700, Blain, who no doubt stayed on in Paris, had difficulty in following him<sup>24</sup>. He knew that he had left for Nantes, for the community of M. Levesque – a community which, however, he did not know well – yet he says nothing either of the year that Montfort spent there, or of the personal reasons which caused the young priest to leave there. Concerning Montfort's stay in Poitiers from 1701 to 1703, he has scarcely heard a whisper except for his enthusiastic reception by the poor people of the General Hospital, and the difficulties which caused the missionary to leave this hospital<sup>25</sup>. He has no knowledge of many of the events of these three years, events which Montfort's own letters to Saint-Sulpice throw a partial but direct light on.

However, in Spring 1703, in Paris, where he was studying for his licentiate degree, Jean Baptiste Blain met up again with Louis Marie, who was struggling painfully to find his own way in life. He followed quite closely at that time the movements of his friend, first of all as a chaplain in La Salpêtrière, then in his hovel near the Jesuit novitiate, and finally living among the hermits of Mont-Valérien. Yet, for this year 1703-1704, Blain, ever more interested in the person rather than in events, gives us information especially about the difficulties Montfort met with among the Parisian clergy: difficulties with the Salpêtrière chaplains, with a certain Jesuit who refused to be his director, and especially with his former Sulpician teachers who cast doubt on his "good spirit" and went so far as to reject him, and finally with the Archbishop of Paris who pronounced an interdict on him. Better still, Jean Baptiste Blain, for whom these added difficulties, and even more the "ridiculous rumours" circulated by public opinion, only served to perplex him still more regarding the attitude of his friend, has left us with an account, more or less explicit, of Montfort's reactions when he

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<sup>21</sup> Pgs 31-32, 54, 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> Pgs. 33-34, 50-51, 96, 99-110, 126-130.

<sup>23</sup> Pgs. 42, 71-72, 92, 99-100, 116, 120.

<sup>24</sup> To judge by pgs. 230-231, Blain seems to have stayed behind in Paris from 1700 to 1703. In the manuscript correspondence of M. Tronson, in the archives of Saint-Sulpice, vol. I, no. 599, M. Leschassier makes reference to a letter from Blain to Montfort at the beginning of March 1701.

<sup>25</sup> Pgs. 202-216.

challenged him with all this. These reactions tally well with two letters of M. Grignon's which we possess from that year<sup>26</sup>.

After Montfort left Paris in the Spring of 1704, Blain lost sight of him. He himself admits that he is ill-informed: "Where did he go then? I do not know exactly. I believe he went back to Nantes or Poitiers"<sup>27</sup>. He was to find it all the more difficult to follow him, as their two paths in life began to diverge considerably. Jean Baptiste Blain, ordained to the priesthood in Autumn 1704, left for Noyon where had had been provided with a canonry, then, in 1708, he went to Rouen, following Monsignor d'Aubigné, the Bishop of Noyon who had been appointed Archbishop. In the capital of Normandy, he was to participate in the training of priests, in the direction of Religious Sisters, in the consolidation of the De La Salle Brothers, all the while holding his seat in the metropolitan Chapter for more than 40 years. On the other hand, Louis Marie Grignon, constantly on the move, worked in close proximity to the common people in the dioceses of Poitiers or Nantes, Saint-Malo or La Rochelle. Yet Blain did not lose sight completely of his class-mate. Not only was he able, during his visits to Paris, to glean a few scraps of news of him, but in the course of his journeys – for example, to Rennes around 1712 – or his meetings with others, he would question priests or religious who had seen the missionary or even worked with him: M. Bellier in Rennes, who informed him of the collaboration between Montfort and M. Leuduger; Capuchins like Fr. Vincent who had worked with his friend; Jesuits like Fr. Martinet who told him of M. Grignon's work in the diocese of Nantes<sup>28</sup>. In spite of this, there are many gaps in Blain's knowledge of this period when Montfort was engaged fully in apostolic activity: there is nothing, for example, on his preaching in the diocese of La Rochelle, the diocese where he worked the longest.

As Blain's information for the years 1704-1714 is very incomplete, it runs the risk also of leading into error. Not only does it not allow us to retrace the geographical itinerary or the pastoral evolution of M. Grignon, but its very paucity, in contrast to the numerous pieces of information furnished for the years 1693-1700, brings with it a certain imbalance in the picture of a Montfort who wanted above all to be a missionary. Not only that, but this information which is extremely sporadic and is not always entirely accurate, leans almost solely on out-of-the-ordinary deeds, such as the three "incognito" appearances of Louis Marie at Fontevraud, Dinan and Montfort<sup>29</sup>. This is understandable, for public opinion is always fond of such things: M. des Bastières, the co-worker with M. Grignon during the years 1708 to 1716, was himself mainly interested in facts of this nature. But in all this there are so many correctives of which we must take account if we are to arrive at the true character of Montfort.

Then, after ten years of separation, the two former class-mates meet up again in the Autumn of 1714. Blain relates the various events that took place during the short stay of the missionary in Rouen, not forgetting his adventure on the boat on the return journey. No doubt, Montfort had the opportunity at that moment to tell him about various happenings in his life, which may have found a place, here and there, in the Summary. But more than anything else, Blain tells us, in very direct terms, about the conversation the two friends had then, expressed with a frankness which is rather rough: this passage, which has a very

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<sup>26</sup> Pgs. 216-217; GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Oeuvres complètes*, pgs 43-48, Letters 15 & 16.

<sup>27</sup> Pgs. 259, 258, 275.

<sup>28</sup> Pgs. 262, 179, 287-288, 302, 307, 308-309, 321-322, 327, 346.

<sup>29</sup> Pgs. 263-266, 268-269, 271-274.

evangelical ring to it, is, without any doubt, the most beautiful and the most meaningful of the whole Summary<sup>30</sup>.

From then on, the two friends never met again. Less than two years later, Montfort died in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. Blain soon heard of his death, by means of a report which was sent to Saint-Sulpice. But it was not until 1724 that he had the opportunity to get more information on his friend by going to his tomb, there to ask for a healing for himself. At that time he questioned the clergy of the parish, one or two followers of the missionary, and Madame de Bouillé. At the same time he was in admiration of the fervour of the parishioners of Saint-Laurent and the pilgrims who came to pray at the tomb of Father de Montfort<sup>31</sup>.

In summary, we have to accept that the information Blain offers us on Montfort is truly fragmentary. It is all the more so, as in the final analysis the author is less interested in concrete facts than in the personality of his friend. It is a testimony more than a biography.

### **BLAIN'S INTERPRETATION OF MONTFORT**

Any biography involves some degree of interpretation on the part of the author himself or herself. This is particularly true when the author is trying to give a testimony, for then the writer is involved in evoking his relationship with his hero. So, more than other biographical texts, this Summary demands a certain finesse in reading it. If Blain offers us a special opportunity to grasp the character of this man whose disciple and apostolic co-worker he was tempted to become<sup>32</sup>, it is important to be able to discern to what extent the image he supplies of this missionary comes in part from the personality of the author himself, his own opinions and even the contemporary way of thinking.

We know very little of the personality of Jean Baptiste Blain. Yet we can discern, as though it were a watermark, certain traits which make him different from Montfort, even if we cannot separate out what is the product of his own temperament and what comes from his social background.

When, in 1724, Blain recalled his first years in the seminary, he spoke with disgust of the food of the poor men that he knew at that time<sup>33</sup>. The fact is that the good Canon of Rouen, for all his devotion to the works of charity, was nevertheless much influenced by the ecclesiastical and bourgeois milieu of the good town of Rouen. For him, the country folk that Montfort had wanted to evangelise on the Seine river-boat hardly deserved such a gesture. From this we can understand how he could speak, with a certain disdain, of the "stupidity" of the "common people" to whom Montfort dedicated himself by preference, going so far as to treat the Breton peasants as "sub-human" and "savage"<sup>34</sup>. So he had great difficulty in understanding the way in which the missionary could "live in dependence on Providence," begging his own food, which Blain called "drinking with generosity of the shame attached to this kind of begging"<sup>35</sup>. Like many priests of that time, he was not particularly sensitive to the ideal of evangelical poverty. This would explain why, apart from some extracts of the

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<sup>30</sup> Pgs 330-345. M. Grignon's aim was to express the opposition, not between religious life and mission, but between "establishment" and prophetic movement.

<sup>31</sup> Pgs. 351-359 and 348-349.

<sup>32</sup> Pgs. 224-226.

<sup>33</sup> Pgs. 40, 57.

<sup>34</sup> Pgs. 344-346, 117, 291, 296.

<sup>35</sup> Pgs. 8, 24, 30, 214.

account furnished him by Father Vincent, the Capuchin<sup>36</sup>, he gives a very meagre place to the apostolate of Montfort among the poor and the ordinary people. So he throws too oblique a light on this essential aspect of the apostolate of M. Grignon.

The difference between the Canon of Rouen and his hero becomes even clearer when we look at the question of social conformity. Influenced by Saint-Sulpice, “where singularity is persecuted as a great vice”, and having succeeded in an honourable career that had led to important responsibilities in the diocese of Rouen, Jean Baptiste Blain, while undoubtedly zealous, took for his inspiration the ideal of balance, which was the commonly accepted one at the beginning of the 18th century, when the movement of Catholic reform was taking place. He took for his models, preferably, “people of consummate wisdom... who do not get themselves talked about”<sup>37</sup>. In this we see a difference of sensitivity when compared with his friend, a difference which comes to the fore in their last conversation in 1714: “I began... by unburdening my heart to him of all that I had to say and that I had heard said against his conduct and his... eccentric... and extraordinary... ways”<sup>38</sup>. It is evident that, even from their days at the College in Rennes, Blain had been struck by the originality of his class-mate. At any rate, at Saint-Sulpice, this singularity raised all the more questions for him as it brought on him the mockery of the seminarians and especially the criticism of their revered teachers. And he continued to hear of this eccentricity later on, when he had the occasional news of his friend. We can understand, therefore, that, having little interest – in common with all biographers of that period – in the daily life of his hero, he returns again and again to the non-conformist doings in his life, with the accompanying risk of exaggerating these traits to the point of caricature, as he unconsciously selects for attention certain “extraordinary” facts. The risk was all the greater, given the fact that Blain had not lived with Montfort at all during those years when, in a movement towards better balance, he was becoming more involved in the pastoral programmes of the dioceses. Grignon de Montfort was original enough that we ought to try to discern to what extent the Canon’s pen may have reinforced our view of this originality.

On the other hand, in an attempt to counterbalance the eccentricity of his friend, Blain takes pains to emphasise heavily his obedience. There is no doubt that Grignon did profess a great submission to authority, especially as, during his years of training, he had to adapt his own strong personality to the framework laid down by Saint-Sulpice, which became less and less flexible. But it is no less clear that this obedience was not, for this man, the be-all and end-all, nor his most characteristic trait. But Blain, in an effort to clear his friend of any suspicion of infidelity, goes so far as to insert into his story of the seminarian, a massive dissertation, or syllogism, with arguments from Scripture and tradition, and even answers to objections – stretching to more than 80 pages, or a quarter of his memoir – in order to prove the exactness of his obedience<sup>39</sup>. By this means, he not only illustrates his own training, but he also tends to create an imbalance in the portrait of his friend, as though to provide a guarantee for his readers, but first of all for himself.

Blain is looking for a similar guarantee when he recalls the testimonies full of praise given on the subject of Louis Marie by their common teachers, whether Jesuit or Sulpician:

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<sup>36</sup> Pgs. 288-294.

<sup>37</sup> Pgs. 118, 334.

<sup>38</sup> Pgs. 331 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Pgs. 86 and 94-180.

Father Gilbert or Father Descartes, M. Baiÿn or M. de la Chétardye<sup>40</sup>. But such recollections tell us more about the capacity for admiration in the Canon of Rouen. This capacity is seen in the emphatic terms he uses to celebrate the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, “this land of saints,” “the one place in the world where he could be most free to wing his way to heaven”; or else to depict his Sulpician teachers, “these priests who are so holy and so like those of the early Church... worthy of the Apostolic age”<sup>41</sup>. Such admiration was to entail torture for Jean Baptiste Blain when he came up against the lack of understanding between his teachers and his class-mate. For his friendship for him was no less full of admiration than his veneration of them. This admiration drives his pen: “one of the greatest devotees of Mary that the Church has ever known,” “one of the greatest preachers of the century.” It leads him also to make a collection, as it were, of the prophecies of Montfort, his miracles, his apostolic successes, and the shows of fervour at his tomb<sup>42</sup>. Nothing speaks more eloquently of his belief that his class-mate shared in the graces of the saints.

Through his keenness for these manifestations, Jean Baptiste Blain betrays his position among the hagiographers of his time. In truth, his Summary of 1724 is hardly more than a sketch when compared with the voluminous biography of Jean Baptiste de la Salle which he undertook the following year. But already, in these more modest pages on Louis Marie, we come up against the same tendencies as are found in his later book, published in 1733, where he takes on the “critics”, notably Claude Fleury<sup>43</sup>. His opposition is not directed, at least not directly, against the edifying stance of hagiography, which was recognised at that time by all church historians, but rather against a certain concept of the direct intervention of God in the lives of the saints, and on a certain view of the marvellous. Since the middle of the 17th century, there had developed a critical way of reading the history of the saints of ancient times and the Middle Ages. To the extent that this critique, which was at first concentrated on the sources, was extended to the very content of the lives of the saints, it could not avoid having an effect on the biographies of contemporaries. One might ask whether Blain was not, in his turn, influenced by this tendency, when we see him relating quite frankly the “singularities” of his friend and his difficulties with the church authorities. But, much more than that, and more openly, he takes his place among the opponents of this tendency. One of the most significant indications of this is the way he presents his friend as a saint right from infancy: “It seems that he had never shared in the sin of Adam... his inclinations, from the time I knew him, appeared altogether heavenly... Whence this great facility for virtue...”<sup>44</sup>. On a wider scale, this tendency is shown in his constant recourse to Providence to explain how things turned out, even when the author knows or guesses at the intermediary role of human beings such as Mlle. de Montigny; and his recourse to the devil to explain the opposition met with by Montfort, for example at the hands of M. Leschassier<sup>45</sup>. In this, Blain shows well enough to what kind of hagiographer he is drawn.

But, as well as an historiographic opposition, must we not also speak of a theological opposition between, on the one hand, the proponents of a more critical history, who

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<sup>40</sup> Pgs. 6, 95, 99-103, 240-241.

<sup>41</sup> Pgs 21, 64, 69.

<sup>42</sup> Pgs. 13, 302, 62-63, 149; 301, 308, 313, 314-315, 340, 344-345, 349, 353-355.

<sup>43</sup> J.-B. BLAIN, *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, instituteur des Frères des écoles chrétiennes*, Rouen, 1733, vol. I, pgs. 114, 88, 90-93, 96, etc. Even if, in this work, he does not set himself directly against the magisterial church history of Claude Fleury, he is clearly opposed to the “new history”.

<sup>44</sup> Pgs. 12-13, and also 18.

<sup>45</sup> Pgs. 19-20, 65; 201, 215, 217, 310, where the devil takes on the form of envy and jealousy.

represented, at least in France, certain Augustinian and Gallican tendencies, and, on the other hand, those who, claiming a more moderate critique, defended the position of the Ultramontanists and the anti-Jansenists. We know that, in Rouen itself in 1715-1716, Blain had a brush with those who opposed the Bull *Unigenitus*. In his Summary, he deals them a back-handed blow by comparing them to Calvinists. One might wonder, indeed, whether he was not more or less allowing his own anti-Jansenism to be projected onto the difficulties of the community of Saint-Clément in Nantes, and also onto the directives given to Montfort by Pope Clement XI<sup>46</sup>. By means of these cases which are explained in part by his own aggressiveness, we can discern the ecclesiology that nourished Jean Baptiste Blain, an ecclesiology which he would make clearer when he spoke of the faith of Jean Baptiste de la Salle, and which he connected with Saint-Sulpice, “one of the main thoroughfares of Catholicism in France”<sup>47</sup>.

In trying to discern the influence which the formation he received from the Sulpicians, and the close relations he maintained with them, had on the Canon of Rouen, it is not enough to speak just of theology. We would need to speak of a mentality, or, better still, of a “culture” which, while being more easily discernible at Saint-Sulpice, influenced a large section of the French clergy in those early years of the 18th century. If we are to pick out the best in Blain’s testimony, it is essential to recognise this culture and to apply a socio-historical method to our reading of the Summary. Without this patient effort, Blain’s pages run the risk of presenting the modern reader with a greater lack of understanding and more confusion than a genuine light thrown on Montfort.

Like any other culture, that in which Blain and many other priests of his time immersed themselves is difficult to analyse precisely. What strikes us first of all is the use at that time of a certain vocabulary which today would be classed as ecclesiastical: the frequent use of such words as “virtuous”, “pious”, “holy”, “divine”, etc...; the use of sugary terms like “unction”, “grace”, “tenderness”, etc...; the making of facile comparisons with the heavenly world of angels, cherubim and seraphim, etc...; recourse to superlatives which never seem quite strong enough: “the purest virtue”, “the most sublime perfection”, “the holiest of directors”, not to mention “consummate piety”. It is clear that repeated use of expressions of this sort goes beyond the level of vocabulary alone, and points to a whole system of representations of society, of mankind, and, through these, of God himself. We find an example of this which is both peculiar to these men and also fairly typical, in the way in which Blain portrays woman, as a model of piety and purity, of modesty and the retiring life, of weakness, inconstancy and... temptation<sup>48</sup>.

Certain traits of the clerical culture of the 17th century seem to appear very little in Blain’s pages. Take the case of the “dignity” of the priest, for example, which is mentioned only once: “it did not become the dignity of his state”<sup>49</sup>; but the canon of Rouen refers implicitly to this dignity when, as he often is, he is shocked by the singularities of his friend. The same is true for the poor opinion he had of his own times, expressed explicitly only once<sup>50</sup>, but this poor opinion is clear in his frequent exaltation of the past, “the purest age of the Church”, whether he was thinking of the beginning of the 17th century, of the Middle

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<sup>46</sup> Pgs. 210, 328.

<sup>47</sup> J.-B. BLAIN, *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle...*, vol. II, pgs. 201-218.

<sup>48</sup> Pgs. 304-306, and 188.

<sup>49</sup> Pg. 113.

<sup>50</sup> Pg 316.

Ages, the Fathers of the Church or the early Church. Here we find, over and above the personal taste of the author for ecclesiastical history, a whole system of reference to the past, a past which is largely idealised and seen as providing a pattern for the present<sup>51</sup>. This reference is a characteristic feature of the clerical mentality of that time.

Other cultural traits are much clearer. Thus, for example, the often repeated affirmation that obedience is the ruling virtue of the Christian and of the priest, reflects an extremely hierarchic vision of the Church – and so of society – which was widespread among the clergy of the 17th century. In this view, the rule perfects the Gospel to the point where man is left with “no usage of his liberty”; every word of one’s superiors is an “oracle”; perfection consists in professing “a sovereign respect for the orders of one’s superiors”, to the point of self-submission, self-abandonment, self-subjection, asking as many permissions as possible, living in a “spirit of obedience, smallness, dependence in all circumstances”<sup>52</sup>. In correlation to this, the ministerial priesthood is seen as the summit of Christianity, a summit that is to be approached only in fear and trembling<sup>53</sup>. If such a vision expresses a certain theology of the Church and the priesthood, we recognise today how such a theology is heavily conditioned by cultural factors.

The same mixture of theology and culture is found also in the way Blain speaks of nature and grace: “in him the love of God stifled the voice of nature”<sup>54</sup>. Nature, what is human, the profane, the body, the will, personal ideas, etc., are always seen in a negative light, as though opposed to the action of God. Such a representation, common throughout almost all spiritual literature of the beginning of the 18th century, is echoed on almost every page written by Blain, who, on the contrary, basing himself on a certain psychology, is essentially interested in “the interior”, in “dispositions” and “inclinations”. In this view, all good tendencies, or those that are seen as such, are a pure gift from God: for example, Montfort’s attraction to Mary<sup>55</sup>. Even the lack of things is seen, at least indirectly, as a divine favour: the absence of any sexual attraction is a grace of purity; the peculiarities of Montfort become a “manure” used by God to “fertilize” the virtues<sup>56</sup>. All the evidence shows that this vision of man is heavily influenced by a certain philosophy of man, with neo-Platonic traits, but it is also strongly redolent of cultural elements.

If one needed to be convinced of the weight of the cultural elements, it would suffice to note how this vision includes a certain masochism, a need to make oneself suffer, to invite humiliation, to the point of delighting in being thought badly of, in close relation with a way of understanding the Passion of Christ. If Blain admires this taste for suffering in his friend Louis Marie, as also in some of their teachers, such as M. Brenier who in his turn would pursue M. Grignon with an almost sadistic enthusiasm<sup>57</sup>, it is less from personal taste than from the fact of adopting a certain understanding, a certain perception of what is holy, which was then commonly accepted among the clergy, owing much less to the concrete experience of the majority of priests than to that of the models of sanctity proposed for clerical formation and literature.

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<sup>51</sup> Pgs. 189, 24, 67-69, 174-175, 232-237, 296-297, etc.

<sup>52</sup> Pgs. 86-89.

<sup>53</sup> Pgs. 89, 97, 136-155, 325, etc.

<sup>54</sup> Pg. 22.

<sup>55</sup> Pgs. 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> Pgs. 12, 187, 120, 176-177.

<sup>57</sup> Pgs. 68, 126-129.

When we look closely at the way the canon of Rouen speaks of his Jesuit teachers, and especially his Sulpician masters, we see that, in fact, he takes his inspiration from veritable cultural “models”. Even the term “model” comes easily to his pen: M. de la Barmondière was “a model of the purest virtue”. When he cites M. Baiüyn or M. Brenier, dissimilar as they may be, he refers instinctively to St. Francis de Sales, St. Philip Neri, the Desert Fathers, considered as types<sup>58</sup>. These models constitute patterns of virtue, such as M. Bardou, “a living model of regularity, obedience and innocence as well as of penance”<sup>59</sup>. Quite naturally the admiration of Blain for his friend inclines him to apply to him these preconceived models; here, more than anywhere else, his portrait risks being strongly idealised. This is all the more so as he is dealing uniquely with models of “interior life”, which, given the formation offered at Saint-Sulpice around 1700, are not sufficient to describe a man whose vocation was above all missionary. We cannot be too wary of these implicit patterns if we wish to discover, behind the interpretations given by Blain, the real development of Grignon de Montfort.

### **BLAIN’S PORTRAIT OF MONTFORT**

If Blain, in offering us a picture of M. Grignon, in this way uses hagiographic models then commonly accepted, we might wonder about his contribution to a direct knowledge of Montfort. But before answering such a question, we must note that many of the cultural models applied by Blain to Montfort were commonly used by Montfort himself, less perhaps in practice than in theory: the opposition between nature and grace, the masochistic taste for suffering, the exaltation of the Apostles, the poor opinion of women, to quote just a few. But, if this similarity helps us to appreciate how much M. Grignon owed to his times, it hardly advances at all our knowledge of his person. The greatest contribution that the canon of Rouen makes to this lies elsewhere and beyond this.

In what we might call the changing seasons of religious biography throughout the long 17th century, Blain seems to be an author of the late autumn. For complex reasons when the “twilight of mystical writers” comes into contact with the taste for historical criticism, the flood of this spiritual literature, which had slowed down since 1680-1690, almost dries up around 1720; the final works produced are often reprints of lives published earlier. Blain is influenced in his own way by his times. Yet, in his Summary, he manifests now and then one of the best veins of spiritual biography of the 17th century: showing the work of God in a living person. In giving a description of his friend, such as he has understood him, through the medium of a relationship which had influenced himself, he helps us – better than he managed to do in the case of St. John Baptist de la Salle whom he got to know quite late on – to discover little by little the personality of his hero.

This discovery of the personality of Grignon de Montfort demands attentive reading and continual discernment in order to go beyond the formulae and the images which were then commonly accepted. Occasionally a whole passage may deliver up one or other aspect of the portrait of Montfort; but more often than not, it is just a sentence, a line or some word or other that describes a confidence offered, reports a significant event, tells of an expression which was dear to M. Grignon, or indicates an “attraction” or an “inclination”. In any case, the portrait remains incomplete, and we need to insist on that fact. But if the Summary does not mean that we need not delve into other sources which might reveal more or less, at least it has the advantage of offering us a better understanding of Montfort from the inside.

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<sup>58</sup> Pgs. 33, 67-68.

<sup>59</sup> Pgs. 181-182.

Jean Baptiste Blain offers us some information on the robust temperament of Louis Marie – which explains his resistance to trials and, in part at least, his need to master himself – and on his intellectual and artistic tastes and abilities<sup>60</sup>. He says very little about his family or his education, even if he throws some decisive light on the difficult relationship between the Grignon father and son<sup>61</sup>.

On the other hand, because he had experienced great friendship with him, Blain comes back often to his affective life: “He had as tender a heart as anyone”<sup>62</sup>. He finds signs of this affectivity as much in the style of his letters, hymns and sermons, as in his behaviour towards the poor “who always took first place in his heart... they were always the first and the dearest object of his zeal”<sup>63</sup>. He describes it also in the relationships he had with his directors, among others M. de la Barmondière, and even more in his relationship with Mary: “You could say that the Blessed Virgin... had engraved in his young soul that tenderness, so marked, that he always had for her”<sup>64</sup>. On this point, which is so significant for the spiritual portrait of Montfort, the contribution of Blain is invaluable, for it puts the finishing touch to the somewhat theoretical writings of the missionary, through a direct testimony on the way in which the latter lived in a very affective and confident relationship with Mary.

Likewise, the fact that he had lived for so long in his company and also did not experience the same tendencies, meant that Blain could throw a very clear light on the difficulties M. Grignon had in fitting in socially. This is the sense in which we must understand his insistence on the peculiarities of his friend. More directly, he portrays him as fitting in with difficulty with the world about him, even as early as the College in Rennes, but above all at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice where he lived in a “deep absent-mindedness”<sup>65</sup>. In a similar way, the author insists on his “over-riding attraction to retreats and mental prayer”, right from his adolescence in Iffendic, through his years at the seminary, and again in Paris in 1703<sup>66</sup>. This difficulty of integration turned Montfort in the direction of the marginalised in society: the poor, in Rennes as in Paris or Poitiers<sup>67</sup>. It shows itself, too, in a way of acting that Blain touches on in passing, but with well-chosen words that echo the vocabulary of Montfort himself: a life which is “apostle-like”, “abandoned to Providence”, that is, a poor life-style, quite unlike that of the clergy as a whole, relying solely on donations from the population: “It was this virtue that I most admired at his departure” from Rennes to go to Paris<sup>68</sup>. In emphasising that this was to be “his own personal way of conducting his missions”, he underlines the capital importance of this trait in the portrait of M. Grignon.

With even more delicate yet well-chosen brush-strokes, Blain hints at the presence, in the friend that he hardly knew outside the confines of houses of formation, of a veritable passion for action: he was “born with an attraction for the apostolic life and its activities”<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Pgs. 11-12, 25, 40, 59, 349; pgs. 7, 36, 45, 56, 70, 115.

<sup>61</sup> Pgs. 11-12, 18-19.

<sup>62</sup> Pg. 22.

<sup>63</sup> Pgs. 288-289, 22-23, 116-118, 247, 284-285, 300.

<sup>64</sup> Pgs. 12-14, 26-27, 35, 47, 71, 78-80, 180-185, 340.

<sup>65</sup> Pgs. 1-2, 34-35, 43, 47.

<sup>66</sup> Pgs. 70-76, 19, 26, 34-35, 43-44, 47, 96, 111, 185, 221.

<sup>67</sup> Pgs. 8, 17, 31-32, 211-214, 251.

<sup>68</sup> Pgs. 23-25, 258-259, 280-281, 317, 331-332.

<sup>69</sup> Pgs 199-202, 17.

He mentions the occasional manifestations of this zeal in his classmate at Saint-Sulpice, whether outside the seminary, or even within the community in his effort to institute new forms of Marian devotion<sup>70</sup>. On this point, he notes accurately that “M. Grignon was endowed with an inventive mind and a lively imagination, so he always had some suggestions to make as regards new practices”<sup>71</sup>. He comes back several times to this apostolic creativity, a creativity that Montfort himself would use to justify his own actions in 1714, when the canon of Rouen would reproach him for setting himself apart: “apostolic men” had “always something new to take in hand”<sup>72</sup>. What Blain took, first of all, for non-conformity, “projections”, “impetuosity”, “being carried away with zeal” – expressions he repeats several times – Montfort himself experienced above all as a missionary and prophetic liberty.

It is in terms of this liberty that we can truly understand and situate the obedience of M. Grignon. If, on many pages of the Summary, this obedience seems to take priority over everything for the seminarian of Saint-Sulpice, it finds its true place, essential but secondary, in the conversation he had with his friend in 1714, which corresponds better to the temperament and vocation of Grignon de Montfort<sup>73</sup>.

Between the seminarian of the years 1693-1700 and the missionary of the years 1710-1716, we can, in fact, sense a real evolution taking place. Blain certainly noticed it: it suffices to compare the way he describes his fellow student, passive, almost huddled up in himself, at Saint-Sulpice, then the young priest of 1703 who is thirsting for action but clashing with the ecclesiastical circles of the day, and finally the apostle who, in 1710-1711, is able to handle the crowds in the region around Nantes and organise them to build the calvary of Pontchâteau; there is a visible change of style in the author as he passes from one phase to another. But even if Blain noticed this evolution, he could not yet really grasp it, influenced as he was by a timeless vision of holiness and grace. Yet, in various ways, he lets us discern this progress, by letting us compare certain immature ways of acting of the seminarian – his obsession with asking permission, or his seeking affective compensation among the poor or with Mary<sup>74</sup> – and the adult stance manifested, ten to fifteen years later, by the active missionary: a man fully aware of his eccentricities and his fragility, yet sure of himself to the point of daring to complain of the treatment meted out to him by one of the Sulpicians; a man who, while being devoted to the poor, is able to take them and lead them to a truer form of Christianity; a man who had discerned his own vocation among all those to be found in the Church, even if he retains a certain hostile attitude to those other vocations<sup>75</sup>.

But, while he fails to trace this evolution in Montfort for us, Blain gives us the opportunity to see how this evolution was brought about through profound tensions which puzzled the Sulpicians, various bishops, and Blain himself: the tension, already evident at Saint-Sulpice, between his penchant for recollection and penance, and his total obedience to his directors<sup>76</sup>; the tension, in 1703, between his attraction to the apostolic life and his taste

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<sup>70</sup> Pgs 77-81, 182.

<sup>71</sup> Pgs. 77, 314-315.

<sup>72</sup> Pgs. 336-337, 306.

<sup>73</sup> Pgs. 336-339.

<sup>74</sup> Pgs. 139-140, 31-32, 71-72, 79-80.

<sup>75</sup> Pgs. 334-335, 324-325, 291-293, 333-337.

<sup>76</sup> Pgs. 47-48, 96-97.

for retirement from the world<sup>77</sup>; the tension, in 1714, between missionary freedom and dependence on the hierarchy<sup>78</sup>; and finally the tension between those two models which dominated his whole life, the Apostles whose life-style he wanted to imitate – the missionary movement – and Mary who nourished his contemplation<sup>79</sup>. Despite the partial nature of his information, despite his full-bodied and emphatic style, and despite the superimposition of his personal interpretations or those of his time, John Baptiste Blain, in exposing these tensions to us, shows us, better than any other biographer, the dynamism of Montfort's personality<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Pgs. 221-222.

<sup>78</sup> Pgs. 335-339.

<sup>79</sup> Pgs 332-337, 183-184, 340.

<sup>80</sup> Any reader eager to know the personality of M. Grignon should preferably read the following pages: 1-2, 6-9, 11-19, 23-24, 36-37, 46-48, 53-56, 59-63, 71-72, 77-78, 103-107, 125-131, 139-140, 180-188, 196-200, 238-243, 247, 259-262, 281-295, 299-300, 313-316, 323-325, 330-340, 343-345, 349-350.

LETTER FROM MONSIEUR BLAIN

The sentences written in the margin were already in the margins of the manuscript. Those passages which were crossed out or partially erased in the manuscript have been written in small print. On the other hand the corrections and additions are in italic. They seem to be subsequent to the original copy though wanted by Blain himself.

**LETTER FROM MONSIEUR...  
WHICH CONTAINS THE  
SUMMARY OF THE LIFE OF  
LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE  
MONTFORT, AN APOSTOLIC  
MISSIONARY WHO DIED IN THE  
ODOUR OF SANCTITY IN  
POITOU ON APRIL 28, 1716.**

Abbé Blain, Doctor of the  
Sorbonne, Canon of the  
cathedral of Rouen, to...

I will not dwell on M. Grignon's birthplace or on his family and his early years because I expect that his uncle's Recollections have given you all the information you need on these subjects. I will start with the time when I first knew him<sup>1</sup>.

### **I° - RHETORICAL STUDIES UNDER FATHER GILBERT**

Although we studied humanities together under the guidance of Father Camus, who is now Rector of the College at Rennes, I did not really come to know M. Grignon till we were in Rhetoric under the guidance of Father Gilbert. The reason for this is that M. Grignon was of a very solitary disposition /2/ and had hardly any dealings with the other students<sup>2</sup>. His great piety, however, began to appear and to shine forth brightly in the midst of a large group of very dissolute young men.

### **II° - WHO WAS THIS MASTER?**

Father Gilbert, who was our form-master, was the most suitable man in the world to sustain M. Grignon's piety. He was a man of consummate virtue and piety, and hardly a day passed without his giving some example of heroic virtue, and patience.

On several occasions I have known him to be publicly insulted by his students without showing the slightest sign of impatience. As the number of his students was very great and many of them were dissolute, he had to bear some new kind of insult from them nearly every hour. It would be both boring and unedifying to relate all of them but it would show what a master of virtue Providence had supplied for the young Louis Grignon's training. This holy religious, /3/ whose whole aim was to lead his students to sanctity far more than to teach them rhetoric, did not miss a single opportunity of talking to them about God or of stressing the necessity of serving and loving Him. He always came back to this point and all his lessons aimed at this goal. He was careful to direct towards God even the most trivial things and the most unrewarding studies by means of edifying comments and remarks full of fervour

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<sup>1</sup> That uncle, Alain Robert de la Viseule, a brother of Louis Marie's mother, Jeanne Robert, was a priest ministering in St Sauveur's parish (Rennes). His "memoirs" have been lost but some excerpts can be found in Joseph GRANDET's book: *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort* (Nantes, 1724, pp. I to 8). These pages give essential details on the family and early youth of Louis Marie who was born on the 31st of January 1673 at Montfort (Ille-et-Vilaine) which was then in the diocese of Saint-Malo.

<sup>2</sup> André Le Camus was born in 1663; he taught classical subjects in the college of Rennes, in 1684-1685 (6th form) and 1688-1689 (second form). This points to the year Louis Marie Grignon and Jean-Baptiste Blain were admitted to the college. Father Le Camus was appointed Principal of the college of Rennes from 1722 to 1725. François Gilbert was born in 1658 in the diocese of Coutances. He taught rhetoric in the same college in 1689-1690.

and of piety. Not a single day or a single class passed without our holy form-master setting some new example and giving some new lesson of virtue.

Far from moving them and inducing a more responsible behaviour in his dissolute students who insulted him in the most painful way, his unfailing good temper was for them an extra reason for multiplying their insults and devising new ones in order to try his patience to the limit and enjoy the sinful pleasure of making him lose his temper or at least of watching him change his countenance. /4/ Their efforts were to no avail. He seemed to be indifferent to it all and their new insults only helped him to produce new evidence of his boundless patience. He had mastered the art of suffering in silence and never allowed the smallest complaint to escape his lips, and the dissolute students who had insulted him were taken aback by his silence. They were more vexed at his patience than they would have been at his just revenge if he had chosen to visit it on them, and the purpose of their malicious behaviour was to make the other students believe that he had missed the point of the insult. They racked their brains to think of more hurtful ones in order to get the better of his patience, but it remained unshakable.

On the contrary the charity of the holy form-master towards these mischievous students seemed to increase all the more. He asked them to call on him and in the course of the private talks he had with them he displayed his fatherly love for them and showered them with kindnesses and marks of affection in order to win them over and draw them to God. /5/ He was successful with a few of them but most of those who had been the object of his affection rewarded him by ridiculing him and his pious lecturing and turned the whole thing into a farce by mimicking their charitable form-master and his pious ways.

Though he displayed much zeal in winning over the bad students, this did not cause him to neglect the good ones. By means of frequent exhortations he strove to preserve in their hearts the seed of piety which he had sown. Every Saturday and on the eve of the main feast days, he never failed to give his students a full half hour's talk on God, and he did this in a charming manner and with great fervour.

### **III° - THE OUTSTANDING PIETY OF M. GRIGNION FROM THEN ON. HIS INNOCENT AMUSEMENTS.**

He soon noticed that Louis Grignon listened to these talks with eager attention, so he took care to cultivate these good dispositions by means of private talks. He realized even then that this pious young man was one of those whom God favours with special graces, /6/ and several years later he told me that he regarded him as a saint. This was in Paris at the Novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers where the pious form-master had been asked by his Superiors to teach rhetoric to the young Jesuits inside the Novitiate house. This testimony comes from a man who shortly afterwards went to sanctify the rest of his days in foreign parts, where he was soon worn out by his apostolic work and his memory is still held in veneration in the Society of Jesus. His testimony therefore deserves attention and is a presumption very much in M. Grignon's favour<sup>3</sup>.

Martinique

The time which the pious student did not spend in studying or praying he devoted to visiting the poor or to drawing or painting. Days off afforded him more time to be devoted to pious exercises and he sanctified them by visiting hospitals and calling on the more pious priests; his greatest joy even then was to talk about God /7/ or to listen to people talking of

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<sup>3</sup> Father François Gilbert died in 1697 while he was nursing sick people in La Guadeloupe. He taught in the Novitiate in Paris from 1692 to 1694.

Him<sup>4</sup>. If he wanted a more human pleasure he could find it in painting, which he enjoyed and for which he was specially gifted. If he had developed this gift he would probably have excelled at painting, seeing that he had very successfully taught himself drawing and miniature painting. He was so good at this form of art that he could reproduce a picture after seeing it only once. A painter whom he visited was so astonished at his talent that he stopped working and hid all his painting gear the moment young Grignion came into his house. This man wanted payment to make M. Grignion more welcome, but the young man did not have any money - I have this from his uncle who told it to me after my return. Providence supplied him with some through a turn of fortune of a fairly strange nature. A small holy miniature which was very good fell into the hands of the student, who reproduced it so well that it looked in every way like the original. /8/ A man, who was interested in this kind of thing, was so pleased with it that he bought it from M. Grignion and gave him straightaway a twenty-franc piece. This money helped young Grignion to make himself more welcome at the painter's house<sup>5</sup>.

When they moved up from Rhetoric to Logic the students enjoyed more freedom and this had very bad effects on them because they got together more frequently and only studied as much as they wanted to, but this situation only helped M. Grignion to progress in virtue.

#### **IV° - GRIGNION BECOMES KNOWN AFTER PERFORMING A STRANGE ACT OF CHARITY**

His great piety had so far been very inconspicuous but it became known after he had performed a charitable action of a very odd kind. One of his fellow-students was so poor and so shabbily dressed that he was the laughing-stock of the whole school and had to bear their mockery.

In order to get him some decent clothes, M. Grignion. turned beggar for his sake and was not ashamed to ask for alms from his fellow-students in order to supply the needs of his companion. However, he did not collect more than half the necessary sum of money, but his ingenious charity gave him the means of making it up: he took the poor student to a shop and said to the shopkeeper: "This is my brother and yours. I have collected as much money as I could from my /9/ He himself told me about it classmates to get him a decent suit; if that is not enough it is for you to supply the rest." This example of simplicity and of charity, which was the first one to draw attention and was followed by thousands of others, produced its effect. Charity bred charity: the shopkeeper gave M. Grignion what he wanted and the poor student got a decent suit of clothes. When the other students heard how he had got it, they were very much surprised and began to regard M. Grignion with a kind of veneration<sup>6</sup>. From then on, he was considered a paragon of virtue among the four hundred students of his class, and those who knew him intimately respected him as a saint.

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph GRANDDET, in his book *Life of Messire LouisMarie Grignion de Montfort* (pp. 5-8) mentions and emphasizes these "recreations" enjoyed by Louis Marie who then often met with a priest: Julien Bellier (cf. below p. 152).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph GRANDDET in his book, p. 8, mentions that "this man with a sharp interest in this kind of things" was a Counsellor at the Parliament of Brittany.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph GRANDDET: same book p. 5.

## V° - HIS GREAT INNOCENCE AND HIS ATTRACTION FOR PENANCE

Even then he spent a great deal of time meditating and was much given to mortification; his only pleasure was to live in God's presence; everything else seemed to him insipid. He would not even have been able to talk about it as he did not know anything about it, since he had spent all his childhood in admirable innocence, keeping away from anything evil. He was so ignorant of anything that might tarnish holy purity that one day when I was talking to him about the temptations against this virtue, he told me that he did not know what they were. All those who knew him intimately unanimously admired in him the combination of these two virtues which are so necessary for priests, /10/ and yet are so seldom found in them: innocence and mortification.

It would seem as if he had not been touched by original sin or by the consequences of Adam's disobedience. He hardly felt any attraction at all for evil and did not find it hard to practise virtue. From the time I knew him he never had any desire, except for heavenly things: all that attracts young men, all that mature men long for, left him cold and failed to arouse his interest. This accounts for the ease with which he practised virtue and his desire to attain perfection, which he constantly strove to achieve almost from the moment he knew where it lay. Once he had begun to walk along the very narrow uphill path, he strode so quickly and so courageously that he did not seem to feel the pricking of thorns on his way. Virtue at its most heroic and perfection at its most sublime seemed to have come naturally to him, so blessed with grace was he.

It seems that right from his birth he was gifted with the deepest recollection, the most sustained meditation, the most rigid penance and the most universal /11/ mortification. His soul was always peaceful, gentle and quiet, and I have never known him to lose his equanimity even when he was subjected to the most trying contradictions and humiliations.

He began to use the discipline, iron chains and suchlike instruments of penance as soon as he heard of their existence. He was still only a student but looked perfectly mature and controlled his senses to such an extent that he was never known to act other than properly in his looks, in his gestures or his manners. He struck all those who saw him, even at that time, as being, as it were, different from nearly all the other students because his eyes were nearly always downcast, his modesty was very striking and there was something very edifying about him.

At home, he had to suffer a lot from his father, who was a man of a very violent disposition, and when his father had unaccountable fits of temper, his great gentleness and obedience could not have stood the test if he had not taken the wise course of running out of his sight. As these fits of temper sometimes occurred when the family were at table, Grignon was obliged to do without food; this was a great hardship for him since he had a good appetite and his need of food was great. /12/ On these occasions, he allied his mortification to his piety to make a virtue of necessity and his virtue made him accept readily this deprivation of food which was not of his own choosing. I met him once after he had thus run away from his father; he told me what had happened and I offered him some refreshment to make up for the loss of his dinner, but he would not accept it because it would have gone against his spirit of mortification.

## **VI° - HIS SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN EVEN IN HIS EARLY YEARS**

This is what M. Grignon was like when he studied philosophy under the guidance of a Jesuit Father, Father Prévost, who was very pious and also very zealous for the sanctification of his pupils<sup>7</sup>. He was in charge of the Sodality for the senior boys and had a special devotion to Mary, which he tried to impart with ever greater zeal. I would be tempted to say that M. Grignon owed to him his own devotion to Mary if he had not already revealed it from the cradle, as it were.

Love for Mary was almost as if innate in M. Grignon; /13/ it can be said that she had first chosen him as one of her greatest favourites and had implanted in his young heart the special tenderness which he always showed towards her and which caused him to be regarded as one of the greatest devotees of the Mother of God the Church has ever known. In his early years, he was, on a small scale, so to speak, what he was to be on a large scale later on: the zealous panegyrist of the Blessed Virgin, constantly speaking of her privileges and of her great virtues, tirelessly preaching devotion to her. As a boy, what he enjoyed most was to speak of her or listen to other people speak of her, and later on his greatest joy was to propagate her cult and increase the number of those dedicated to her service.

When he was kneeling in front of a picture of Mary, young Grignon appeared to be completely unaware of everyone else, being, as it were, in a trance with his senses in some way suspended: he would kneel for hours at the foot of her altars, /14/ looking devout and carried away, motionless as if spellbound. He would thus pray to her, honour her, paying her his homage, begging her to protect him, consecrating his innocence to her, imploring her to keep it safe, dedicating himself to her service. This heartfelt devotion was not a fleeting emotion, as is the case with so many children; it was part of his daily life. Every day on his way to and from school he would go to St Saviour's, his parish church, and pay a visit to an old miraculous image of our Lady which was kept there; and his uncle testified that he sometimes spent an hour there<sup>8</sup>.

It is common knowledge that he never called her anything but "Mother" or "dear Mother"; but what is not so widely known is that even as a boy of tender age he used to go to her with the simplicity of a child to ask her to supply his temporal as well as his spiritual needs. He was always confident that his prayers would be heard because Mary's kindness was so great that he never had any doubt or worry or anxiety about anything. As far as he was concerned, when he had prayed to her there was nothing more for him to do and all hesitation vanished.

/15/ His extreme love of poverty and of the poor as well as his apostolic abandonment to Providence, gave rise to constant needs, which our Lady, his tender and thoughtful Mother, always met. Thanks to the help of the Queen of Heaven he never lacked anything. Those who have come into as close contact with him as I have know that the number of miracles which Mary worked on his behalf kept increasing as days went by; if she seemed to forsake him at times, it was only to stimulate his confidence in her and give him an extra chance to practise the most difficult virtues. Just as a good mother plays at hiding from her son for a few moments, only to make him appreciate her presence all the more afterwards, /16/ so did the

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<sup>7</sup> François Provost (sometimes reads Prévost) (1651-1695). In 1690-1692 he was reading in logic and Philosophy in the college at Rennes; at the same time he was the prefect of the congregation for senior students.

<sup>8</sup> Saint-Sauveur's Church at Rennes had an altar dedicated to Our Lady of Miracles. It was said that Our Lady had freed the town in 1356-1357. To be noted: the difference between uncle Alain Robert's accurateness: "sometimes one hour" and Blain's emphasis: "hours on end".

divine Mary sometimes seem to forget her most zealous and loving servant. After she had tested his virtue, however, she would soon give him some fresh proof of her kindness to him. It would have been necessary to enter in a diary each of her kindnesses to him if a complete account were to be given of how she looked after him; she seems to have led him by the hand in all his ways just as the Angel Raphael led young Tobias. It looks as if she had taught him all he had to do to handle the most intricate and perplexing situations, such as the choice of a state of life.

## VII° - HIS VOCATION

When this delicate and difficult question arose, M. Grignion was no more perplexed than on any other occasion. The priesthood was the only state of life that appealed to him, the only one that God meant for him. In order to get into the right frame of mind and study the virtues required in this state of life, he got in touch with the most virtuous priests.

/17/ Once he had completed his study of philosophy, his only concern was to study theology thoroughly so that he might be in a position to fulfil the duties of the apostolic life for which he was preparing himself.

## VIII° - A JOURNEY UP-COUNTRY. HE STUDIES THEOLOGY

It was about that time that the two of us went on a visit to a mutual friend staying in the country. Later on this young man joined the Order of the Capuchins, and the other members of the Order regarded him as a paragon of virtue<sup>9</sup>. This visit afforded me a chance of getting to know M. Grignion better and of becoming a more intimate friend. He kept talking about God and things connected with God: he was devoured by his zeal for the salvation of souls and his heart was already burning with such love of God that the only way in which he could gratify it was to show it in action through his charity for his neighbour; yet he would try to gratify his charitable longings as secretly as possible; thus he would steal away from us to go and show his affection in various ways for a simple-minded, very unattractive poor beggar, embracing him and making much of him: he would kneel at his feet and kiss them when he thought that nobody could see him; /18/ however, he did not act secretly enough because on several occasions I was able to see him giving way to his pious transports of charity.

He performed another similar act of charity, though in a different field, shortly afterwards when he was staying at his father's country-house, where I dropped in on him. His Father had in his house an obscene book full of lascivious pictures<sup>10</sup>; the presence of this obscene book in the house caused some sorrow to the chaste Joseph, who dared not burn it because he feared that his quick-tempered father might get angry. Eventually, after he had grown older and his zeal had increased, he gave in to his good inclinations and chose his time to rob the devil of impurity of this dangerous weapon. One day, as he was alone in the house he burnt the book and was then determined to endure any ill-treatment which would follow if his father came to hear of what he had done. He had just completed his good action when I entered the house. I found him scared and almost trembling in fear of the arrival of his father, /19/ but on the other hand quite happy

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<sup>9</sup> Father Raoul, the archivist for the Capuchin Fathers of France, could not identify this Father Joseph de Saint Méen. He did not find his name in the existing ledgers of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. Neither could he find it in his onomastic files.

<sup>10</sup> Le Bois Marquer was a mansion sited at Iffendic near Montfort. It had been bought by the Grignion family in 1675. One may wonder whether Mr. Blain does not darken the description of Mr. Grignion's book.

having made this sacrifice. Then he took me out into the garden where he showed me, some secluded spots which he found very suitable for his prayers; he liked to spend most of his time there, praying. He seemed so full of the thought of God, so attentive to Him, so overflowing with love of Him and desire for his own perfection that I was at once edified and ashamed of myself. From then on, whenever I looked at him or listened to him I was filled with admiration and a kind of grief at my inability to follow along the path of virtue a companion who was striding along with giant steps at such a quick pace that he was soon out of my sight.

When he returned to college he started studying theology under the guidance of two Jesuits, Father Magon and Father Baron. The latter was a famous professor of theology who knew the subject thoroughly; under his guidance, M. Grignion could have made great progress<sup>11</sup>, but divine Providence meant him to become perfectly versed in the Science of holiness /20/ and he was called to Paris. There he attended that school where the most genuine priestly virtues were taught, I mean, St Sulpice Seminary, where anyone who wanted to become a saint could find the most outstanding models and the most experienced guides along the way to perfection.

### **IX° - HIS DESIRE TO GO TO ST SULPICE SEMINARY AND THE MEANS WHICH PROVIDENCE USED TO FULFIL HIS DESIRE**

M. Grignion did not know of the existence of this holy place; besides, his parents could not afford to pay the school fees and the sum necessary for his upkeep there. However, God who meant him to be trained for sanctity by the best masters, worked things out in such a way that he heard of the existence of the Seminary and He put in his heart the desire to go there. The instrument which God used to fulfil His designs on M. Grignion was a lady born in Paris, who had come to Rennes on business and was staying with Grignion's father. Her name was Mlle de Montigny.

She had mentioned St Sulpice to the pious young man as the most suitable place in the world for those who wanted to become perfect priests. /21/ This roused in M. Grignion a keen desire to go there, although his chances of actually going there were very slender. True, his parents had enough money to keep up their social status, but they had many children to provide for and were not in a position to grant him his wish<sup>12</sup>. However, it was God's design that a living, palpable proof of His thoughtfulness and care for the generous men who trusted Him blindly should be given in those times. He inspired Mlle de Montigny, who had brought the existence of St Sulpice to M. Grignion's knowledge, with the desire to find out how she could get him into the Seminary, and she did find the means to achieve this.

### **X° - HE LEAVES FOR PARIS AND ST SULPICE**

M. Grignion was delighted to find such an unexpected opportunity of fulfilling his keen desire for perfection in such a suitable place. He was eager to leave for the land of the saints, and as soon as possible he departed from his native place and from his relatives in

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<sup>11</sup> Julien Magnon (1643-1708) and Pierre Baron (1645-1707) read in theology in the college at Rennes in 1692. Everything shows that young Grignion attended their courses for a few weeks only and left for Paris at the end of 1692, possibly in the beginning of 1693.

<sup>12</sup> Mlle de Montigny lived in the parish of Saint Sulpice in Paris. She had come to Rennes as she was engaged in a lawsuit before the Parliament of Rennes.

such a spirit of detachment that once out of his sight they would literally be out of his mind<sup>13</sup>. / 22/ This may sound as if he were hard and unfeeling when in actual fact he was as tender-hearted as anyone could be. The point is that his love of God was far stronger than his natural feelings and caused him to turn all his desires and thoughts to Heaven. I can vouch for the authenticity of these sublime dispositions in accordance with the Gospel; some time later he opened his heart to me in a letter in which he explained his conduct and urged me to join him in his quest for virtue away from my land and relatives in a place where it seemed to have taken refuge after its rejection by the world... Anyone reading his letters could not fail to be struck by the energy, vitality, emotion and unction of his unique style, which was the exact reflection of his innermost feelings. I must confess that I used his letters for my spiritual reading and no book has ever moved me more. In a few words he made so clear to me the necessity of leaving my relatives in order to serve God in complete freedom that he roused in me a keen desire to do so, "Egredere," he wrote, /23/ "de cognatione tua, et vade in terram quam monstravero tibi"<sup>14</sup>. He was paraphrasing these words of the Bible by means of such pressing devout words that he made it quite clear that God had spoken them to him, just as he had to Abraham, and had given him the grace of understanding them.

## XI° - HOW HE TRAVELS TO PARIS

M. Grignon was given only thirty francs for his travelling expenses and for his upkeep in Paris; so he had no choice but to travel on foot, which he welcomed as a chance of practising virtue. Rennes is seventy-six leagues from Paris but he was so desirous of living the Gospel that he would have gone to the end of the world and thought nothing of the difficulties and troubles such a long and laborious journey involved; besides, as it was the first of many which his zeal for the salvation of souls urged him to make later on, this was to set the general pattern. I mean that he wanted to model his poverty, his humility, /24/ his labours, his fatigue and his reliance on Providence on those of the Apostles. When I said good-bye to him, what struck me most was his complete reliance on Providence; he seemed to me so detached from everything, so certain of lacking none of the necessities of life, so determined to bear the rebuffs and to revel in the disgrace attached to begging, that I felt as if I were in the presence of one of the Apostles or as if a man of the early apostolic times had been brought back to life.

From that time onwards he abandoned himself entirely to Providence, surrendering himself to its care with such confidence and serenity that he gave the impression of feeling that he was the only human being that Providence had to look after. A purse full of gold or a cheque for ten thousand pounds to be cashed in Paris would not have made him feel more secure. When he left Rennes his thoughts were in heaven, his heart in St Sulpice and a prayer to Mary on his lips. He reached Paris safely after only eight or ten days; /25/ at the time he was strong and could walk with long effortless strides. As far as I remember he told me later about the many sufferings and rebuffs he had had to bear during the journey. He begged alms of parish-priests and other people who were all equally ill-disposed towards beggars; many of those who did give him alms made him pay the price by humiliating him in various ways, which he must have felt all the more acutely as he was still young and unaccustomed to humiliations.

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<sup>13</sup> Obviously Louis Marie was highly detached from his family, particularly from his father. However this detachment was not as complete as Blain puts it. We know that on arriving in Paris he wrote to his parents. Four of his letters to his brothers and uncle have been kept. They were written in the years 1694-1699; cf GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, Paris 1966, pp. 5-10.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis, 12, 1.

## **XII° - HOW HE BEHAVED ON ARRIVING IN PARIS. HOW HE PRACTISED MORTIFICATION OF THE EYES.**

As he approached, then entered, Paris, the first sacrifice M. Grignon had to make was to keep a close watch on his eyes. He made a resolution not to allow them to rest on anything pleasing, either on the magnificent artistic masterpieces or on the unique sights which have made Paris the most beautiful city in the world, attracted such large numbers of foreign visitors and often /26/ kept them as it were captive under its spell. I must add that he kept his resolution as faithfully and courageously as if he had taken a vow. As the aim he had set himself when deciding to go to Paris was to seek perfection, he closed his eyes to all that could turn him away from it. When I say “he closed his eyes”, this is no exaggeration (and is to be taken both literally and figuratively) for he left the French capital ten years later without having seen anything pleasing to the eyes, no more than if he had been blind.

Those who knew him at the time noticed that he always kept his eyes so downcast as only to see his feet. It was even a wonder how he could find his way along the streets; what was even more surprising was that he knew where all the pictures and statues of the Blessed Virgin were, whether at the crossroads or on the doors of houses. While walking with him along the streets of Paris, /27/ I and many other people were both surprised and edified to see a man who always kept his eyes downcast take off his hat when passing pictures of Our Lady which nobody else had noticed. One day, as I was walking along with him I could not help asking him whom he was greeting because he was taking off his hat so very often; he replied that he was greeting pictures of the Blessed Virgin on the doors of houses; these pictures, however, were so difficult to see that it took me quite an effort to discover them. He carried this mortification so far as not to look anybody in the face, not even the persons with whom he lived nor those whom he visited and he left the houses and various places to which he had to go without having looked more about him than if he had been a dead man,. Because of the position he held in the community (of which I will speak in a moment) he had to go into some splendid houses, /28/ which were among the most beautiful in Paris; he would, however, have been quite at a loss to describe their structure or the furniture which they contained; all he knew was the road there and back.

## **XIII° - GOD SENDS HIM A TRIAL IN THE COMMUNITY OF M. DE LA BARMONDIERE**

On reaching Paris, M. Grignon went immediately to the community of M. de la Barmondière, former parish-priest of St Sulpice. Providence had arranged things in such a way that he found a place there thanks to the help of a charitable lady who, at the request of Mlle de Montigny<sup>15</sup>, was paying for his board and lodging. Very soon, however, he was to be deprived of this help, just when he needed it most, and God began to test the virtue of his servant and his abandonment to Him. The charitable lady paid for his board and lodging for a few months, then either because she had not pledged herself to pay any longer or because she had changed her opinion about him, she discontinued her payments. M. Grignon found himself reduced to poverty at a time when the number of in 1693 and 1694 poor people was increasing very quickly and when the effects of famine and of the high cost of living were even more acutely felt in the capital than in the provinces.

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<sup>15</sup> Claude Bottu de la Barmondière (1635-1694), a Sulpician priest, was the parish-priest of the parish of Saint Sulpice from 1678 to 1689. He had founded a community of poor priests in his parish, in 1686. We know nothing about that “charitable lady” who paid for his board and lodging, but a letter from the seminarian (about 30 months later) shows that Louis Marie was in touch with several friends of Mlle de Montigny; cf GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, p. 8.

## **XIV° - HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD AND HIS ABANDONMENT TO HIM IN THIS TRIAL**

/29/ Any other clerical student – he had been tonsured – would have been very much perplexed and worried. He kept his usual serenity although he was on the eve of being thrown on the streets. He expected this to happen any day but he lost none of his recollection nor did he worry in the least. Those who witnessed his serenity wondered if he were human and the troubles of this life affected him in the same way as ordinary people. He was once asked in my presence: “What would have become of you if M. de la Barmondière had turned you out?” As far as I remember, he replied unconcernedly that he had not yet given it a thought and that God was his sole support.

Such unshakable confidence in God was as valuable to him as the most advantageous bargains and I have never known him to worry /30/ about the present nor be concerned about the future. God, who is the complete master of the hearts of his servants, even more in a sense than those of kings, touched the heart of M. de la Barmondière and inspired him to choose M. Grignon together with three of his fellow-students who were no better off and to give them the task of watching beside the dead in the parish of St Sulpice. They would perform this task whenever they were asked, and this would bring them enough money to pay for their board and lodging.

He still had to find some more money for his keep; he resolved to do this by asking his neighbour for charity and generously to drink to the dregs the cup of shame associated with this kind of obscure begging. He pledged himself to drink this cup of bitterness and humiliation all his life in order to practise in the least detail the most rigorous poverty and to bear the inevitable rebuffs and contempt which to him as to all holy men are its most acceptable fruits..

## **XV° - HIS CHARITY FOR THE POOR**

Moreover, M. Grignon's condition as a pauper enabled him to find in it more resources for the poor /31/ than he could have done if he had inherited a large fortune. He would beg alms of a good many charitable priests belonging to the communities of St Sulpice and the amount of money he received from them was often fairly considerable. He kept only very little of this money to supply his own pressing needs, and sometimes he did not keep any at all because his joy was to give it to the poor especially to poor clerical students. The result was that, poor as he was, with no financial resources of his own, he was able to give to the poor more than any charitable priest endowed with a large inheritance or benefice.

On many occasions M. Grignon gave to paupers all that he had been given without keeping anything for himself. At the time in question his whole fortune amounted to thirty sous. An old woman came to him and told him about her extreme poverty; she begged him to help her out of her difficulties. /32/ He asked her how much money she wanted: “Thirty sous would do,” she replied. He gave her the money there and then and the poor woman was so comforted, overjoyed and grateful that she expressed her gratitude whenever she met him afterwards.

On another occasion somebody had had a short cassock of very good warm material made for him; he did not even put it on once, but gave it away to some poor students together

with a number of pieces of clothing which he had collected for them in the course of his begging rounds<sup>16</sup>.

He could justifiably be called the mendicant of the poor, because he was a mendicant all his life. All that belonged to him belonged to the paupers. He kept the money and clothes he received only until some opportunity arose of giving them to the needy.

## **XVI° - HIS FERVOUR IN THE COMMUNITY OF M. DE LA BARMONDIERE**

/33/ His charity, which was so boundless and so pure in its motives, could not pass unnoticed among men as it originated and found its support in God. M. de la Barmondière soon sensed that this student was, like himself, filled with the spirit of God; he soon realized how unusually pious and virtuous this young man was, and these qualities first earned his esteem then won his affection. M. de la Barmondière, who had for some time been parish-priest of St Sulpice, had had to carry the heaviest crosses while at the head of this large parish and was regarded as a saint after he had resigned his office. He was a man of the highest virtue. He was at once a very learned and deeply humble man, unassuming and as guileless and obedient as a child. He led a very austere life, given as he was to constant mortification in everything. Such was the first spiritual director that divine Providence supplied to M. Grignon in Paris. /34/ None other could have been more suitable to guide a saint than a man who had already achieved consummate sanctity.

M. Grignon started by making a general confession of all his past life, then he told M. de la Barmondière all about his spiritual life, which only served to reveal to his spiritual director what a blameless life he had led and also with what great gifts God had endowed him. M. de la Barmondière, who had set himself the highest goal as regards perfection and whose fervour was boundless, allowed the zeal of his penitent full scope in this respect.

M. Grignon, finding himself free to give full play to his taste for penance, meditation, silence, recollection and mortification, reproduced all that is said of the saints in their biographies and lived as they did. His meditation became, as it were, continuous, and he seemed never to be distracted from it by anything, so busily engaged was he in conversing with God. He daily devoted several hours to meditation as well as to spiritual reading. /35/ He talked very little during recreation and when he did, the topic of his conversation was either God or things related to God or the Blessed Virgin; for almost always he started by talking of the Mother of God or reverted to Her whom he always called his mother.

He scourged himself with the discipline several times a day and the beating was so energetic that the student in the room next to his was frightened at the mere sound of it. This student was a very pious layman called M. le Vallier. M. de la Barmondière had accepted him in his community and given him a separate room next to M. Grignon, on the other side of the yard<sup>17</sup>. I have it from him that, judging from the various sounds he could hear, M. Grignon made use of other instruments of penance, such as hair shirts, iron chains, bracelets, just as frequently as he did of the discipline. /36/ I do not know for sure in what order he used them; all I can say is that they followed each other in uninterrupted succession and that he had no sooner taken one of them off than he would put a different one on that he might, in the words of the Apostle, bear the mortification of Jesus in his body.

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<sup>16</sup> This could coincide with the gift of a cassock which had been paid for by his mother; Cf Joseph GRANDET, same book, p. 351.

<sup>17</sup> Presently it is impossible to identify this M. Le Vallier.

I feel on safer ground when coming to the order of the spiritual exercises which he performed while watching beside the dead at nights, because I and several other people actually saw him perform these, and also because I have it from his own lips. He usually watched beside the dead three or four nights a week; he devoted four full hours to meditation, kneeling motionless with clasped hands; then he gave two hours to spiritual reading; he slept during the next two hours and the rest of the time studied the notes on theology /37/ which he had made during the lectures he attended at the Sorbonne together with the other members of the community.

It must be borne in mind that this holy young man, who was so often in the company of dead people, watching as he did beside them, did not fail to consult them and to examine their faces, which taught him a lot about the vanity of the world and of worldly pleasures. In order to acquire a thorough understanding of heavenly wisdom which engenders contempt for all that is short-lived and transient and fills one with horror at the sight of bodies destined to fall into dust, he took pleasure in uncovering the faces of the dead; seeing how ugly and horribly distorted these faces were he fully realized how misleading was the attractiveness of youth and beauty now vanished, and how extremely foolish were those who allowed themselves to fall victims to their charms.

Two of the corpses beside which he watched made a particularly strong impression on him /38/ and taught him valuable lessons on the short-lived character of all mortal things. The first was that of a high ranking priest, who may have been a prince, since, as far as I remember, people used to call him Prince Phélypeaux. This priest was attacked and fatally wounded as he was leaving a house of ill-fame<sup>18</sup>. His corpse, which bore the shameful marks of his debauchery, gave off such an appalling smell and was decaying so fast that the next day when it was taken to the cemetery those who carried it could not stand the horrible smell and professed that they had never experienced such a thing before, accustomed though they were to carrying corpses. M. Grignon, however, bore the smell all night, drew near the corpse and uncovered its face in order to realize the repulsiveness of sin and the vanity of worldly pleasures, because these things were clearly written on the face of the dead man.

He did the same while watching beside the dead body of one of the most notable and most beautiful court-ladies. /39/ Twenty-four hours after her death her face had changed to such an extent and become so repulsive and horrible that it inspired M. Grignon with all he was to say later in his sermons on the brevity of life and the vanity of physical beauty. Another thing which struck him very much on these occasions was that only a few days after they had been idolized those bodies were left alone, and only a servant stayed on in the house where they lay; everyone else fled as though it were plague-stricken.

Those who had undertaken to watch beside the dead could take a light meal, if they so wished, to prevent them being over-tired by their watching. But M. Grignon never touched anything served on these occasions and those who kept vigil with him pointed out to him /40/ somewhat bitterly that he should at least try to regain his strength by sharing in the meal served to the community. By so doing he could not possibly have been sensual nor intemperate because the portions served to the students in 1693, when the cost of living was very high, were so scanty as not to satisfy one's hunger and so unappetizing that to eat them was to make a great sacrifice. Nevertheless, M. Grignon did not eat half his portion. What

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<sup>18</sup> Should this prince be identified as Michel Phélypeaux de la Vrillière, the abbot of Nieul, Absie and Saint Lô, archbishop of Bourges, who died suddenly in Paris (April 28, 1694)? Anyway this one is the only Phélypeaux whose death is mentioned by the *Mercure Galant* in the years 1693-1694. It is also the only one who died as an Abbot in the same two years. It is true to say that Blain does not seem to trust his own memory when he mentions his name. One may wonder whether he does not darken the picture when he speaks of that death.

the other students were served, which was barely enough to keep them alive, was a luxury for him, and his mortification drove him to leave the best part of it as superfluous. This rigid self-denial must have been a great sacrifice for him because he had a good digestion, a good appetite and badly needed food. /41/ I think that I can safely say that of all his mortifications this must have been the most painful and the one which affected him most.

Outside recreation-time M. Grignon did not give more scope to his tongue than he did to his eyes. He kept silence so scrupulously that it was impossible to drag a word from him unless it was absolutely necessary; even then he spoke so low and in so few words that one was not tempted to distract his attention again from God. He was always bare-headed out of respect for the presence of God. Every humiliating or repelling task to be performed inside the community devolved on him, either from his own choice or out of charity for the others. During recreations /42/ he was often under discussion and some of the oddities which he was never able to correct often made the others laugh at his expense; some students even took pleasure in cutting him to the quick. "Since you are so mortified," a thoughtless young student used to say to him, "let us see whether you will bear patiently what I'm going to do." M. Grignon readily accepted the challenge and the young man thought he could play any trick he could think of, such as pouring water over his head or into his pockets, etc. While they were on a walk together, one of his fellow-students said to him, "Since you are so fond of scourging yourself with the discipline, let me scourge you." So saying, he thrashed M. Grignon on the shoulders with a willow stick he had in his hand. /43/ The great saint, who was indeed very fond of penance, suffered the blows with joy.

It must be, pointed out that no one was ever more lacking in human respect nor cared less what others thought than did he. His desire to please God did not allow him to turn to creatures for comfort. He even took delight in setting himself against worldly trends of thought and revelled in the contempt this attitude earned him. Whenever he went in or out of the classroom at the Sorbonne, he never failed to kneel down and pray in the middle of the room, and as the school year drew to its close, he prolonged his prayers to ask God's forgiveness for the sins which he and his fellow-students had committed there. This singular behaviour could not fail to attract the attention /44/ of the other students and to raise contemptuous laughter. I took him to a bank once. He stayed behind in the hall, where I found him kneeling bareheaded in the presence of the servants and praying as if he had been inside a church. He behaved like this wherever he was and spent the time praying or reading a devotional book, bare-headed and usually on his knees. On another occasion I took him to see a doctor, a high-ranking priest who was appointed bishop some time later. While I was talking to the doctor, M. Grignon kept his eyes downcast, and was as silent and as recollected as usual, as if he were making his meditation. We left the doctor together but M. Grignon had not said a word and had kept his eyes cast down all the time, much to the doctor's edification.

I must mention the fact that it was then that, prompted either by mortification /45/ or by the fear of being distracted from God, the pious young man gave up for ever a most innocent hobby for which he was highly gifted, namely, drawing and painting. M. de la Barmondière had thought he might cultivate these gifts, not only in drawing and painting but also sculpture, architecture and any other science requiring the lively imagination which he possessed. He hoped that M. Grignon could make use of these talents in the service of God. M. Grignon, however, could find pleasure only in God and in what was directly related to His glory. Besides, M. de la Barmondière died soon after, leaving M. Grignon at liberty to bury his natural talents in eternal oblivion. I can truthfully say that this young man lived as if nothing else existed on earth but God and himself. He went so far as to wish neither to see nor to talk to his fellow-students nor his fellow-countrymen, so great was his detachment

from creatures; /46/ if he met one of them in the streets of Paris he would go out of his way to avoid him or pretend not to recognize him so that he might not have to waste time talking to him or paying him visits, as he explained to me while suggesting that I should do the same.

He went to holy communion four times a week and did so with so much piety that the mere sight of him was enough to inspire the same sentiment. Although his whole life was a continual preparation for this holy act, he intensified it in a special way the day before. He usually talked about it during recreation and seemed to think of nothing else. His thanksgiving lasted an hour<sup>19</sup> and in order to enjoy the presence of his Beloved in peace and quiet, he tried to find the most secluded spot in the church. When he was the only communicant or when he stayed behind the others for his thanksgiving he was /47/ given the task of looking after the Lady-Altar and the picture of our Blessed Lady at the back of the church of St Sulpice<sup>20</sup>. No pleasanter task could ever have been given him, for anything connected with the cult of Mary delighted him; he gladly missed recreation on Saturdays and on the eve of Our Lady's feasts to spend the time decorating the altar which I have just mentioned. He performed this task for as long as he stayed at St Sulpice, and nobody took over from him after he had left.

Instead of saying that he was glad to miss recreation I should have said that this fulfilled his most fervent wish. He took recreation only because the Rule and the will of God required him to do so; if he had followed his inclination he would have retired to his room after meals in order to converse with God alone. I remember M. de la Barmondière pointing out to him that he should regard as a temptation this inclination to retire to his room /48/ during recreation as it was not only necessary for the health of hard-working students, but being included in the Rule was in accordance with the will of God.

His spiritual directors, who knew about his interior life, are the only people who can tell all the riches of his soul and the gifts with which God favoured him. What is certain, however, is that he was spiritually so endowed that in all circumstances he showed that he was filled with grace and his mere presence inspired piety. He often looked as if he were in a kind of trance, living among us in a world different from ours, absorbed in God. He could not even control the longings of his heart burning with love of God, so that he sighed often during meals and recreation and wherever else he was. This earned him great humiliations because his confreres did not fail to make fun of him.

I think I can safely say that he was then feeling the /49/ effects of the strong heady new wine of the Holy Spirit which turned the Apostles into fools in the eyes of men, while they were so very wise in the eyes of God. According to the teaching of the masters of the spiritual life, there is a kind of ecstasy in the life of the soul, just as there is in the life of the senses. The latter occurs when the mind is befogged and cannot work properly because it is made hazy by the vapours rising from a stomach too full of food and wine; the former is the happy result of the vehement impulses of the love of God, of the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit with His fullness of grace which then overwhelms the soul with delight. This holy rapture is the height of true wisdom, which is regarded as folly by worldly people and which arouses their contempt of the happy souls God favours with his grace. /50/ This happened to the Apostles and to many saints, as witness the history of their lives.

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph GRANDET (same book) said that Louis Marie took half an hour only for thanksgiving, which seems to be nearer to truth.

<sup>20</sup> If it were true that between the year 1692 and 1700, the church of Saint Sulpice was only partially built, at least the sanctuary and the side altars, one of which was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, had been built since 1667.

It is probably safe to say that M. Grignon had his share of these favours. So much like the saints in their way of life it is easy to believe that he received similar graces. His great innocence, allied to his strict penance, his great silence, his recollection, his near-continual prayer, his boundless mortification, had prepared his soul for the advance of the heavenly Spouse, and his excellent dispositions enabled the Holy Spirit to have full scope in his pure, dedicated heart. God must have acted without hindrance in this purified soul since M. de la Barmondière, who was himself so enlightened in matters concerning the spiritual life, nevertheless referred M. Grignon to M. Baiÿn<sup>21</sup>, renowned Superior of St. Sulpice, /51/ and one of the greatest masters of the spiritual life in the eighteenth century. M. de la Barmondière acted like this because in his great humility he feared that he was not sufficiently enlightened to direct a man who had reached such heights of perfection as M. Grignon.

## **XVII° - HIS LOVE OF THE CROSS**

As M. Grignon devoted a lot of time to spiritual reading, he became familiar with nearly all books dealing with the spiritual life. Those which in my opinion were his favourites were those by the, late M. Boudon, a former archdeacon of Evreux, who died in the odour of sanctity and whose life has been published. He especially enjoyed the one called “Ways of the Cross”<sup>22</sup>, which deals with the various ways in which the cross comes to us, and which neither flesh nor blood reveals but which the Holy Spirit taught him secretly. This book, which was so much to his liking, was only a repetition of all that he had already learned from the Holy Spirit in his meditations, and it gave him such a high esteem /52/ and such a great attraction for suffering and contempt that he never tired of talking of the happiness found in bearing the cross and of the value of suffering. He was envious, in the way only saints can be, of the fate of the poor and of the afflicted; he honoured and revered them as God's favourites and the living images of Christ crucified. One day I saw him, hat in hand, ushering out a man who seemed to me a nobody, whose social status did not require such fuss; I expressed my surprise to M. Grignon and asked him why he was showing so much respect to a man who did not seem worth it. “He, is suffering,” he replied, “and we ought to respect and honour all those who are lucky enough to be nailed to the cross.”

Later in his life this great lover of the cross had his fill of sufferings. It can be said indeed that after St Sulpice he drank /53/ to the dregs the chalice of the master. Like Him he was overwhelmed with reproaches and not a day of his life passed but it was marked by some new form of humility and of patience; God, who knew his longing for suffering, soon fulfilled his wish.

## **XVIII° -THE DEATH OF M. DE LA BARMONDIERE; M. GRIGNION'S ATTITUDE IN THIS TRIAL**

The first trial that God sent was the death of M. de la Barmondière, his Superior, spiritual director and real father. He owed him a great debt of gratitude and anybody even less tender-hearted than M. Grignon would have been drawn in many ways to this holy

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Jacques Baiÿn (1641-1696) was a convert from Protestantism. He entered the Society of Saint Sulpice. In collaboration with M. Brenier he founded and directed the minor Seminary and became its superior in 1695-1696.

<sup>22</sup> BOUDON (Henri-Marie), archdeacon of Evreux, wrote a number of books of spirituality, such as: *The holy ways of the Cross, which treats of interior and exterior sufferings and the means to use them in a Christian way* (Paris edition). Recent researches on Montfort and his intellectual formation prove that M. Blain has exaggerated when he speaks of M. Grignon's extensive readings.

benefactor. This attachment was justified not only because he owed him a debt of gratitude, but also in his own interest, since after the death of M. de la Barmondière, M. Grignion was reduced to his former position, abandoned to poverty and with no other resort than divine Providence. /54/ And this is what he wanted. Let us examine how he took this blow and how he reacted to such a painful trial.

When M. de la Barmondière was attacked by the disease which was to cause his death a few days later<sup>23</sup>, M. Grignion was in retreat at St Lazare in preparation for minor orders. So when he finished his retreat the man whom he expected to find alive was dead. This was the crucial moment for him. His confreres, who knew how much he was obliged to M. de la Barmondière, were on the look-out to see how he would react. They tried to find out from his expression what his feelings really were; they wondered what emotions would be aroused by his surprise on hearing of the unexpected loss of a man so dear to his heart. He did indeed look surprised but not perturbed; he remained calm and composed; I would go so far as to say that he looked as if he were not affected<sup>24</sup>. One of his confreres, /55/ who was not quite sure whether this attitude was edifying or shocking, said to him in the presence of his other confreres: “M. Grignion: either you are inconceivably ungrateful if you are not moved by the death of your benefactor, or you are a great saint if, though moved, you are virtuous enough to repress your feelings”.

The consequences of this death were as serious as he had expected them to be; the community of M. de la Barmondière disappeared with him, as it were, and the Junior Seminary of St Sulpice inherited what he had left.

## **XIX° - HIS PROGRESS IN HIS STUDIES**

The school was one of those in Paris where the students were most successful; twice a year M. de la Barmondière himself examined those whom he had accepted in order to assess their progress in theology; although some of them were very keen on their studies and did very well /56/ at la Sorbonne, the Superior once stated in public that M. Grignion had done better and given better answers than any of them. In point of fact he was brilliantly intelligent, and if he had continued his studies at la Sorbonne he would have been an excellent student; however, he was keener on the science of the saints than on theological studies.

## **XX° - HE JOINS THE COMMUNITY OF M. BOUCHER AND FALLS ILL**

Divine Providence supplied him with a good means of making progress in theology by enabling him to join the community of M. Boucher after that of M. de la Barmondière had disappeared with him<sup>25</sup>. The students were as hard-working under the guidance of M. Boucher as they were under that of M. de la Barmondière, and their progress in their studies was no less noteworthy. In his new community M. Grignion found ample scope, for

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<sup>23</sup> M. de la Barmondière died on the 18th of September 1694 at Saint-Lazare, the house of the “Priests of the Missions”, in Paris. Since 1632, in that house there were “exercices” or retreats for the priests of the diocese.

<sup>24</sup> This feeling of confident peace is manifested in Louis Marie's letter to his uncle Alain Robert (September 20th); cf GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> François Boucher was not a Sulpician but was very close to them. In 1690 he founded a community for poor students (40 seminarians) in the vicinity of the Collège de Montaigu. M. Grignion lived in that community from the fall of 1694 to July 1695.

indulging his great inclination for poverty and mortification. The food, like everything else in the community, was very poor /57/ and quite disgusting and on the way to the refectory it was very easy to imitate the great saint who said that he went to his meals as though he were going to a kind of torment: “Ad mensam tanquam ad patibulum”<sup>26</sup>. The offal and the kind of butcher's meat which only the poorest could afford was served in tiny portions and even if these had been much bigger no one would have been tempted to eat too much because the mere sight of the meat was enough to satisfy the most hungry students and one had to do great violence to oneself and overcome one's repugnance to eat that kind of sickening food which caused constant nausea and which could hardly be kept down. I am talking from personal experience because I stayed with that community at the time. /58/ It is now near the Junior Seminary and everything has changed a good deal since then.

Each student had to provide himself with bread, so he could choose it and eat it at his own discretion; as for water, there was no shortage of it, and the community used it generously as wine was not yet known there. Abstinence days brought little to make up for the lack of appetizing food on ordinary days: the students were served with rice cooked in water and laced with very little milk, or they had swedes and broad beans seasoned in the same way. The students themselves were well able to do this kind of cooking, and they took it in turns. If the subject were not so serious, it would not be inappropriate to say that each of them was thus given a chance of poisoning the rest.

/59/ However strong and robust his health M. Grignon could not stand up to studying so assiduously and being fed so scantily, all the more so as he kept to his plan of penances and did not relax it in the least; so he fell ill and was soon at death's door.

## **XXI° - HIS ILLNESS**

He had taken his turn to do the cooking and was wearing a hair-shirt when he felt the first onslaught of the disease. The first thing he did was to take off the hair-shirt and to hide it under his straw mattress so that nobody might ever know about it, but God willed otherwise, for it was discovered some time later, lying there just as he had put it. He was immediately taken to the “Hôtel-Dieu”, and, although he had not been ordained, /60/ he was put in the ward reserved for priests, which was the best place for him, for the nuns soon discovered his great piety and his rare virtue and gave him every possible attention.

Illness, which often puts virtue to the test, can also prove a stumbling block, as is the case, all too often, for those who are not very far advanced on the way of perfection. Convalescence. is an even more perilous time for pious souls, even for those with the strongest character. The virtue of M. Grignon passed through this double crucible and came out refined and more radiant than ever.

He was overjoyed when he realized that he was being taken to the “Hôtel-Dieu” just as some might be were they taken to a palace. He was never ashamed of staying at a place with such a name as “Hôtel-Dieu”; he regarded it as his real home /61/ to which he was entitled to go by right at any time because of the poverty which he professed. The name “Hôtel-Dieu” delighted him, and when I visited him there he said to me cheerfully and laughing: “I am in the house of God. This is a great honour. My relatives may not be too happy about it but nature seldom agrees with grace.” His face radiated joy, peace and serenity. He did not look as if he were in pain and it would have been difficult to realize that

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<sup>26</sup> By quoting this sentence, M. Blain seems to refer to Saint Bernard. This sentence is drawn from the Life of Saint Bernard by Guillaume de Saint-Thierry.

he was ill if the disease had not manifested itself. As usual he talked only of God and of things related to God; it was impossible to visit him without admiring him.

## **XXII° - HIS VIRTUE IS MADE MANIFEST AND EDIFIES**

Some even visited him just for the sake of being edified. He never complained nor worried nor showed any sign of pain or impatience. /62/ I would go so far as to say that no human weakness could be detected in this sick man who was almost dying. He was subjected to a number of blood-lettings repeated at very short intervals; their effect was to make him weaker and weaker, so this treatment was really courting death and he soon found himself actually at death's door. It seemed as if he were going to breathe his last after the last drop of blood had come out, for the vein was closed up only after he had lost so much blood that his exhausted body had no more left.

Even when he was given up for lost and so near to death he lost none of his peacefulness and serenity; he was upheld by his great innocence and his rigorous penance.

## **XXIII° - HE PREDICTS THAT HE WILL NOT DIE OF HIS ILLNESS**

Besides, he did not agree with those who had given him up for lost; what he said may have been the result of divine inspiration, /63/ or he may have had some divine revelation assuring him of what was to come, but he told me confidentially and quite clearly that he was not going to die and that he would soon be well again.

He broke free from death's jaws very quickly, and a few days later he looked like a man risen from the dead; he was even fit enough to get up, walk, read and pray. When I reported this to M. Brenier, Superior of the Junior Seminary of St Sulpice<sup>27</sup>, where I was staying at the time, he told me that it is not uncommon for God to allow some holy people to reach death's door and to snatch them back when all hope of recovery is lost in order to manifest in this way His power and His tenderness.

During his convalescence, while he was regaining strength, M. Grignon felt an ever greater desire to serve God and, like an athlete /64/ who has had some rest while sitting, he seemed to have renewed his determination to continue to fight the world and the flesh. Providence arranged things in such a way that the letters of Father Surin fell into his hands. He was greatly impressed by them, especially by the first one, which tells of the admirable virtue of the young man whom the holy Jesuit met on the coach from Paris to Rouen<sup>28</sup>.

## **XXIV° - HE JOINS THE JUNIOR SEMINARY OF SAINT SULPICE**

When M. Grignon left the "Hôtel-Dieu", God, who seems to have always led him by the hand, enabled him to join the Junior Seminary of St Sulpice. This was the kind of place most suitable for him to soar to the heights of the most sublime perfection under the guidance of two saints, namely, his spiritual director and his Superior. /65/ He was to live with a large number of very pious young men burning with the same zeal for their sanctification. They

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<sup>27</sup> Antoine Brenier (1651-1714), a Sulpician, founded the minor seminary of Saint Sulpice in 1684, which he directed until 1695. In March 1696, after a few months in the seminary at Angers, he came back again as superior at Saint Sulpice.

<sup>28</sup> SURIN (Jean Joseph), *Correspondance*, text presented with commentaries by Michel de CERTEAU, Paris, 1966. It is said, pp. XIV-XV, that the first publication of Volume I of these letters - the one in which the event mentioned by Blain is related - was completed on the 1st September 1695. Unless the seminarian's convalescence was longer than usually accepted, M. Blain might have been mistaken about the time when M. Grignon found Surin's letters.

were not leading an easy life there; although the food was sufficient it was poor and the whole emphasis was on poverty, obedience, and mortification.

Only those who were the instruments of this grace and did him this favour could say how Providence arranged things so that he was accepted as a non-paying student. The worthy Superior who was in charge of the seminaries of St Sulpice and has run them so wisely and piously for so long is still alive and could give the information. I think if he prefers not to give it, it is because he was instrumental in this act of charity: / 66/ his generous gifts contributed towards paying for M. Grignon's board and lodging at the Junior Seminary<sup>29</sup>. All I know is that the reputation of the great virtue of the convalescing student, which had become more manifest during his illness, had spread to the houses of St Sulpice through those who had gone there on leaving the community of M. de la Barmondière. The result was that the priests of St Sulpice wished to have him as one of their students.

Be that as it may, M. Brenier welcomed him as if he had been an angel sent from heaven. Although he did not realize it at the time, M. Brenier thought that the arrival of this clerical student was a great grace for the Seminary. In order to thank God for this grace he asked that the "Te Deum" be said, and I can guarantee /67/ that it was actually said. True, the wise Superior gave no public explanation for this, though he may have confided it to someone or hinted at it in some way. The fact remains that all of us were convinced that if the "Te Deum" had been said it was in thanksgiving for the arrival of M. Grignon<sup>30</sup> and we talked openly about it amongst ourselves.

### **XXV° - M. BAÜYN, ONE OF THE MOST HOLY PRIESTS OF THE CENTURY, BECOMES HIS NEW SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR, AND M. BRENIER, ANOTHER SAINT, BECOMES HIS NEW SUPERIOR**

For a disciple so far advanced in the science of the saints, very skilful masters were necessary; as I have said before, God supplied them in the persons of M. Bäüyn and M. Brenier.

M. Bäüyn, his director, was an angel living on earth and one of the most holy men of the last few centuries. His austere way of life and his extraordinary penance made him a martyr. He was a second Francis de Sales /68/ in his burning zeal, his incomparable gentleness and his boundless charity for his neighbour; he was a second Philip Neri in his love of God, his meditation and intimate union with God. M. Brenier, who had founded the Junior Seminary, was of a rich illustrious family, but he was the humblest of men. All that he was concerned about was to keep out of the limelight or to appear contemptible; he was the only one to be unaware of his obedience, his mortification, his prudence and his other virtues. These virtues of his have been praised by all who have known him. He looked on himself as a

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<sup>29</sup> The term "Saint Sulpice's seminaries" covers three different and adjacent communities: the Seminary for those students who were healthy and could pay for their boarding; the Small community for those who could pay but were not in good health; the junior Seminary for those who had neither health nor money. M. Grignon was admitted to the latter in 1695; it was a "Major Seminary", according to the usual meaning of the term. In a letter dated July 11, 1695, Montfort explained that his boarding (260 livres) was paid partly by Mme d'Alègre's donation (160 livres) and partly by the benefice from a small chapel, which Mr. Bäüyn had obtained for him; cf GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, pp. 8-9. These details correct the assertion of M. Blain who claims that M. François Leschassier had admitted Montfort without any charge. M. François Leschassier (1641-1725) was then the Superior of the Seminary properly so called; later he became Superior General of the whole Company (1700-1725).

<sup>30</sup> It seems that on this point M. Blain makes another mistake, as M. Bäüyn had already taken the place of M. Brenier as the superior of that house.

sinner, a great sinner, the greatest of all sinners, and he wanted everybody to look on him as such, He felt insulted when somebody praised him, and his joy was to be left aside or insulted. As a result of his mortification and of his obedience, which were as remarkable as his humility, he practised self-denial to such a high degree, that he might have been one of the early anchorites.

/69/ I often deplore the fact that nobody has yet written the biography of these two holy priests who were so like the early Christians. All religious Orders keep up-to-date records of their members. These records give due honour to the names and lives of those who have excelled in piety. Could no one be found to write the lives of holy diocesan priests who lived in the last few decades? I feel sure that many of them are worthy of the first centuries of Christianity and of apostolic times. The biographies of the early Superiors and directors of St Sulpice who lived either in Paris or in the provinces would of themselves provide ample material for a whole volume. Such names as Fathers Bretonvilliers, Tronson, de la Barmondière, Balsa. d'Entrecolles, have sunk into oblivion, and the edification which such priestly lives could give has been irrevocably lost<sup>31</sup>. / 70/ May God inspire someone to recall their memory, to write their lives. and so edify the Church.

### **XXVI° - M. GRIGNION INCREASES HIS PIETY, WHICH BECOMES. MORE MANIFEST THAN EVER**

To come back to M. Grignon: when he joined the Junior Seminary of St Sulpice, which was then full of the most Pious young men, he seemed to rise far above them all like an eagle soaring into the heights above the clouds. His silence, his recollection, his mortification, his austerity, astonished even those who excelled in these virtues. As his superiors had not deemed it fit that he should continue his studies at the Sorbonne<sup>32</sup>, he had more time to devote to God and could give full play to his dominant inclination for solitude and prayer. He lived in the centre of Paris as if he were in a desert and never left his room except to go to the spiritual exercises of the community and he came back to his room just as recollected as when he left it. /71/ As he made no use of his eyes, his tongue nor his ears, they were no obstacle to his union with God on whom he wanted to concentrate all his being.

Far from being a cause of distraction, the recreations helped him in his recollection, for he could only speak of Jesus and Mary or listen to others speaking of them; he found dull and boring any reading or conversation in which the names of Jesus and Mary were not mentioned. He kept silent as if his tongue cleaved to his palate if anyone changed the subject. He nearly always came back to the subject of the Blessed Virgin whose greatness, virtues and privileges he praised constantly. He did so too often in the opinion of some less pious people who picked quarrels /72/ with him and reproached him either with turning Mary into a deity or with rating the Mother more highly and loving Her more dearly than he did the Son.

If it was a fault with him to praise the Mother of God untiringly and to preach devotion to her unceasingly, it must be said that he never amended his ways in this respect, nor did he ever intend to, following in this the example of several saints who kept the name of Mary ever on their lips and in their hearts.

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<sup>31</sup> Alexandre Le Ragois de Bretonvilliers (1620-1676), Louis Tronson (1622-1700), Claude Bottu de la Barmondière (1635-1694), Jean Pierre Balsa (1660-1700), Ignace Martial d'Entrecolles (died in 1717) were all Sulpicians.

<sup>32</sup> The cancellation of his studies at La Sorbonne is confirmed by GRANDDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon*, pp: 13-14. Louis Marie's humility and his need for recollection account for this decision.

## XXVII° - SOME PEOPLE COMPLAIN THAT HE TALKS ONLY OF GOD AND OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

However, he turned these reproaches to good account because they gave him an opportunity of keeping the conversation on God and the things of God; but talking of God was no more pleasing to those who reproached him than talking of Mary. They complained /73/ about it to M. Bäüyn, the, holy director I have already mentioned, who was then acting as Superior of the Junior Seminary because M. Brenier had gone to Angers<sup>33</sup>. The holy man told M. Grignon that he should not turn recreation into a meditation and that, out of consideration for those who were still weak and not very far advanced in the way of perfection, he should avoid talking only of God and of the things of God or at least not talk about this subject to the exclusion of all others.

It must be admitted that this warning sounded rather forced coming from M. Bäüyn, this seraphic man who himself delighted in talking about God and no less enjoyed thinking about Him. If it was a fault not to be able to talk of anything else, then the holy Superior /74/ was the first to be blamed and M. Grignon in following his own inclination was really following the example of his Superior-director. M. Bäüyn was so full of God and so empty of everything else that he would have been at a loss to carry on a conversation on any other subject. I can say truthfully that he could not help it; if on reflection he became aware that he should stop talking about this subject for a short while in order not to turn recreation into meditation, then words failed him and he could not think of anything to say. /75/ He let somebody else carry on the conversation and took advantage of this to recollect himself and resume his union with God.

I have often seen the most pious students gather around him and stand in silence listening to the words of life that came from his lips; and when he had himself been silent for some time, he had to start talking again of God and of the things of God. The result was that when the recreation came to an end, the students felt as recollected and full of fervour as if they had just finished their meditation. M. Bäüyn did this purposely, and I have heard him say that there was no better way of becoming closely united to God than to talk of Him quite frankly and simply during recreation which thus became more efficacious than meditation proper.

M. Grignon felt therefore more inclined to follow his example than to take his warning seriously. However, obedience, which stands supreme among all virtues, made it a duty for him to humour the weak and to avoid putting them off spiritual things by talking of them too frequently. Yet, what could he do? He /76/ was constantly absorbed by the thought of God, and neither his mind nor his heart furnished any other idea. As he could not speak of them he had to keep them to himself and leave it at that. Like M. Bäüyn, he no longer dared talk too much about God, so he kept silence and did not contribute any thing to the conversation; his body was there but his mind was elsewhere, or rather it was completely recollected, concentrated on God. However, his desire for obedience as well as for charity often compelled him to come out of himself and to look cheerful and jovial during recreation. For this purpose he had even collected some jokes and amusing stories which he told as best he could, during recreation, but it must he said /77/ that he was no more gifted for this than was M. Bäüyn. The master and his disciple disliked things of this world so much that they could talk about them only with reluctance, in a dull way, which made them sound very

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<sup>33</sup> M. Brenier was appointed to the seminary at Angers in May 1695; he remained there until Spring 1696, after M. Bäüyn's death. This complaint against Montfort must have occurred during the first months after Louis Marie's arrival at the Junior Seminary, before Spring 1696.

boring. What might perhaps have raised a laugh while listening to them was to hear them say the most amusing things in a devout way. They were far more successful when they talked of God, because they could then give full play to their character and their inclination and talk in a pleasant manner about a subject they enjoyed.

He was always wearing a large crucifix

**XXVIII° - HIS DEVOTION AND HIS ZEAL  
PROMPT HIM TO INTRODUCE SEVERAL PIOUS  
OBSERVANCES AND HE PUTS HIS IDEAS INTO  
PRACTICE**

M. Prévost

M. Grignon was endowed with an inventive mind and a lively imagination, so he always had some suggestions to make as regards new practices or new reasons for practising virtue. He would have liked everybody to join the society of /78/ the slaves of the Blessed Virgin. The source of this zeal was the book written on this subject by the late M. Boudon<sup>34</sup>; and he was given permission to exert his zeal and to exhort everybody to practise this devotion. However, in order to forestall any objection even from the most critical, that great man, M. Tronson, Superior of St Sulpice but living in retirement at Issy, thought it fit to change the expression “slaves of Mary”, as used in the formula by the members of the association and also in its statutes, to “slaves of Jesus in Mary”<sup>35</sup>. After M. Grignon had agreed to this suggestion, the zealous devotee of the Blessed Virgin was at perfect liberty to enrol in the association as many people as he could.

M. Grignoin did not confine himself to this. A small book /79/ called The Little Psalter of St Bonaventure, fell into his hands. In this book the words of the psalms are applied to the Blessed Virgin and turned into a prayer of praise to Her. M. Grignon enjoyed reading this book very much indeed<sup>36</sup>. He was so delighted to have found this manna that he wished the other seminarians to taste it. After he had been given permission by his Superiors, he prevailed upon all those who had not yet been ordained to say the Little Psalter on their half-days.

**XXIX° - HIS LOVE FOR THE BLESSED VIRGIN PROMPTS HIM TO  
WEAR A PICTURE OF HER ALL THE TIME. HE ALSO WORE A  
FAIRLY LARGE CRUCIFIX CONSTANTLY**

When he came across pictures of the Blessed Virgin which he found beautiful and inspiring he used to feast his eyes on them and he would go to any length to acquire them. He occasionally bought quite a number of them and gave them away in the Junior and Senior Seminaries and elsewhere. He made it a point of always wearing one /80/ and after finding one made of metal he would hold it in his hand, look at it, revere it, kiss the feet of the Virgin with ever-increasing devotion. When he was a student in M. Boucher's community, he used to keep it in his hand while studying his notes.. As some people thought that he was unduly

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<sup>34</sup> BOUDON (Henri-Marie), *God alone or holy slavery to the admirable Mother of God*, Paris, 1668, in-12, 572 pages.

<sup>35</sup> Louis Tronson (1622 1700) was the Superior General of the Company of Saint Sulpice from 1676 until his death. He proposed an alteration to the formula, which is quoted by M. Grignon himself. GRIGNION DE MONTFORT *Complete works*, p. 651.

<sup>36</sup> The booklet was a transposition of the Divine Office, in which the 150 psalms were applied to Mary. This psalter of the Blessed Virgin, which is not what is called the “Little Office”, is attributed to Saint Bonaventure himself.

attached to it, a good priest who was his confessor at the time, deemed that it would be a good sacrifice if he were to part with it and he took it from him. It was a very great sacrifice indeed, but he said that if the picture of his good Mother could be snatched from his hand it could not be removed from his heart. This deprivation only served to make him more anxious to acquire another one, which he soon did.

### **XXX° - HIS BURNING ZEAL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD. HOW HE PARTS TWO YOUNG MEN WHO HAD DRAWN THEIR SWORDS**

Even as a seminarian /81/ he was so sensitive when the honour and glory of God was at stake that he could not control his zeal when he saw Him being offended. One day in Paris he saw two young men draw their swords and begin fighting. He went up to them and held up a crucifix, for he always wore one as well as a picture of the Blessed Virgin. He then spoke to them in such moving and effective terms that they drew apart.

He became chaplain and I think that he is now Canon of the Cathedral at Noyon. He was the brother of the, man who was Solicitor General a few years ago and his name was Poignard.

A few years later one of them was called to the priesthood and came to the Junior Seminary of St Sulpice to acquire the spirit proper to this state of life. There it was that he himself told me about the incident which I have just related and about which M. Grignon had told me before. The young man said that he had been greatly impressed by this gallant action and it was immediately after that /82/ he had considered

dedicating himself to God.

It is only too common an occurrence in the streets of Paris to see and hear men and women selling licentious songs and singing them at the tops of their voice. Whenever he came across such a scene, M. Grignon was very distressed because he could not do anything about it. As he could not strike at the root of evil, he tried to stem its tide, for some time at least; he would buy on the spot all the copies of the bawdy songs the vendors offered for sale and tear them up in their face while mildly rebuking them; and because of the money they received most of them took no offence. When it was pointed out to him that the zeal he displayed on these occasions was of virtually no avail /83/ because he could only stop for a short time a torrent of obscene publications which in fact he helped to swell and spread further by supplying money, he replied that he would be satisfied if he could prevent or even delay a sin being committed. He did the same when he found licentious books on the banks of the River Seine: He bought them and tore them up in spite of the fact that it was pointed out to him that there were infinitely more and that it would take vast sums of money to clear bookshops of this plague.

At other times the zealous seminarian suggested that they could pay to each other's guardian angels the homage of respect, love and gratitude which is due to them; he introduced the practice /84/ of addressing to them inwardly the outward greetings people gave to each other. Actually this practice had long been recommended and observed at St Sulpice. Or again he concentrated on the practice of saying "Deo gratias"; he said it himself on all occasions, following the example of a Capucine Brother, St Felix of Cantalice, and exhorted others to do the same.

I should have a lot more to say if I had stayed longer with M. Grignon at the Junior Seminary.

### **XXXI° - HIS RECOURSE TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN HIS NEEDS AND THE PROTECTION HE RECEIVED FROM HER**

I remember when I was still there with him, M. Le Vallier was one of our fellow-students. He was a good layman whom I have already mentioned and who had moved from the community of M. de la Barmondière to the Junior Seminary. One day he told me, that M. Grignion had given him 30 sols, which was all he had, and had asked him to buy something for a pair of suede trousers him. /85/ Now, 30 sols was nowhere near the price he would have to pay for the purchase. He remarked on this to M. Grignion who replied that he had no faith and that he should go and make the purchase just the same. Indeed, the good layman did not have enough faith to make the 30 sols multiply, and when he offered them in payment for an article which was worth three times as much people laughed at him. When he brought the 30 sols back to M. Grignion, he was reproached again for his lack of faith; then M. Grignion added that his good Mother, meaning the Blessed Virgin, would eke out the sum. In the meantime, M. Le Vallier came to me and told me what had happened; then he said: "I have no doubt that M. Grignion, who has so much confidence in the Blessed Virgin, /86/ will find the necessary money and bring it to me this very day." Sure enough, he did.

### **XXXII° - THOUGH NEVER FAILING IN OBEDIENCE HE BEARS THE REPROACHES IN THIS RESPECT WITH GREAT EQUANIMITY AND PATIENCE**

It is now time to say how exact was his obedience, because this virtue is the test and evidence of all the others, and if he had failed in it there would be grounds for calling his holiness into question. He has often been reproached with lack of obedience, however; and this reproach is very trying for the truly obedient and of all reproaches it is the one most likely to upset them. God, who takes pleasure in sanctifying souls in a thousand different ways, often hides the most genuine virtues under what would appear to be the opposite vice. He allows accusations to be made against these souls for faults of which they are entirely innocent and although these persons may seem guilty /87/ in the eyes of men they are perfectly blameless in the eyes of God. As the grain hidden under the snow in winter lives on and develops there, so through humiliations and reproaches their virtue is purified and strikes deep roots into their souls.

The reproach which most hurts a soul genuinely seeking God is to be accused of disobedience. There is none more alarming /88/ nor more upsetting because it is self-will which engenders all sin and destroys all virtue.

The mere idea of self-will is abhorrent to the saints because they know that it is the enemy of the will of God and their hearts bleed at the mere suspicion of being disobedient; they are on their guard against that evil which brought on mankind all ills; they are alarmed and dismayed when their conscience tells them in secret what they are reproached with publicly, namely, that they lack obedience. If they appear not to be obedient and are constantly accused of this, although they do obey perfectly, then their sorrow is extreme and they need all the courage and fortitude in the world to possess their souls in patience and be satisfied with the evidence of their conscience and that of God Himself.

It can be said that it is a kind of martyrdom for one who is trying to do the will of God in everything to be told that he is constantly doing his own.

/89/ Some may wonder how a person dedicated to obedience can be subject to reproaches for disobedience. This happens whenever God allows it to happen, when He

allows the devil's malice to have its way. Too often those not versed in seeing through the devil's ways mistake appearances for reality, vice for virtue and hypocrites for saints. Even the saints in this world sometimes fail to recognise holiness in other people and it is not uncommon that such persons persecute each other. Since Christ and His Apostles were treated as evil-doers, we should not be surprised at anything that happens in this respect, as witness so many examples in the Old as well as in the New Testament.

It is no more difficult /90/ for the devil to get people accused of acting out of self-will when in fact they act out of obedience or are inspired by the Holy Spirit than it was to represent the chaste Joseph as a corrupt and infamous man in the eyes of Putiphar who was taken by surprise and deceived by what his unchaste wife told him. It was just as easy for him to make the holy man Job look a criminal in the eyes of his greatest friends and of those who must have known him best as it was to tarnish the reputation of the most chaste and most faithful of all wives, Susanna, by making her appear as an adulteress and having her condemned as such.

Humble people are often accused of being proud and sometimes the shame of impurity blackens the reputation of the most chaste. Every day the devil invents new means /91/ of misrepresenting piety and of casting a slur on the most perfect virtue. But if he can deceive men he cannot deceive God who often purifies the souls of his servants by the very same means used by the devil to corrupt them.

Judgments passed on the behaviour of other people are usually a reflection of the dispositions of those who see them. We judge according to our own dispositions. We assume that other people think what we ourselves think and that their behaviour is prompted by the same motives which prompt our own. Appearances are often the only rule we go by; that is why our judgments are so wrong.

M. Grignon was passionately eager for perfection and he regarded obedience /92/ as the shortest way to reach it. However, he seems to have often strayed from this path in the eyes of those who were on the look-out to find fault with his ways and were bent on his condemnation whether it be justified or not. I have often heard people complain that he was opinionated, eccentric and self-willed, or that he was carried away by his imagination, not amenable to obedience, or that he thought his ideas were the only ones right and that he substituted his own will for the will of God. These hurting remarks were made to him but he bore all with his usual patience and equanimity. If he were really guilty of all these faults, there would be no point in writing the history of his life /93/ for the edification of the general public, for a person who is not obedient cannot be truly virtuous. Had his life been as unusual and miraculous as that of St Simon Stylite, it would become suspect and would even deserve condemnation were there the least sign of self-will.

In fact he always obeyed exactly; and as all the virtues are so closely linked together the loss of one weakens the others, so he could not have been humble, mortified, recollected and intimately united with God if he had not been very obedient. The irrefutable proof of this, and I put it forward as an unquestionable principle, is that complete obedience to one's spiritual director, to the rule, /94/ to the will of one's Superiors is the proof of perfect obedience which shows complete detachment from any expression of self-will. Now, throughout his life M. de Montfort followed the advice of the wisest and most pious spiritual directors. Inside the Seminary as well as outside he was a model of the most exact regularity. He always sought and followed the advice of his Superiors and never acted in any way contrary to what he knew was their wish. I have always known him to do this, I who can claim to having known

him more intimately than anybody else, and I am now going to give evidence of his obedience by examining all his conduct<sup>37</sup>.

### **XXXIII° - PROOF OF HIS OBEDIENCE. HE WAS ALWAYS OBEDIENT TO HIS SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AND TO THE RULE. HIS GREAT ATTRACTION FOR MORTIFICATION AND MEDITATION**

He has always trusted the guidance of the most holy and most enlightened spiritual directors at all times and in all places, and has followed their advice and suggestions like a child. /95/ As a schoolboy, the spiritual director he had chosen was a Jesuit, Father Descartes, a well-known director of Rennes, who was a very enlightened man with a deep knowledge of spiritual matters, in charge of guiding a large number of persons greatly advanced in perfection<sup>38</sup>. This priest regarded M. Grignon as a saint and an extraordinary man even though eccentric in some ways; but his great virtue outweighed his eccentricity with which God allowed him to be afflicted as a source of humiliation.

I met Father Descartes at Rennes eleven or twelve years ago, and we discussed M. Grignon. He told me that he admired his love of the cross /96/ and the fortitude with which he bore his suffering. He said to me: "For this man the most painful cross is like a piece of straw which is thrown on to a big fire: it is instantly consumed."

After Father Descartes, M. de la Barmondière was M. de Montfort's spiritual director. He was parish-priest of St Sulpice and his memory is held in veneration. I can assert that he guided him as he would have guided a child and found that he followed all his advice with a child's docility and obedience. He conformed in everything to the judgment of his director and would not do anything without consulting him first. Although he was naturally inclined to live in perpetual silence and complete solitude, in order to give himself entirely to conversation with God, he fought this inclination out of obedience and made a sacrifice in taking part in the recreations, which he found burdensome /97/ because he was then compelled to have dealings with men, which seemed to distract his attention from God.

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<sup>37</sup> From page 93 to page 180, M. Blain goes into a long digression, a kind of argument which, to some extent, dulls the story of M. Grignon's life. He integrates into it a few facts which are foreign to his purpose v.g. p. 116 about hymns composed by the seminarian. This argument is an attempt in favour of M. Grignon's obedience. It is based on a syllogism stated p. 93-94. It includes a major premise: submission to rules and superiors is a proof of complete obedience, and a minor premise: M. de Montfort was always submitted to directors, rules and superiors. This minor premise is developed in pages 94-180.

1st point: submission to his directors

- Father Descartes p. 95
- M. de la Barmondière, p. 96
- M. Baijn, p. 99
- M. Leschassier: relationship Director/disciple, p. 103
  - limitations imposed upon practices of penance, p. 110
  - measures to force M. Grignon to relax, p. 115
  - oddities, p. 118
  - M. Leschassier hands over to M. Brenier, p. 126
- after leaving the seminary, p. 134

2nd point: his obedience to regulations in the seminary, p. 137

3rd point: even after leaving the seminary, M. Grignon remained submitted to his superiors' will, p. 151 objections and six answers, p. 157.

<sup>38</sup> Philippe Descartes (1640-1716), the philosopher's nephew, was head-master, prefect of the Marian Congregation and confessor in the college at Rennes, during the years 1684-1692 while Louis Marie was a student.

His inclination for austerities was no less strong than for solitude and silence. As I have said before, those which his director allowed him to practice were extremely hard but I should add that those which were forbidden him were infinitely harder. If he had ever been tempted to set limits to his obedience, it would probably have been on this particular point, but he had always subordinated to the spirit of obedience the spirit of penance with which he was inflamed. He has never done anything contrary to obedience, the basis of all virtues; furthermore, the mortifications of all kinds to which he subjected his body were in accordance with the will of his director, and therefore sanctifying.

He has mentioned to me several times, if I remember rightly, the case /98/ of a nun who wanted to exceed the bounds which her Superiors had set to her mortification. Our Lord appeared to her and told her that she had begun her action for His sake but she would end by doing it for the sake of the devil. This may or may not have happened, but the fact remains that he was moved by the story and as it were nailed to obedience his passion for mortification. He also told me fairly frequently that in the past God used to inspire some people with a great longing for penance which obedience did not allow them to satisfy; their souls were thus subjected to a new kind of martyrdom because, on the one hand, they longed for penance and, on the other hand, the rules of obedience prevented or restricted them.

/99/ I can truthfully say that the great affection which M. de la Barmondière felt for M. de Montfort was prompted by his remarkable obedience as much as by his great innocence and penance.

#### **XXXIV° - M BAÜYN ONE OF THE MOST HOLY SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS OF THE CENTURY, TESTIFIES TO M. GRIGNION'S OBEDIENCE AND DEFENDS HIM**

M. Bäüyn, an angel living on earth, whom I have mentioned before, succeeded M. de la Barmondière as M. de Montfort's spiritual director. He had the same opinion of him as his predecessor. I heard him myself praise the obedience of the pious seminarian in the following circumstances. There was much talk in the seminary about the mortification and austerities of M. de Montfort. In this field as in those of meditation and recollection he was the despair of the most devout who found him inimitable. They would willingly have said /100/ to the Superior what the disciples of St Pacomius said about the great St Macarius who had come to live among them so as to remain hidden and unknown, or again the monks of the community where St Simon Stylite retired said to their Abbot: "What kind of man is this? He seems to have no body and lives no longer on this earth: his example drives us to despair because we cannot imitate nor follow him.". As the seminarians were talking among themselves and in the presence of M. Bäüyn about the great mortifications of M. de Montfort, some of them suggested that they might very well be followed by extreme relaxation as had been the case with M. \* \* \* \* whose example had made a great impression on them and taught them /101/ that the only safe way was that of obedience.

This M. \* \* \* \* was extremely mortified and had been given to excesses in austerities of all kinds. Some examples were given which were both odd and astonishing; but they did not bear the hallmark of obedience; they were inspired by self-will or by the devil and this was proved by their extravagant and stubborn nature. This young man could have attained a high degree of sanctity by being far less mortified and much more obedient. After he had given himself to these strange austerities for a few years, the directors in the seminary referred him one to another, for none of them would approve his ways nor was able to moderate him. /102/ So, without any merit on his part, he soon lost all physical and mental energy and was in great need of food and rest. This was eventually granted him in plenty and

even in excess so that he gradually fell from a state of great mortification to one of relaxation and over-indulgence and finally ended in disorderly living. Such was the seminarian to whom his companions compared M. de Montfort when they hazarded the prediction that he would come to the same end. But then M. Baiÿn, summing up in a nutshell the whole difference between the two seminarians, said: "If they are alike in the practice of penance, they are different in the practice of obedience: /103/ M. \* \* \* \* was self-willed whereas M. Grignon is obedient."

On another occasion I have heard M. Baiÿn say that there was something extraordinary about M. Grignon; that was why he guided him with special care and attention, endowed as he was with a special grace for the guidance of extraordinary souls along unusual ways..

### **XXXV° - M. LESCHASSIER, HIS SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AFTER THE DEATH OF M. BAUYN, PUTS HIS OBEDIENCE TO THE TEST AND PUTS HIM ON TRIAL IN EVERY WAY**

After M. Baiÿn died, M. de. Montfort asked M. Leschassier to be his spiritual director. So it is now the turn of this worthy Superior of the seminaries of St Sulpice to say what he knows of his penitent. Incidentally, M. Leschassier is still alive in spite of his poor health and his frail constitution. He knows what graces M. de Montfort received and what were his virtues. He tested his penitent's spirit and had it tested by other people in every possible manner. /104/ I know that he manipulated him, so to speak, in all kinds of ways, and studied him thoroughly. In order to put his obedience to the test he often took away the permission he had just given, he cut him down on meditation, mortifications and spiritual exercises. He seemed indifferent to all that the devout penitent appeared to enjoy; he, who was so well-informed about the way to sanctity, did his best to destroy in the pious desires of his disciple the most subtle forms of self-love. I gather this from what M. Grignon himself told me.

One of the rules at the Seminary of St Sulpice was that each seminarian should give an account of his spiritual life to his director or superior at least once a month. M. de Montfort, who was so keen on perfection, was anxious to fulfil this part of the rule and to acquaint his spiritual director fully with his inner dispositions by telling him all about his thoughts and feelings. Besides, the fear of falling a prey to the devil's deception and craftiness, or to the illusions and subtle deviations of self-will, kept him watchful and diffident; he could rely only on the guidance of his director to avoid so many hidden traps in the spiritual life. His anxiety to obey in everything prompted him to give an account of and to ask for advice on the most trivial things. In this spirit he never failed to visit M. Leschassier and tell him of his progress in the spiritual life; he did this not only once /106/ but several times a month, although it often happened that M. Leschassier would not listen to him and even rebuffed him and sent him away. The wise director thus kept M. Grignon waiting sometimes for several months, his penitent being always willing to give an account of his spiritual life, but being continually turned away until later. On one occasion I noticed that M. de Montfort was greatly mortified by this because he had no other resource but God and must rely on Him. So while he was trying his best to keep alive his desire for perfection, he was denied the means that lead to it, even those which seemed most necessary and were most widely used in the Church; /107/ for him they must be motivated by the supernatural and free from any human or natural consideration. This was probably why he was treated in this way by his spiritual director, who was such an adept in spiritual matters.

I must say that there could not have been any means more conducive to the seminarian's advancement than those used by M. Leschassier, who was the most moderate man in the world, endowed by nature and by grace with extreme aversion to excess of any kind. Under the guidance of M. de la Barmondière and of M. Baüyn, M. Grignon enjoyed more freedom and had more scope for his zeal for penance and spiritual exercises. These holy men, who themselves knew scarcely any bounds in this respect, had no objection to the most pious of their penitents /108/ being allowed ample opportunity to satisfy their desire for prayer and penance. I must add that these two holy directors, who were full of esteem and admiration for their penitent, sometimes gave away how they felt towards him, and such hints cannot but have fed what little self-love was still in him. Self-love indeed is so subtle and elusive that it is very hard to destroy even in the most virtuous souls.

I may be wrong in this but I think that M. Leshcassier behaved towards M. Grignon in a slightly different way. He checked all his desires, even the most pious and the most spiritual, and by not allowing him to put them into practice immediately and sometimes by ignoring them he tempered /109/ their ardour and purified them from any mixture of human motives. He got him accustomed to sacrificing everything else to obedience. He never gave an inkling of what he thought of his penitent and in his behaviour towards him everything was designed to destroy self-love. A few signs of esteem or approval, a few words of praise or comfort from a director encourage a depressed soul; but M. Grignon, who did not need any such salve, did not expect it from his director. If he was all aglow, then he would find his director as cold as ice, seemingly indifferent to all that concerned him, sending him back without listening to what he had to say and seeming /110/ to take not the slightest notice of his suggestions. He often said to him that his feeling and resolutions were figments of his imagination and he did not allow him to give them any consideration until he had given the impression of censuring or despising them.

### **XXXVI° - ALTHOUGH IT HAD BEEN TEMPERED, M. GRIGNION'S MORTIFICATION WAS STILL EXTREMELY SEVERE**

What made him even more uncomfortable was that now he was allowed to practice mortification only within narrow limits; these limits, however, were quite sufficient to cause physical pain. He scourged himself with the discipline so vigorously as though he wanted to cut himself to pieces. The following incident, which was told me by an eye-witness, is an illustration of this. Shortly after he had scourged himself with the discipline in the way I have just mentioned, M. Grignon met /111/ M. \* \* \*, who stopped him. While talking he inadvertently touched him. When he removed his hand he noticed that it was stained all over with blood. This must have mortified M. Grignon as much as it edified M. \* \* \*<sup>39</sup>.

Mr. Le Clerc, who is: now  
Director of the Seminary at  
Lyon

When he was allowed to retire to his room and stay hidden there the whole day long, he left it only to take part in the community exercises, and he spent all his time as obedience would have him do. He did everything that had been prescribed and never ventured to follow his inclination by devoting to prayer the time allotted to study. Besides, he was so careful /112/ and anxious to mortify himself in everything that if there was anything he enjoyed doing this was reason enough for him to regard it as a duty not to do it. When he received a letter he never opened it immediately but waited for some time in order to mortify his first

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<sup>39</sup> Laurent-Josse Le Clerc (1677-1736) entered Saint Sulpice junior seminary in 1696. He became a director at Saint Irénée's seminary at Lyon in 1722.

impulse and he sometimes put off reading letters for several weeks when he badly wanted to know what was in them. When I paid him visits he often left me alone suddenly, without giving any explanation, after the first words of greeting; he wanted to renounce the satisfaction which the visit of a friend would afford him.

The smallest and most uncomfortable room always devolved on him, /113/ in accordance with his wish. Nearly all the time he was at the seminary his room was one of those right under the roof; there he had every opportunity to suffer from the cold and the heat; he stayed there during the most severe winters and the bed bugs could bite him to their hearts content, safe as they were from any interference on his part.

No matter how cold it was he looked at the fire only to withdraw from it, and most of the time he did not wear enough clothes to keep warm in the severe winters. He did not go bare-foot because it did not become the dignity of his state but he found a way /114/ of practising a kind of mortification which only God could see: he cut off the feet of his socks which were hidden by his shoes. He practised this kind of mortification all the rest of his life, and it must have been more painful while he was at the seminary because he took no exercise and remained motionless in his room for the greater part of the day and as a natural result his feet must have been icy cold.

### **XXXVII° - HE BECOMES SO ABSTRACTED, SO WITHDRAWN, SO ABSORBED IN GOD THAT IN ORDER TO BRING HIM OUT HE IS GIVEN THE TASK OF MASTER OF CEREMONIES**

By means of this universal mortification and complete seclusion, M. Grignon developed a deep spiritual life and a profound recollection so that he seemed /115/ absorbed in God and incapable of exterior activities.

It was in order to bring him out of his state of abstraction that his wise director and superior gave him the office of master of ceremonies, which he fulfilled for six months under the authority of M. de Lagarde<sup>40</sup>. During that time he completed a task which several other people had unsuccessfully attempted: he classified and specified the tasks and functions of deacons, sub-deacons and acolytes so that it became easy to find information about them and to learn what they were because what used to be listed under various headings was then compiled and grouped into one category.

### **XXXVIII° - HE WRITES CANTICLES WHICH HE WILL USE LATER**

/116/ During his period of seclusion he also wrote hymns which he used later in his missions<sup>41</sup>. As soon as it was known that he was trying his hand at poetry, those seminarians who thought themselves clever were very anxious to read his poems hoping to have a good laugh at his expense. They thought that such a devout man could produce nothing amusing in the way of poetry since he was so abstracted, so withdrawn and his only subject of conversation was God. They soon realized however that if this very pious man could talk only of God and Mary he could express his ideas in very exalted terms, pleasant and full of

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<sup>40</sup> Laurent de la Garde, from the diocese of Quimper joined Saint Sulpice's seminary in 1676, he became master of ceremonies until his death in 1722.

<sup>41</sup> These hymns might be found, though altered, among the 163 hymns left by the missionary in four hand-written books which have been published in GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, p. 861-1673. When M. Blain mentions the warmth and popular meaning of these hymns, he refers to the journey he made to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre (1724), where he heard them sung by the parishioners.

unction; they also learnt that when they are kept hidden the qualities of the mind and of the soul /117/ become more refined and more pure.

I do not mean to say that the hymns written by M. de Montfort are in a refined delicate style or in accordance with the rules of high-quality poetry. As he meant them to be sung only by country-people or by ordinary people lacking refinement and polish, he concentrated more on devotion than on good quality and finish. In writing them he paid more attention to the spirit of God than to the tenets of good style; he has thus managed to sprinkle them with devotion, charm and unction, which qualities are not to be found to such a degree /118/ in other hymns. He has expressed the feelings of his heart towards Jesus and Mary in such tender and moving terms that it is difficult to check one's tears when one sings them with devotion and tries to adopt and enter into his pious sentiments.

### **XXXIX° - HIS ECCENTRICITY AND THE HUMILIATIONS IT BROUGHT HIM**

I feel I ought to say a word or two about his eccentricities. Not everybody found them pleasing and it must be admitted that he was very odd. The seminary of St Sulpice was the best place in the world for him to get rid of his eccentricity for it was thought relentlessly there as a great vice. This does not mean that the young men who gather there and come from all parts of France are constantly waging war /119/ against it by not letting anything pass that may offend their eyes or their ears; it does not mean either that they make such fun of anyone showing some eccentricity that he just has got to get rid of it as soon as possible. What it does mean is that the spirit of the house is a spirit of community life hidden in Christ which is in direct opposition to any eccentricity. The superiors and directors who are tending towards perfection themselves and leading others with them are entirely dedicated to the sanctification of those in their care; and they are so opposed to anything that smacks of eccentricity /120/ or seems unusual that they make it very easy for anyone under their guidance to get rid of any peculiar habits.

However, it must be said to their credit that all their care and efforts were defeated in the case of M. de Montfort. They did not succeed in ridding him of his eccentricity and mannerisms. He brought them with him to the seminary and he took them away with him when he left. No doubt, God wanted him to keep this source of humiliation as a cloak hiding the extraordinary virtues and graces with which he had endowed him.

It is probable that nothing brought him more insults and shame than his eccentricity and it can be said /121 / that taking it with him wherever he went he was also taking the cause of his troubles and of some of the persecutions to which he was subjected. In the seminary of St Sulpice, where a spirit of peace, gentleness and charity prevails, his eccentricity was frequently ridiculed and provided for some a subject for amusement. It is true that he bore it all with an equanimity and a patience which surpassed the peculiarity of his manners. There were even some eccentrics, whose mannerisms were even more peculiar than his, /122/ who persecuted him and slapped him in the face when he bent his head to one side to make him hold it straight. The warning was a cutting one and fit to correct anybody, but M. Grignon did not take offence and showed no signs of impatience; in fact he took advantage of it to correct the position of his head immediately so as not to give again the kind of offence for which he had just been blamed.

This happened during a public lecture, as was reported to me by an eye-witness, M. de Montillet.

## **XL° - HIS VIRTUE IS TESTED BY EXTREME HUMILIATIONS**

Extraordinary virtues seem to demand extraordinary trials. The saints probably need more patience than other people because they have a greater share of humiliation and suffering /123/ in their lives. It seems that everything turns against them and is in league to wage war on them. The paths they follow are very thorny for their virtue arouses the jealousy of men and the persecution of the devil.

False virtue often takes on the appearance of true virtue and deceives men very easily. Humility is the characteristic of true virtue just as pride, concealed and refined, is that of false virtue. According to the masters of the spiritual life, humiliations alone provide the means of discriminating between them with any certainty. /124/ When a humiliation is severe and prolonged it wears out the imperfect man and unmasks false virtue. True virtue alone can stand the test and, like gold in the furnace, come out purified and refined. That is why the Fathers of the Church and the founders of religious Orders have always insisted that their followers should be subjected to humiliations, and the more perfect among them to more severe tests. They taught only what they practised themselves and they always set the example before they gave the lesson. They guided others along the paths which they themselves trod first. Their purpose in inflicting humiliations /125/ was to test and purify the virtue of those whom they guided; they wanted to test it to find out whether it was true and what degree it had reached; they wanted to purify and increase it if it were already far advanced.

M. de Montfort's virtue was reputed extraordinary, so he was to have plenty of extraordinary trials. He had already had several, as we have seen, but he was later to be subjected to the most terrible. In order to prepare him for them and not let him rest or take any respite on the way to perfection, God prompted M. Leschassier /126/ to subject him to some long and severe humiliations.

To achieve this, he entrusted him to a man who was most suitable for the task, M. Brenier, Superior of the seminary where M. de Montfort was staying. As I have said before, M. Brenier was a saint and his great virtue was humility. The late M. Tronson, who had been his director and was well-known for his deep wisdom and his outstanding piety, had, as it were, been forced to encourage and guide M. Brenier along these lines of his penitent's longing for humiliations. Providence had made the task easier by subjecting this soul thirsty for humiliations to such severe tests as to satisfy even him and give him more than enough. /127/ Besides, nobody knew better than he the devious ways of self-love or could lay better traps to catch it out. Finally, he had a keen penetrating mind and was a good judge of souls. With the help of his natural qualities and of his wide experience, but even more with the grace of God which enlightened his humble soul, he could see through his penitents, knew how to unmask their most secret faults, and had acquired a thorough knowledge of the human heart, of its deepest recesses, of all its twists and turns.

M. Grignon could not have been in better hands to be humiliated to his heart's content, and sure enough, he had to bear prolonged and public humiliations. /128/ Not a chance was missed to rebuke him sharply. In M. Brenier's face he could never read anything but severity and disdain, only sharp and harsh words came from his lips and his eyes had always a severe threatening look. Because the holy Superior had a thorough knowledge of the human heart and was well aware of all the devious ways of self-love which he was singularly gifted to fight and compel to come out in the open or to disappear, he fought the spiritual battle with M. de Montfort in a masterly, unparalleled way. He carried out a thorough examination of the seminarian, of his inclinations, /129/ his disposition, of his character and temperament. On all occasions he watched out for any sign of natural impulse in order to

crush it, or for any indication of self-love to pursue it relentlessly and eradicate it. It was in public, that is, in the presence of all the seminarians in the community, that he attacked him most fiercely. When he wanted to, M. Brenier could terrify the boldest and shake the strongest with a single look or word. His attacks on M. de Montfort took place at the beginning of the recreations; he then lashed out at him on the points on which he thought him most vulnerable and said /130/ the most hurtful things he could think of in order to humiliate and mortify him.

None but M. de Montfort could have put up more than once with such deadly blows to natural impulses and self-love. Yet he endured them not just for one day but for six whole months at a stretch without being in the least perturbed. His patience and his humility got the better of the man bent on mortifying him so that M. Brenier had to give up and to admit to M. Leschassier, who had entrusted him with this task, that he was at his wit's end and could not think of anything else /131/ which would succeed in humiliating M. Grignon.

M. Brenier had used all his resources and had applied all his knowledge to the task, yet he had failed to shake the constancy of the holy seminarian; while he was being humiliated he remained as unperturbed as if he had been praised; after the humiliation he came to his holy persecutor as cheerfully as if he wanted to thank him, and spoke to him as naturally as if he had just been congratulated. I have this from M. de Montillet an eye-witness who is now parish-priest in the diocese of Rouen after having been in charge of the Junior Seminaries in the diocese for twelve years<sup>42</sup>.

/132/ This makes it abundantly clear that while he was a seminarian it was impossible for M. de Montfort to do his own will, and the director and Superior he found there were just the right men to fight and destroy his self-love. He spent those years under their sharp, watchful, critical eyes which pierced its depths, and which knew how to discover and attack its most sensitive spots. He could not escape their eyes, not could he escape their censure and even the slightest signs of self-love did not go unpunished.

The obedient man proclaims his victories, Scripture says<sup>43</sup>. Once he has conquered his own opinion and his own will, /133/ the most redoubtable enemies of his salvation, the first to appear and the last to die, he becomes master of himself, he tramples his passions and inclinations underfoot, he rules over all his feelings, and his mind enjoys profound peace and full liberty. These are surely the qualities we see in M. de Montfort. As I have just shown, he was completely dead to himself, completely calm and untroubled under the blows aimed at humiliating him. If obedience and victory are so closely connected, the latter is an unmistakable indication of the former; so many victories won over his self-will and self-love are ample proof of his perfect obedience. Vir obediens loquetur victorias

## **XLI° - HE OBEYS HIS DIRECTOR OUTSIDE THE SEMINARY**

/134/ Some people may wonder whether after he had surrendered his self-will to obedience in a place where it would have been difficult for him not to do so, he in fact ever surrendered it completely and did not act in his own way once left to himself. The answer is that he always obeyed his director, outside as well as inside the seminary. He always obeyed M. Leschassier as long as he was under his guidance, and it was a great humiliation for him

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<sup>42</sup> Antoine de Montillet (1676-1741) hailed from the diocese of Autun. In 1710 he was appointed superior of Saint Nicaise's junior seminary (Rouen), then superior of the seminary for theologians and finally (1722) parish-priest of Sasseville where he remained until his death.

<sup>43</sup> Proverbs, 21, 28, Vir obediens loquetur victoriam.

when such a wise director refused to guide him any longer<sup>44</sup>. Through his eccentricity and his extraordinary mannerisms, M. de Montfort brought upon himself this cross, /135/, inflicted by the wise Superior of St Sulpice who, until then, had been kind and charitable to him in all kinds of ways. And the weight of this cross was made heavier by the fact that Father Sanadon, who was then giving the retreats at the Novitiate of the Jesuits and was a very capable director, greatly esteemed<sup>45</sup>, dared not assume the responsibility of guiding a man who, though very virtuous indeed, had such peculiar and extraordinary ways. It seemed as if Providence were leaving M. de Montfort to his own counsel, without anyone to guide him, /136/ since those whom he wanted and whom he had every reason to trust refused this service. However, he was too humble and too fond of obedience to shake off its yoke at the first difficulty. His self-will seemed to crush him and he would have felt ashamed of following its dictates after he had so often repudiated and renounced it. He therefore resolved not to follow his own counsel but to ask advice in everything. He returned to his first director, Father Descartes. As he could not consult the priests of St Sulpice, whom he trusted fully and whom he regarded as oracles /137/ but who had become dumb for him, he usually went to the Jesuit Fathers in the places where he happened to be, and followed their instructions<sup>46</sup>. It is well known that when it is practised in the spirit of faith and with holy dispositions, spiritual direction requires complete self-surrender and therefore demands continual renunciation of one's own lights and opinions. Whoever submits to it blindly on his way to God as M. Grignon did, should be counted among the perfectly obedient who proclaim their victories over the devil, the world and the flesh.

## XLII° - HIS GREAT REGULARITY

Secondly, his obedience to the Rule was no less exact. In a holy community the Rule is /138/ the voice of God making known His will at all times. The Gospel gives us the broad outline of the will of God, the Rule gives it in detail, applying it to particular situations. It leaves man no room for freedom, as it tells him when and where each particular action should be performed; so his every movement is within the framework of the Rule. The name that God promised through His prophet can justly be given to one who is faithful to his rule: "He will be called my incarnate will." *Vocabitur voluntas mea in ea*<sup>47</sup>. The reason for this is that by obeying the Rule he constantly renounces his own will in order to do the will of God. /139/. It can be said that in this respect M. de Montfort was a perfectly obedient man all his life, as he always was a "living" Rule.

When he was at the seminary of St Sulpice he was a pillar of regularity. He regularly arrived first for the community exercises, and never once in his life did he ask for any

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<sup>44</sup> In a letter dated May 21, 1701, M. Leschassier answers M. Grignon, saying that he does not think that he is sufficiently enlightened to direct persons whose behaviour is so extraordinary. In another letter, dated November 12, 1701 he says that he is not able to be his director, due to the fact that he is too far away and that his ways are too extraordinary. In his last letter to M. Leschassier (July 4, 1702) M. Grignon, who was then at Poitiers, speaks of a person who directs him in the place of M. Leschassier, GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> Nicolas Sanadon (1652-1720) was, in the beginning of the XVIIIth century in the Novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers, Pot de Fer street (in front of Saint Sulpice's). He was there to conduct retreats held in the house. His refusal to be the director of M. Grignon must have occurred between the years 1703 and 1704, when the latter was in Paris.

<sup>46</sup> Eventually we came to know the names of some of these Jesuit Fathers who accepted to be the spiritual directors of M. Grignon: Father de La Tour at Poitiers in 1706; Father Martinet at Nantes in 1711. cf GRANDDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Maric Grignon*, pp. 95, 462-463.

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah, 62, 4 "Vocaberis voluntas mea in ea".

exemption or dispensation. He did not take a step without permission and he never got annoyed nor tired of asking them. In fact he enjoyed it and he never allowed himself perfectly legitimate actions until he had been granted the right by an express permission. /140/. I have seen him use innocent evasions and pious tricks, if I may so describe them, in order to ask permissions. On several occasion when I went to see him I met him in the house, but he evaded me when I tried to stop him so that he could first get permission to speak to me. On similar occasions I have seen him pick something up and, on pretext of taking it back to his room or somewhere else, he allowed himself time to go and ask permission to speak to the person who wanted him.

### **XLIII° - HIS LOVE OF DEPENDANCE**

In short, this fervent seminarian after the example of the saints, /141/ used all kinds of pious artifices so as to lose no opportunity of practising obedience; and in everything to act in a spirit of obedience. Even when he met some people unexpectedly and good manners seemed to make it a duty for him not to ask permission so as not to offend their susceptibilities by excessive and scrupulous regularity he still insisted on doing nothing without permission and risked their displeasure.

There is nothing that so wounds the pride of man as dependence. The first suggestion of independence made to the first woman by the serpent, although it was foolish and extravagant, dazzled and delighted her. Without stopping to think about the impossibility of achieving independence, her heart was deluded by it and she earnestly desired it. This vice, /142/ which the first sinner handed down to all his children, with original sin, is the source of all evils and is not removed by baptism. There was nothing that Christ, the New Man, valued more, if I may dare to say so, than dependence, to the extent of loving it and practising it at every stage of his life and in every condition. He began His life in obedience practised during His childhood which is a state of constant and universal dependence, not to say captivity and slavery. He, ended it in obedience when it took Him to His death even to death on a cross. *Obediens usque, ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*<sup>48</sup>. We are not told anything about the thirty years /143/ between his birth and his death, except that he obeyed Joseph and Mary: *et erat subditus illis!*<sup>49</sup> Through this mysterious and eloquent silence, the Holy Spirit means us to realize that the desire for independence, followed by the disobedience of our first parents, caused their ruin and ours and that He did not deem it fit to reveal anything to us about the many mysteries in the life of the God-Man except His love for dependence, and His perfect obedience, which have retrieved our losses and effected our salvation.

The members of the mystical body of Christ who want to imitate his example /144/ and enter into his spirit strive to practise dependence, which is so contrary to human nature; they become slaves of the will of their Superiors, convinced that, in the words of the Imitation of Christ, “To move away from obedience is to move away from grace: *Qui se subtrahit ab obedientia, ipse se subtrahit a gratia*”<sup>50</sup>. They are most anxious not to do anything on their own initiative, even the most trivial things, and they follow the impulse coming to them from authority; they go so far in their love for absolute dependence that they dare not do anything without permission.

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<sup>48</sup> Philippians, 2, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Luke, 2, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Imitation of Jesus Christ, book III, chap. XIII, “*Qui se substrahere nititur ab obedientis, ipse se subtrahit a gratia.*”

This holy practice, /145/ which prevails in all fervent communities, was introduced and very carefully preserved by their founders for the purpose of permeating these mystical bodies with the spirit of God. It is observed as a kind of law in the Seminary of St Sulpice and all the members of the community ardently vie with each other to keep it faithfully in spite of the urgings of pride and self-will. Thanks to this spirit of spiritual infancy, some young men make astonishing and rapid progress in virtue, and others knowledgeable and highly intelligent become small /146/ in their own eyes and by the help of this sublime wisdom which is not revealed to the worldly-wise, live indeed as little children wholly dependent as they.

M. Grignon therefore acted according to the spirit of the seminary when he debased himself in his own eyes and obeyed only the eyes and voice of his superiors. He was like the good servant whom the centurion praised to Christ in these words: "It is enough for me to say 'Do this,' and he does it; 'Go there,' and he goes; *fac hoc et facit; vade huc et vadit*"<sup>51</sup>. He was like the humble and faithful handmaid who surrenders herself to the will of her mistress and keeps her eyes fixed on her hands and her looks to find out this will, /147/ "*Sicut ancilla in manibus dominae suae*"<sup>52</sup>.

Now, to say that he entered perfectly into the spirit of the seminary and acquired the virtues and qualities prevailing there is tantamount to saying that he was perfectly obedient; for the spirit reigning in this holy house is one of obedience, humility, dependence in everything, recollection and mortification. The members of the community of St Sulpice do not take the vow of obedience yet they act as if they had taken it, after the example of the disciples of Christ, and of the early Christians.

I know that some people who are called broadminded /148/ but who are in fact quite worldly regard as minutiae all these little practices of piety and cannot bring themselves to ask so many permissions; they are of the opinion that a mature, virile and virtuous man ought to rise above such trivialities and fuss; however, in reality it is self-love which prompts them to say this and natural pride which feels the need to assert itself. Indeed their stability causes no trouble to the devil and does not further the building of the Kingdom of God on the ruins of that of the Prince of Darkness. On the contrary, the holy practices which they dare to decry /149/ as minutiae raise those who are faithful to them to a high degree of perfection and enable them to achieve great things in the world for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

It was perhaps to his exact regularity and his spirit of obedience in the smallest things, as much as to his great austerities and mortifications, that M. de Montfort owed the vast treasure of graces which accompanied him everywhere, made him a man powerful in words and deeds and brought about so many conversions.

I will now very briefly prove his obedience. His conscience, that of a pure, sensitive and tactful soul, /150/ never reproached him with having disobeyed. His greatest enemies never disputed this praise. His conscience would have tormented him if the idea of disobeying had occurred to him and he would have regarded it as a crime. If therefore his conscience, which was a severe, uncompromising judge, never reproached him with anything as regards obedience, his fidelity in following it must have been perfect indeed. It may be wondered how I know that he never disobeyed. Well, he, told me so himself. He was once accused of wanting things his own way and of refusing to accept the opinion of more

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<sup>51</sup> Mathew, 8, 9, "Vade et vadit... fac hoc et facit..."

<sup>52</sup> Psalm 122 (123), 2, "Sicut oculi ancillae suae in manibus dominae suae."

enlightened people. /151/ Although I did not believe this to be true<sup>53</sup>, I reproached him accordingly; it was then that he testified to the truth of what I have just said. This humble servant of God, who was so accustomed to obeying that it had become second nature with him, was never tempted to deviate from it. He had treated his self-will so mercilessly that there was no chance of its ever prevailing upon him again.

#### **XLIV° - HE HAS NEVER ACTED WITTINGLY AGAINST THE ADVICE OR ORDERS OF HIS SUPERIORS**

After he had left the seminary he continued to fight it and never acted against the advice of his director or of his Superiors.

This is the third point on which his obedience must be examined. Many people violently disagreed with him. A large number of them were prompted by jealousy; /152/ as they could not find fault with his conduct they found something wrong with his intentions and accused him of all kinds of failings at every opportunity. He could not do anything that met with their approval. They accused him of being guilty of what they considered blameless in other people. What in other people would have passed without the slightest notice became in him a subject of attention, criticism, censure and condemnation. I heard this at Rennes eleven or twelve years ago, from a holy priest<sup>54</sup>. His chaste life and his faultless morals afforded no cause for slander /153/ but this did not apply to his behaviour, manners, actions and intentions. In the opinion of these envious people, he was prompted and guided only by vanity, imagination and stubbornness; he would not listen to anyone or take anybody else's advice.

M. Bellier

I defy these envious people, however, to quote a single occasion on which the fervent missionary acted or made a decision wittingly against the order or advice of his superiors. I emphasize the words “wittingly against the order or advice of his superiors”, because they are worth noting and considering. The spirit of humility and obedience does not oblige one to ask and follow the advice of just anybody willing to give it; this would be exceedingly imprudent and would often be tantamount to choosing a blind man to guide another blind man. /154/ Neither does the spirit of humility require that one should comply with the will of a domineering person, as this would mean taking the passion of another person as a rule of conduct. But this spirit does inspire one to distrust one's own lights and to submit them to one's superiors, to consult wise people and follow their advice; this M. de Montfort has always done.

He never resisted nor acted against the will of those whom God had placed as guides in his Church. I would say more than this: he has always respected to the utmost the persons of his superiors and their orders. /155/ It was in this spirit that he went to Rome, as I shall relate later, and threw himself at the feet of the Pope to receive his mission from him, ready as he was to go to the farthest and most uncivilised countries. In this spirit he offered his services to the bishops or to the Vicars General wherever his zeal took him, and he put himself at their disposal to carry out their orders.

If they were not pleased with him, if they blamed his manners, thwarted his designs or disapproved his practices, the humble priest tried to justify himself if he was allowed to do

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<sup>53</sup> M. Grignon's testimony which M. Blain mentions here is also reported pp. 338-339.

<sup>54</sup> Julien Bellier was ordained priest in 1686; he committed himself to the most active forms of pastoral work such as preaching missions and training aspirant priests. Louis Marie made his acquaintance between the years 1688-1692; he met him again at Rennes in 1706.

so, but if his apologies were not accepted /156/ he kept humbly silent. At the slightest sign of their will<sup>55</sup> he deferred, left unfinished or gave up all that he had undertaken.

On several occasions he was refused admission and driven in disgrace from some dioceses but he uttered no word of complaint, no slightest murmur against the Church nor against the authorities who thus outraged him in so cruel and cutting a manner. He did not wait until he had been told that his services were no longer required; as soon as he felt that they did not meet the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities he preferred to leave their dioceses rather than work there against their will when he was not fortunate enough to have his practices accepted. /157/ If he has ever done anything with which they did not agree, it was quite unintentionally; if he had known their wishes he would have complied with them; he would rather die than by some act of disobedience lose the merit of all his labours for the salvation of souls.

### **XLV° - REFUTATION OF THE MOST PLAUSIBLE OBJECTIONS AGAINST HIS PERFECT OBEDIENCE. THE VERY OBJECTIONS SUPPLY THE PROOF OF M. DE MONTFORT'S EMINENT VIRTUE**

One may put forward the objection that he has done many things which not only did not bear the hallmark of obedience but were repudiated, disapproved, even blamed and condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities. This happened so often /158/ that they thought it their duty to limit, suspend or even withdraw the powers which they had granted him; some of them went so far as to refuse him permission to stay in their dioceses and drove him out in disgrace. This is probably the most serious slur that can be cast on his memory. I am not trying to cover anything up. I am not afraid of putting forward the objection in the strongest terms because the refutation of this objection will serve to enhance the virtue of the great servant of God whose only reply to the most deadly insults was his humble patience and his silence, after the example of Christ. Let us examine each of the accusations /159/ to find out whether any advantage can be drawn from the attempts which were made to blacken his reputation.

I begin by agreeing that the burning, impetuous zeal of M. de Montfort often drove him to manifestations of devotion which did not please everybody, not even his friends, and even less the ecclesiastical authorities. It must be pointed out, however, that:

1° he acted in all simplicity and sincerity in yielding to his impetuous zeal and to his fits of devotion; many such examples can be found in Holy Scripture, and in the lives of the Saints. In such cases the good intention and ardent charity not only make up for what may be faulty in the action, but they sanctify it and increase its value in the eyes of God /160/ though it may seem ridiculous to the eyes of even wise men. All this can be supported by several well-known examples in Holy Scripture as well as in the History of the Church.

2° It is a well-known fact that God acts in pure souls which put no obstacles in His way and inspires them powerfully and often suddenly to do extraordinary things which seem ridiculous but which serve his designs and contribute to his glory. Besides the Prophets, Patriarchs and other great saints of the Old and New Testament, a great number of examples illustrating /161/ this point can be found in each century of the History of the Church. In the lives of those whom the Church has recognized as saints, many strange incidents can be

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<sup>55</sup> About M. Grignion's obedience to the Pope and bishops, the difficulties he met in several dioceses, namely Poitiers, Saint-Malo, Nantes, Saintes, Avranches, refer to PICOT DE CLORIVIERE, *Life of Hr. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort*, pp. 129-132, 174, 177, 202-203, 373, 393-394.

attributed only to divine inspiration although they would be regarded as deserving censure and blame, had they not had their origin in the secret, powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I must admit here that limits must be set in this respect, or else the human mind is in danger of substituting its own ideas for those of God, and of mistaking the illusions of the imagination for movements of the Holy Spirit. To yield unreservedly to the impetuous manifestations of a zeal allegedly inspired by the Holy Spirit would invariably lead to the most dangerous fanaticism. /162/ The Apostle warns us that we should not trust every spirit, and that the angel of darkness often disguises himself as an angel of light; Holy Scripture constantly warns us against false prophets who mistake their own fancies for revelations from God, or who claim to be sent by God whereas they are self-appointed or have fallen victims to the devil. On the other hand, it would be equally wrong, for fear of falling into this danger, to go to the other extreme, to disbelieve anything extraordinary and judge the workings of God on the basis of reason alone.

/163/ The Church has certain rules which enable one to tell what comes from the good spirit and what from the bad. A holy life, blameless morals, sound doctrine and most of all humility and obedience are a guarantee and an unmistakable proof of the good spirit. This rule will be our yardstick in appraising the zealous missionary and his practices. If they were extraordinary and even seemed ridiculous at times, their result bore out what the Apostle said, namely, that what seems folly in the eyes of men is wisdom in the eyes of God. Christ himself has taught us to know labourers /164/ by the result of their work; we shall know the tree by its fruit, He said<sup>56</sup>. So we should not term ridiculous what was sanctioned by so many blessings, what signal conversions and marvellous changes seal with the divine hallmark.

If these practices are to be rejected because they are innovations, the rejection is not justified because there is a beginning to everything. All the practices of perfection initiated by the saints have had a beginning. The Church has seen the emergence of all those which it now sanctions. The same rule that is valid for new religious Institutes applies to practices of devotion: they had to face violent opposition at the start, but they developed amid storms. /165/ In the end the world becomes accustomed to them and finally accepts what it grows tired of censuring.

I could add that the practices which the holy missionary introduced had existed before him; they were not his own invention but the saints'; they had been forgotten or disused and he revived them with success. This is particularly the case of the ceremony of the Virgins whom he required to wear white veils and white habits, as a symbol of the purity which they were to guard jealously.

3° The practices of the humble priest have sometimes been opposed and censured by his superiors; /166/ on several occasions he was even rebuked and reprimanded in public. No less often, however, did he receive these marks of disapproval in a saintly way, with humility and submission. All who witnessed such happenings were far more edified by his attitude than shocked by the seemingly ridiculous character of the action for which he was being blamed. I shall illustrate this point later on. True virtue is seen when it is subjected to shame and public correction; there is nothing that hurts human pride more acutely and wounds self-love more deeply. On such occasions an ordinary man, no matter how good he may be at hiding and disguising his feelings, comments bitterly and maliciously /167/ on those who have opposed him; he indulges in complaining and murmuring, secretly at least, and vindicates himself in season and out of season; and since he is unable to bear blame and insult gently and quietly, he vents his vexation and, bitterness on those who condemn him

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<sup>56</sup> Mathew, 7, 16 19.

and he condemns them in his turn. It takes great humility and submission to bear the public reproach of one's superiors for things which in themselves are innocent, and to remain unperturbed without trying to justify oneself. That is the way Montfort behaved. Perhaps I should say: "happy fault" which, revealed how deeply virtuous he was, /168/ earned him considerable merit and gave such good example to his superiors in their own struggle for perfection.

4° The humble missionary never did anything that he knew would displease his superiors and discontinued any action they did not approve. The most humble and obedient man cannot do more when he is on a mission far from his ecclesiastical superiors and therefore unable to take personal orders from them. All he can do is to remain willing to obey them /169/ in everything and to stop any undertaking that does not meet with their approval.

It is easy to imagine that such a man, who was regarded as a saint, gave rise to envy and had many secret and public enemies. Great virtue and great merit are a kind of insult which small-minded and less virtuous men cannot forgive; it is therefore to be expected that they will raise their voices, and they never fail to indulge their secret passion in the name of religion. When it came to finding reasons for passing sentence on the Holy of Holies, /170/ his enemies were greatly at a loss and nobody in the synagogue could think of any plausible pretext. It often happens, however, that the heart overpowers discretion, and eventually discloses the real reasons which have previously been kept secret. Why did Christ deserve death? Because "Everybody is going to Him: totus mundus post eum abii"<sup>57</sup>. The Pharisees had lost all their followers; the Sun of Justice had overshadowed their hypocritical holiness. Their pride was baffled and they were at their wit's end, so they planned to take their revenge /171/ by killing the author of life. They were not short of false reasons in their attempt to cover up the greatest of all crimes; but they disclosed the real one when they said: "Totus mundus post eum abii". It was envy and jealousy which plotted the death of Christ.

Let me apply to the disciple this feature of the Master. M. de Montfort's greatest fault and the one most difficult to forgive was the great reputation of sanctity which he enjoyed among ordinary people. Though ashamed of themselves, those who were jealous of him would not admit their feeling; they were even less prepared to confess it to others. /172/ They did not remain idle, however, and sought for a disguise. They racked their brains for a reason to condemn an innocent man whose morals and doctrine were blameless, but whose behaviour was peculiar and his practices extraordinary. They made quite a fuss about it and this soon came to the knowledge of his ecclesiastical superiors through false or distorted reports. Besides, some people have a knack of twisting facts by presenting them in their own way and making the most harmless thing sound ridiculous. If they were to be believed, far from being helpful, such new practices of devotion would soon strip religion /173/ of its ceremonies and churches of their statues; but in their attempt to simplify and purify worship they would soon make it more Calvinistic. No doubt, they did not like M. de Montfort, who was so ingenious in stirring devotion in uneducated people by means of expressive exterior practices, and they swelled the number of his opponents<sup>58</sup>.

It is no wonder, therefore, that even some well-meaning bishops, who esteemed the virtue of a man persecuted in so many ways, declined his services. A man of M. de Montfort's calibre should have been born /174/ several centuries earlier, when simplicity was prevalent

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<sup>57</sup> John, 12, 19, "mundus totus post eum abiit".

<sup>58</sup> In this passage M. Blain opposes the Augustinian tendency which since 1714 had been polarized against the Bull Unigenitus. Indeed Montfort had a keen sense of popular religious practices but he was closer to Augustinians on other points.

and pious people took pride in all their practices. Those who so warmly welcomed St Francis, St Dominic and so many others with their extraordinary practices and their new ways (manners), would no doubt have been even more favourable to him.

5° After all, apart from a few mannerisms which were peculiar but basically harmless and which I dare not approve and have no right to blame, M. de Montfort always acted in a saintly way with all the characteristics of a highest perfection. What he did proved helpful to many souls /175/ and to their spiritual progress.. He followed in the footsteps of the greatest men of the past century, such as Father Eudes, Father Honoré, M. Bourdoise, M. le Nobletz and several others who died in the odour of sanctity<sup>59</sup>. If anyone tells me that they were not wholly praiseworthy and that the faults of the saints were not sanctioned by the fact that they were canonized, I accept this and apply it to M. de Montfort. He may have had his faults since the greatest men, the saints, themselves are not entirely faultless. This is a human trait permitted by God /176/ to humiliate them and teach them and us that their virtues are gifts of God and that His grace has made them what they are.

6° Finally the faults of the elect, especially of the saints, have very different effects from those of the reprobate and sinners, In the latter, faults become passions and are the cause of sins, but in the former they serve as material for their heroic fortitude; in their humility and mortification they make use of them to add splendour to their crown, just as a gardener uses manure to fertilize the soil and make the trees yield more abundant fruits. /177/ God allows them to keep these faults so that they may be come a source of humiliation and supply a good testing ground for mortification; in other words, these faults help them to purify their virtue and increase their merits. Thus it was by God's permission that M. de Montfort, carried away by his zeal and thinking that other people were as simple and as artless as he, introduced practices which to him seemed fit to inspire contempt of the vanities of the world but which to some critical and less simple souls seemed ridiculous and silly. /178/ As a result, the holy missionary felt humiliated and he never failed to seize this longed-for opportunity of shame and confusion to savour it and turn it to his spiritual profit. When he was rebuked by his superiors, he kept silence; he obeyed them and compelled them to admire his virtue in the way he accepted correction. I feel justified in saying that even his faults were a help to him on his way to perfection because they supplied material for the exercise to a heroic degree of such virtues as silence, modesty, humility, submission and patience, and therefore benefited his soul.

/179/ It seems to me that what I have just said, however brief, is enough to clear M. Grignon of all the accusations brought against him by the malicious and the envious as well as by ignorant people who were pious but over-scrupulous. If some wise and worthy people have shared these prejudices, it was because they did not know M. Grignon well enough, or else God allowed it to happen as a source of humiliation for him, as with so many other saints, or in order to humiliate these people themselves.

/180/ Let us now go back to where we left off; that is, from the Seminary of St Sulpice, to find out how he behaved there until he left.

## **XLVI° - HE GOES ON A PILGRIMAGE TO CHAR TRES, AS WAS THE CUSTOM AT THE SEMINARY OF ST. SULPICE, AND HE PAYS A VISIT TO THE PICTURE AND CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED**

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<sup>59</sup> Jean Eudes (1601-1680), Honoré de Cannes, a Capucin Father (1632-1693), Adrien Bourdoise (1584-1655), the founder of the community of Saint Nicolas of Chardonnet, Michel Le Nobletz (1577 1652) a missionary in Brittany.

## **VIRGIN. DURING THIS PILGRIMAGE HIS ZEAL, HIS MORTIFICATION AND HIS GIFT FOR MEDITATION SHINE FORTH**

The superiors and directors of St Sulpice take great care to instil and cultivate a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin among those entrusted to them. They usually urge them to send representatives on a pilgrimage every year to visit some of the most famous shrines dedicated to Mary. When M Grignon's turn came to be one of the representatives, he was overjoyed. /181/ All that concerned the honour of Mary was very dear to him and he delighted in everything that furthered his devotion to the good Mother who gave him fresh evidence of her kindness every day. So he went to our Lady of Chartres with the same joy with which he might have gone to the Garden of Eden. Indeed this place was for him an earthly Paradise where he received many graces and blessings.

His appointed companion on this pilgrimage was a student worthy of him; he was one of the most devout in the seminary a living model of regularity, obedience and innocence /182/ as well as of penance<sup>60</sup>. In his company M. Grignon could give full play to his devotion with out cramping it either by prudence or kindness. As he was free to exercise his zeal to the full, he took advantage of this situation in the vast plains of the Beauce to steal away from his companion and go out of his way to teach catechism or talk about God to the farmers and the poor people whom he saw near him or in the distance; then he would hurry back and rejoin his companion who found his behaviour a subject for edification but not for imitation.

He was Mr. Bardou, a parish-priest in the diocese of Narbonne, who was also Vicar General at one time. I am not sure that he is still Vicar General; in fact I do not know whether he is still alive today.

/183/ On arriving at Chartres he hastened to go to the chapel in the crypt where a picture of the Blessed Virgin is kept and honoured, and threw himself at its feet with the most heartfelt tenderness and devotion. There, at the feet of Our Lady, his heart overflowing with happiness he could say with St Peter, "Oh, how good it is to be here! Bonum est nos hic esse!"<sup>61</sup> The time he spent there seemed short to him; he was delighted to be there and was reluctant to leave; he looked forward to his return visit on the morrow but felt it was too long to wait. He no longer felt tired from the journey on foot, or if he did, /184/ then a bed was not the right place for him to rest; the famous shrine of the Virgin Mother would be his resting-place. So he returned there as soon as he could and stayed as long as possible. He received holy communion there with extreme devotion and piety which the special grace attached to this place made easier. Then he spent six to eight hours in meditation, that is, from morning till midday, kneeling motionless, completely carried away. The time for his meal interrupted most inopportunistly his longed-for quietude with God and his conversation with the Blessed Virgin; so he had to force himself /185/ to go to his meal, but he cut it short in order to go back to the shrine, and lose himself again in a meditation which lasted as long as the morning one, in the same posture, and with the same devotion; he prolonged it into the evening until he was told that he was not allowed to stay in the chapel any longer.

His companion never tired of admiring such a young man who spent a whole day in virtually uninterrupted meditation, who was as recollected at the end of the day as he was at the beginning, in a kind of ecstasy and, as it were, unable to satisfy his hunger for this heavenly food. As for himself, he /186/ admitted that he could pray only for a few hours at a

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<sup>60</sup> Etienne Bardou, from the diocese of Narbonne, spent one year (1697-1698) in Saint Sulpice's seminaries.

<sup>61</sup> Mathew, 17, 4.

stretch and that he wondered how M. Grignon could talk to God for so long and how he had so much to tell Him.

## **XLVII° - HE TAKES THE VOW OF CHASTITY BEFORE HIS ORDINATION**

I have forgotten to mention that even before ordination, which binds the priest to God by the vow of chastity, he had expressed the desire to take this vow and had been allowed to do so by his director; his purpose in so doing was to attract all the graces he needed in the present as well as in the future. The church in which he chose to take this vow was Notre-Dame de Paris, where he and several of his fellow-students used to go and receive holy communion every Saturday /187/ out of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Kneeling at the feet of his good Mother, he gave full play to the promptings of the most tender piety; he dedicated his body to God as a pure, unblemished victim free from the sins which often stain the purity of youth.

I do not know whether later in life he found it hard to remain faithful to this gift of himself or whether he had to fight hard to keep the virtue of chastity intact against the attacks from the devil, the world and the flesh, which wage such a relentless war against the angelic virtue. What I do know /188/ is that before he joined St Sulpice he had no idea of the battles that had to be fought to keep chaste; this happy privilege may have been the result of his great mortification, of his severe austerities, of his solitary life, of his deep recollection and above all of his great love for the Queen of Virgins. Be that as it may, he always lived like an angel in a mortal body; after the example of the holy man Job he had made a covenant with his eyes not to gaze at women and not to look at them any longer than was necessary to recognize them and avoid them. /189/ I am convinced that he remained chaste all his life and that when his body was laid in the tomb it was as pure and as innocent as when it lay in the cradle.

## **XLVIII° - HIS ORDINATION**

This brings us to the subject of his ordination. The Fathers of the Church and Canon Law require great innocence from candidates to the priesthood; this innocence must have been preserved or recovered through the sacrament of penance. M. de Montfort possessed these two kinds of innocence in a very high degree, as we have just seen, and I can say that in the more fervent times of the Church, when candidates to the priesthood had to go through many years /190/ of training, in the times when they were chosen among confessors of the faith or anchorites, in the times when they were chosen among the most perfect and ordained by force, M. de Montfort would have met all the wishes of the people of God and would have been accepted by the most strict and exacting bishops.

I can say that all his life had been a preparation for the priesthood. Who could have been more worthy - if anyone can ever be worthy - of this holy character than a man whom God had showered /191/ with so many graces even from his earliest years and who seemed to be a saint from the moment he was born? He was brought up at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, as it were, and the tender love he had for her prompted him to turn to her on all occasions; all his life he was the object of her favours and of her maternal tenderness and it was through her protection that he kept his innocence free from the corruption of the world. He spent his childhood in solitude like John the Baptist, he lived in his father's house as in a kind of desert, and he lived in solitude again at /192/ St Sulpice which is so regular and so perfect a seminary. There he was trained by masters in the spiritual life and subjected to long and severe penance as well as to harsh and frequent humiliations, and he learnt to obey blindly in

everything; after he had reached such a high degree of contemplation and of union with God, all he lacked was a strong, sincere conviction of his unworthiness.

This holy disposition enhances all the others and no other attitude of mind compensates for its absence. This delayed him on his way to the priesthood and kept him from asking to be allowed to be ordained. /193/ Far from being in a hurry to become a priest he shrank from the honour. Instead of being impatient at the long interim periods between the various steps leading to the priesthood he found them too short and tried his hardest to prolong them. He waited in fear and trembling to hear these words addressed to him: “Amice, ascende, superius: My friend, go up higher”; and he would have been glad if he had been forgotten. Moreover, he was not the only one in this praiseworthy attitude of mind; it was widespread in the seminary, and one of the characteristics of the candidates to the priesthood who lived in this holy place was that they seemed to acquire there a kind of holy fear and shrank from ordination. /194/ M. Grignion was not the only one to be, as it were, forced by obedience to take Holy Orders. He would have been virtually the only one to ask to take them in a place where the students were not allowed even to show signs of their wish to become priests. Thus when I say that he was at St Sulpice it implies that he was in a place where nobody ever applied to be ordained; the students waited until they were ordered to do so; they were then expected to show reluctance when urged to go ahead and were allowed to feel tempted to disobey on this one particular point. He was in a place where it was not uncommon to see young men /195/ shed tears in the streets when they were compelled to go to the bishop for the laying on of hands, and it took all the authority of a superior to urge any student to take this important step and all the skill of a pious director to comfort him afterwards. So I can safely say that even if M. Grignion had not entered St Sulpice with this attitude of fear and trembling towards Holy Orders, he could not have failed to acquire it as a heritage from so many holy priests who had been there before him.

How he prepared himself to be ordained /196/ in the near future can be revealed only by his spiritual director. He must have thought that M. Grignion had reached a very high degree of union with Christ because shortly before or after his ordination - I forget when exactly - he asked him to write on the subject. M. Grignion, who found it easy to unburden himself to me, told me this confidentially and promised to pass the essay on to me. However, his humility may have reproached him with this confidence afterwards or he may not have been given permission to pass it on; anyway, I was never handed the essay<sup>62</sup>.

M. Leschassier

### **XLIX° - HE SAYS HIS FIRST MASS WITH ANGELIC FERVOUR**

The place where he chose to say his first Mass was the one which he had looked after so carefully /197/ since he first came to the seminary: the chapel of the Blessed Virgin behind the sanctuary in the church of St Sulpice. I was present there and while saying Mass he looked exactly like an angel. I was not the only person to be struck by his angelic appearance; one of his fellow-students at the seminary was there too; he noticed it and told me how surprised and edified he was. In order to test his sincerity, I told him that I had known other former students from St Sulpice - and I named some of them - who had been among the most pious and had looked just as devout as M. Grignion while saying their first Mass. “I do not dispute /198/ that,” he replied, “but there is a big difference: M. Grignion looked like an angel.” This testimony is worth noting because this student was not inclined to flatter anybody, least of all M. Grignion, to whom he was not particularly attracted.

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<sup>62</sup> M. Grignion's essay has been lost. He was ordained to the priesthood on Ember Saturday before Pentecost (June 5, 1700).

## **L° - AFTER HIS ORDINATION HIS SOLE PREOCCUPATION IS THE SALVATION OF SOULS**

After his ordination he thought only to dedicate himself to the salvation of souls; he had exercised his zeal on himself first, devoting many years to his own perfection with almost unprecedented ardour. His zeal was like a blazing fire which could not but spread and set the whole world aflame. /199/ During the time he still had to spend at the seminary, he compiled and edited subjects for his sermons and collected enough material to enable him to talk at any time on any subject, as he in fact did later<sup>63</sup>.

Because of his ardent charity he was attracted to the uncivilised countries but at the time the devil engineered disagreement among the missionaries and he had to renounce the idea of going out there. M. Leschassier did not allow him to go to Canada<sup>64</sup> because he feared that his impetuous zeal might take him to the vast forest in this country where he might get lost /200/ in his pursuit of the local savages. M. Leschassier told me so himself.

Some badly wanted to keep him at the Seminary and even counted on this, but the newly-ordained, priest was not so inclined. As his only wish was to fulfil the will of God, he would have stayed there if he had been told that God wanted it thus, but his attraction lay elsewhere and no one tried to force him to stay against his will, so he was allowed to leave though everyone was sorry to see him go. According to M. Leschassier.

I think that I can safely say that from then on he found that the authorities of St Sulpice /201/ had changed their attitude towards him. It may be because they expected him to stay on and they took his leaving the wrong way; or it may be because God allowed these holy men to share in the ups and downs of ordinary people in order that M. de Montfort might learn to find his sole support in Him; or it may be that this was simply a special mark of God's Providence in continually sending the cross to His humble servant. Be that as it may, I can safely say that his most painful crosses came from St Sulpice.

*To avoid hurting those who succeeded to the authorities mentioned above and following M. Blain's advice, I have cancelled these lines and some others. which will be found hereafter.*

## **LI° - M. DE MONTFORT HELPS A HOLY PRIEST CALLED M. LEVESQUE, WHO WAS A HUMBLE MAN...**

As he was born with an attraction for the apostolic life /202/ and its activities, he was advised to go to a holy priest living at Nantes, called M. Levesque. This priest had a community of priests preparing for the missions<sup>65</sup>. Although there was a wide gap in their ages and their characters were very different, M. Levesque and M. Grignon had very similar tastes in their way of life and penitential practices.

It would have been difficult to find two men hating the flesh more and striving harder to mortify it. M. Levesque, one of the early followers of M. Olier, had acquired the latter's mentality and joined his famous school /203/ for perfection, which was then in the manor of

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<sup>63</sup> To prepare sermons, he compiled notes and references in a hand written book which is kept in the archives of the Company of Mary, in Rome. There are 280 sermon-outlines (p. 91 to p. 384). The subjects are classified in alphabetical order. They are drawn from XVIIth century collections of sermons. M. Grignon might have begun his compiling work before his ordination.

<sup>64</sup> These disagreements refer to the Quarrel about Rites. From the beginning of the year 1700, somebody from Missions Etrangères made the Sorbonne aware of the propositions of Fathers Le Comte and Le Gobin s.j. These propositions were examined and condemned on October 18th.

<sup>65</sup> René Levesque (1624-1704) had strong ties with Saint Sulpice. In 1670, at Nantes, he founded a community of priests in order to preach missions; the headquarters were close to Saint Clément's Church. This community ran through many difficulties, so much so that in 1700 it was missionary in name only. M. Grignon must have left Paris for Nantes in the month of September.

Avron but is now at Issy, near Paris This school has produced many holy priests who were a credit to St Sulpice and the pride of the Church.

His main virtues were humility and penance. He wore a hair-shirt every day and took it off only to put on a new one of coarser texture. He travelled from Nantes to Paris partly by water and partly on foot, and all the money he needed for such a long journey was one écu (three francs), which was enough because he took only bread and water during the journey, and in the inns where he was well-known it never occurred to anybody to serve him anything else.

/204/ As St Sulpice had given him the foundations of his spiritual life, he occasionally returned to this source to renew his piety. As he grew older his visits there became longer and more frequent; his cherished ambition was to die there and God granted his wish. Although he was almost decrepit and bowed down with years, he redoubled instead of relaxing his penance, and the very year of his death he had bought a new hair-shirt which was very much to his liking because it was of very rough and coarse texture. /205/ He hated his body so much that he seemed to feel no pain; the surgeons who cut into his injured foot did not know whether the flesh was still alive or not, as he showed no sign that he felt any pain. They were even more surprised when the holy old man told them to go on with the operation and not to hesitate to flay him alive in terms which marked how complete were his self-denial and his contempt for his body. According to M. Leschassier.

As a last stage in his preparation for death, he went /206/ from the seminary in Paris to the one at Issy, which is the house of solitude and prayer for the members of St Sulpice. I think that he went there on the Sunday or one of the other days just before Ash Wednesday; he started on an empty stomach, wearing his hair-shirt and an iron chain; as he was over eighty years of age he walked the distance of about three miles with considerable difficulty and was so tired that when he took a step forward he often had to take two backward because he had so much pain lifting his feet and standing on his legs. The passers-by who noticed this old man tottering /207/ along thought he had had too much to drink; scandalized, they pointed at him, and no doubt, as is usual on such occasions, applied their contempt of him as a person to his state in life. Men are so blind and rash in their judgements! They condemned an innocent man as a sinner. They deemed guilty of the sins committed during carnival celebrations a holy priest who was expiating those very sins by severe penance. Had they known /208/ that the cause of his weakness lay in the instruments of penance which he was wearing, they would not have forgiven themselves for their rashness, and would certainly have shed tears.

After he had reached Issy he spent the time of Lent in retreat and penance; he spent the greater part of the day - eight hours - in meditation, and as he was not allowed to kneel for so long at a time he found relief for this penance by adopting a still more painful posture: he remained prostrate on the marble floor of the chapel of our Lady of Loretto, where he took his delight. During the rest of the day his relaxation /209/ consisted in walking about in the garden saying his rosary or reading some spiritual books. There was only one thing in this place to which the holy man objected: the bread which he was given was too good for him; annoyed that he could not get worse he ate it reluctantly and found the means of satisfying his mortification by leaving what was best in the rest of the food and eating only as much of it as was strictly necessary. According to M. Leschassier

That was how this venerable old man of over eighty prepared himself for death. /210/ He was so filled with the spirit of penance that he feared death might come when he was not mortifying himself. That was his reply to his spiritual director who exhorted him to relax. No

two men could have been more suited to each other than M. Levesque and M. Grignon. Yet they did not stay long together. /211/ As some members of the community of M. Levesque did not agree with his attitude, still less with his principles,<sup>66</sup> M. Grignon decided that he could not stay there any longer; his principles and manners clashed too violently with those of some members of the community.

**LII° - HE GOES TO THE HOSPITAL AT POITIERS AND STAYS THERE FOR SOME TIME AT THE GENERAL REQUEST OF THE POOR PEOPLE WHO BEGGED HIM TO STAY, AS IF MOVED BY A COMMON INSPIRATION.**

This is how divine Providence afforded M. de Montfort an opportunity of leaving the community. He was passing through Poitiers and, following his inclination, went to the hospital to say Mass there. The poor people in the hospital had neither chaplain nor confessor at the time. They no sooner saw how piously M. de Montfort said Mass than they were all seized with enthusiasm and conceived the idea of keeping him with them. For this purpose they all gathered round him when he was about to leave, they called him their father and begged him to be such. /212/ They had no difficulty in persuading him because he was by nature very compassionate and this quality had grown with the years. He was always attracted to the poor and full of love for them, and they were always his favourites in all his apostolic activities and labours; so he followed his inclinations by giving in to their desire. He and they seemed to obey the same inspiration and they were delighted to be together from the start taking an instant and instinctive liking to each other<sup>67</sup>.

I have this from Mr. Grignon himself.

In this public refuge /213/ for distress of all kinds there was neither order nor regulations nor means of livelihood, and the spiritual side was as badly neglected as the material. This chaotic state of affairs provided M. Grignon with an opportunity of exercising his patience and his charity in caring for both the spiritual and the material aspects of the work. Anyone less generous than he would have been repelled and discouraged right from the start and his charity would have been damped by the extent of the distress which nothing short of a miracle could relieve; however, his zeal, which was never at a loss and which difficulties only served to increase, prompted him to achieve the double purpose of helping both the bodies and the souls of those poor forsaken people /214/ and of restoring this refuge for waifs and strays which threatened to collapse.

In order to achieve this aim he made certain rules, and to supply the material needs he sent out some of the poor inmates into the town to beg for alms from the inhabitants. They were to take with them a donkey with panniers to carry the fruits of their begging. I think that he even led them on this humiliating

I have this from Mr. Grignon himself.

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<sup>66</sup> BACHELIER (A.), *Le Père de Montfort et le Jansénisme* in *Recherches et Travaux*, volume III, no. 2, April-June 1948, pgs 20-26, sets the record straight regarding this insinuation against the doctrine of Saint-Clément in 1701. Here M. Blain, prompted by his personal anti-Jansenism, transfers to that date the later opposition of the community to the Bull Unigenitus. The departure of M. Grignon was more due to his own difficulty in integrating into a society.

<sup>67</sup> This fact is confirmed by a letter from M. Grignon, dated May 4, 1701. M. Blain seems to mingle together into one two journeys of M. Grignon to Poitiers: that at the end of April, to get information, and that in October, to settle down. The second one is mentioned in a letter from M. Grignon, dated November 3. GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, pp. 17-18, 28-30.

collection, which anyone but he would have been ashamed to do, but he was never ashamed of poverty nor of those who suffered from it<sup>68</sup>. Besides, he was by now so inured to humiliations that he seemed quite hardened. Each fresh one made humility more attractive and brought him fresh graces.

/215/ He could have stayed in the hospital quite a long time if he had been as successful in overcoming the division among those in charge of the girls as he had been in winning the hearts of the poor and ordering their lives. But envy, which always brings about discord, was rife and counteracted the good results of his labours and of his instructions. He went to all kinds of trouble to destroy or at least alleviate the bad effects of the vice which was at the root of all the disturbances; but his efforts were of no avail for jealousy is a very subtle and carefully disguised passion, and those who suffer from it have difficulty in detecting it in themselves. /216/ As they are ashamed of it, they keep refusing to admit that they are a prey to it, and they cover it up with a pretence of zeal and an appearance of piety. The holy man soon realized that he was not getting anywhere with these unintelligent and ungodly persons so he resolved to abandon them to their fate. He did not reveal his intention, however, but one fine day he left them for Paris in his search for new crosses, and a new field for his charity.

### **LIII° - HE RETURNS TO PARIS. HIS OCCUPATIONS AND SUFFERINGS**

His attraction for hospitals and for the abjection reigning there was still very much alive, so he went to la Salpêtrière, where he found ample scope for his zeal. He had as many opportunities as he could wish for exercising his /217/ gentleness, patience, charity, love of poverty and of the poor; but he also found that jealousy was widespread among the workers of the kingdom of God and this drove him from the Paris hospital as it had from the one at Poitiers<sup>69</sup>.

He was uncertain at the time as to whether he was following the right path and wondered which one he should take. His oracle, (I mean, his director, M. Leschassier) remained dumb and refused to give him any guidance; he even rebuffed him, expressing disapproval of his conduct and, as I have just said, refused to give him any advice. This was a very heavy cross /218/ for M. Grignon who had full confidence in him. One day in holiday-time he went to a country house at Issy where his director was staying with the other members of the community. His feelings were badly hurt when his director gave him a very icy reception, sent him back in disgrace, in a sharp, contemptuous manner, and refused to speak or listen to him. I was present there and was shocked and dismayed at the humiliation inflicted on M. Grignon. He accepted it with his usual gentleness and modesty, /219/ then he went away looking as unperturbed as when he had arrived but with his fervour greatly increased, which was ever his most cherished reward when new crosses came his way. This was demonstrated on his way back when he met a man who was swearing; he went up to him and rebuked him with his usual undaunted courage, but also with a gentleness and humility which never failed to touch sinners and bring them to acknowledge their fault and ask God's forgiveness.

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<sup>68</sup> The situation of the General Hospital at Poitiers and the initiatives of M. Grignon are confirmed by a letter from M. Grignon himself, dated July 4, 1702. GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, pp. 31-36.

<sup>69</sup> La Salpêtrière, a general hospital, was founded in 1656 for women only. M. Grignon stayed there throughout Spring and Summer in 1703. The records of burials or minutes of meetings which might make more precise the dates of this stay have been destroyed.

I was with him on this occasion and pointed out to him that his excessive zeal exposed him to insults from these churlish people. /220/ Ignoring his own interests, and alive only to the interests of God, he replied that he could not bear to stand by and hear this man insult God; then, still under the influence of the humiliation he had received at Issy, he went on his way thanking and praising God.

At the time this great lover of poverty used to take shelter in a small corner of a derelict house, near the Novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers. He kept so well-hidden and so few people knew he was there that I had great difficulty in finding him in a place which looked like the cave of Bethlehem; it was a small recess /221/ under a flight of stairs which let in hardly any sun. The only pieces of furniture I could see were an earthen pot and a tumbledown bed fit only for a tramp or a drop-out. This was the kind of lodging he had wherever he went either from choice or necessity, yet God made up for his poverty, his humiliations and sufferings by granting him the grace of communicating with Him so intimately and so frequently that the servant of God spent the greater part of his days and nights in prayer. He even reached the stage where he began to wonder whether he should not /222/ discontinue the functions of the priestly ministry, for a time at least, so that he could give himself to his powerful attraction for contemplation.

He asked advice on this point but as he did not discontinue his apostolate it would seem that he was told to continue exercising his zeal. It was at that time that he visited the Junior Seminary of St Sulpice where I was staying. He arrived when we were having our recreation, and everybody was anxious to find out whether he had lost anything of his former fervour. He was the subject of observation, scrutiny and interrogation, but we all had to agree that he was more fervent than ever.

#### **LIV° - THE ANGUISH HE HAS TO BEAR; EVERYBODY REJECTS HIM AND HE PUZZLES SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS**

In spite of all this, many people commented on his eccentricities. He was the subject /223/ of many conversations, everybody trying to prophesy and foretell the outcome of it all, each according to his own bias. People wondered whether he was genuinely following the guidance of the Holy Spirit or whether he was a prey to illusion and was going astray. This was the subject of controversy, and while some decided definitely for or against, others reserved their judgment. Everybody agreed that he was a saint and praised at once his great modesty, his recollection, his humility, his mortification /224/ and austerities, his love of poverty and of the poor, his charity and his zeal, but especially his tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin. What is surprising, however, is that people still doubted whether he were on the right road to sanctity. I listened very carefully to all that was said about him and could not help wondering how anyone could regard him as a saint while doubting that he was on the right way to sanctity. As I felt greatly inclined to imitate him and be his companion, I was the more interested in what concerned him and anxious to know how exactly I should rightly judge him.

/225/ I asked somebody else to sound M. Leschassier and find out what was his opinion of M. Grignon. This third person said to me: "He is very humble, very poor, very mortified, deeply recollected, and yet I find it hard to believe that he is guided by the Holy Spirit." These words were to me a mystery which I could never fathom, as I thought to myself that the spirit of God rests with the humble man; Holy Scripture assures us of this and yet while acknowledging that this man was very humble, people questioned that he was guided by the Holy spirit. It was agreed that he was very poor, very recollected, very mortified; /226/ in other words, practised the evangelical virtues and lived in the likeness of

Christ; yet, people were still not sure it was the spirit of Christ which animated him. This was the mystery which chilled my relationship with M. de Montfort, kept me from joining him and even made me doubt whether I should have so much to do with him.

Three or four years ago, after the death of M. de Montfort, which set the seal on the quality of his life, I reminded M. Leschassier of the reply which he had given me on the subject which I have just mentioned. /227/ I also told him about the harsh way in which he had treated him on his visit to Issy, which I have also related. What I meant to convey was that I was surprised that he could have questioned the conduct of a man who seemed to have died in the odour of sanctity, whose face had been the subject of engravings, whose portrait had been drawn many times, who was rumoured publicly as having worked several miracles and whose life had been a prodigy of virtue. This priest, who was wise and enlightened, saw my point and gave me an answer worthy of him: "You realize now that I do not know a saint when I see one," he said. This modest answer edified me /228/ very much and gave me more satisfaction than all the apologies he could have made for his former judgment.

Let us now return to M. de Montfort. I reported to him, as a friend, the most mortifying and humiliating things that people were saying about him. He listened to me without allowing the slightest sign of sadness to escape him. I was upset about it, but not he. I took the opportunity to point out to him the many things to which people objected in his behaviour and in his eccentricities, but then he would refute my arguments with such apt and sound answers that I wondered where he got them from. /229/ I was astonished at his ability to demonstrate in a few words how wrong were the objections to his way of life.

I also tried to find out what M. Brenier's opinion was, but this inscrutable man would never tell me. I sounded him and had him sounded by other people but he never gave a clear answer. However, in an obscure language, which he used rather frequently and which was often affected, he hinted at his admiration for M. Grignon, and always spoke well of him, often even with praise; he never spoke ill of him, nor seemed to question either his virtue or his spirit; he did object /230/ to his eccentricities which he had fought so openly but of which he had never been able to rid him. He seemed to hold M. de Montfort in secret veneration but did not want to show this feeling because he did not think it fit to sanction publicly such extraordinary conduct nor to give the support of his approval to a man whose uncommon virtue could hardly be help up for imitation.

At the time I am speaking of, M. Lefebvre was superior of      The one who is at Cambrai  
the Junior Seminary. He followed in the footsteps of M. Bienier and  
conducted his community in the same spirit. /231/ He, too, seemed very reticent<sup>70</sup>; however,  
he occasionally dropped a few hints which indicated that he admired M. de Montfort's great  
penance and mortification. He told me about it one time when it was bitterly cold and the  
winter was more severe than usual: he used to picture M. Grignon, who never drew near the  
fire, freezing in a corner of a poor, damp house, wearing clothes which were not warm  
enough with his bare feet in his shoes and at times lacking all comfort and completely  
destitute.

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<sup>70</sup> Claude Lefebvre (1668-1744) was born at Saint-Quentin; he joined Saint Sulpice's seminary in 1693; later, as a Sulpician, he directed the seminary at Cambrai.

## LV° - EXTRAORDINARY VIRTUOUS MEN ARE USUALLY SUBJECTED TO THESE TRIALS<sup>71</sup>

Extraordinarily virtuous men are usually subjected to this kind of trial; men's opinions differ widely about them; they divide hearts as well as minds; the wisest and most enlightened /232/ show most reserve in their regard for fear of condemning a saint or of canonizing a hypocrite; they reserve their judgment and wait until death reveals the worth of a whole life. The saints do not always acknowledge one another in this world, sometimes they even persecute each other. St Augustine and St Jerome did not always agree and, though keeping within the limits of charity, their differences did give rise to an exchange of sharp words. The disagreement between St Epiphane and St Chrysostome went much further; /233/ they each accused the other of either being wrong or defending wrong doers, and reproached each other bitterly. St Cyprianus and Tertullian, as well as others before their time, had provided an even more striking example of human ignorance: St Cyprianus mistook error for truth and supported it, even against the opinion of Pope St Stephen, and he did so with such bitter zeal that according to St Augustine, only martyrdom by decapitation was able to bring him forgiveness and purification.

Now for a few more relevant examples: the life of St Simon Stylite puzzled the Fathers of the Desert for a long time. /234/ They doubted that he was guided by the Holy Spirit when he was living on the top of his column, nor did his miraculous way of life seem to them to be a sufficient sign nor a good guarantee. His obedience was the only proof that they accepted. More recently, St Teresa was for many years a legendary figure and her Contemplation a paradox for the learned and intellectual alike. She was condemned by all, first and foremost by her confessors. In their opinion she was the plaything of the devil, her contemplation was an illusion, her visions were dreams: such was the general feeling. Then she became a puzzle /235/ for many and opinions differed about her. Everybody passed judgment on her, in private homes, in learned societies, in squares, and everybody took sides for or against; she gave rise to quarrels between people supporting or opposing her designs; for some she was a saint inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit and for others she was deluded and deceived by the devil. The controversy went on for a long time at the expense of the seraphic Teresa.

I could say a lot about M. Bourdoise, who had even more peculiar manners and acted in an even more eccentric, extraordinary, and seemingly ridiculous fashion. /236/ He behaved strangely but his actions bore the hallmark of the spirit of God. This is my opinion, anyway, though it was not shared by everybody, as some people denied him the credit of being inspired and led in everything by the hand of God. Who would dare to take him as a model and hold him up as such with his admirably eccentric character and his peculiar behaviour? Would anyone imitating him be as successful as he was? Would anyone praise his imitators for the outbursts of enthusiastic zeal to which he was given and which won people's approval? /237/ Anyone venturing to act as he did would soon be regarded as a fool and an eccentric, which was the accusation made against him. The history of his life shows clearly enough that he did not please everybody and that he had some critics even among his associates.

Thus God allows his chosen ones to remain hidden and unknown even to each other. Their mutual esteem might spoil their virtue and tarnish its purity; just as for a saint the persecution to which he is most sensitive is that which comes from another saint, /238/ so

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<sup>71</sup> From page 231 to page 239 there is a long digression to explain, in terms of history, the trials Mr. Grignon went through.

does the most flattering and valuable praise come from the same source; it is enough to make up for the lack of praise from other people, and even for their censure and slander.

On this principle, we can imagine the distress of M. de Montfort when holy men enlightened in the ways of God questioned his ways, and did not even dare to become his spiritual directors, for fear of being unable to lead him along paths which they thought wrong or untrodden, or of being held responsible for his peculiar actions. /239/ This distress has to be experienced to be properly understood; the more a person is dedicated to God, the more sensitive he is and the more the soul is overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay. It is well-known that it was with reference to this state that St Peter of Alcantara said to St Teresa that she had had to bear one of the most painful trials on earth.

## **LVI° - GOD DOES NOT FORSAKE HIM AND SOME PEOPLE OF GREAT VIRTUE APPROVE HIS SPIRIT**

God, who always proportions the cross according to the ability of his servants and knows how many drops are held in the cup of His Son which He asks them to drink, did not allow all virtuous people to condemn as suspect the behaviour or M. de Montfort and the spirit which inspired it. / 240/ The holy Bishop of Quebec, who is still alive, testified that M. de Montfort was inspired by the Spirit of God; he was fond of him, revered him and kept in close contact with him<sup>72</sup>. M. de Saint-Vallier  
Father Sanadon, as I have already said, did not dare to assume the responsibility of guiding him but another Jesuit Father, who did not have to be so wary of what people said or who perhaps did not fear them so much, did him this service.

The late M. de la Chétardye, parish-priest of St Sulpice, was one of the greatest admirers of M. Grignon's virtues; he held him in such veneration /241/ when he was at the seminary that he used to stand up and bow low to him whenever he entered the sacristy of the parish church. I have it from M. de Montillet who saw him several times.  
When he returned to Paris, M. de Montfort thought that the parish priest would be in the same frame of mind as when he had left him, but he had reckoned without regard for the fickleness and instability of the human heart. The parish priest had changed so much that he deigned neither to see nor to speak to M. de Montfort; instead of the help M. de Montfort had expected from him he received humiliating rebuffs.

## **LVII° - RIDICULOUS TALES WERE SPREAD ABOUT M. GRIGNION**

This change of attitude in the priest as in some other people could have been caused by the tales which had been concocted to represent the humble /242/ priest as a burlesque, ridiculous man. Some spread the rumour that M. de Montfort had been seen preaching in public squares and that the Archbishop had had to suspend him in order to put an end to his outbursts of zeal. Others said that he had attacked the Pont-Neuf singers and suchlike public entertainers and had thus caused a great stir and disturbance; as a result, he had been arrested and been sent to the prison of the ecclesiastical court. /243/ As liars are always bold, especially where religion is concerned, they guaranteed that they had asserted nothing but what they had seen with their own eyes. All this could not fail to rouse opposition to the virtuous priest who was innocent of all the accusations made against him. Even the least

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<sup>72</sup> Jean-Baptiste de la Croix de Saint Vallier (1653-1727) was trained at Saint Sulpice. He had been the bishop of Quebec since 1688. From the end of 1700 until June 1704 he lived in France and Rome, engrossed in the affairs of his diocese.

gullible people were inclined to believe them<sup>73</sup> because they were asserted with such conviction, and I myself, who was so biased in favour of M. de Montfort, hardly dared disbelieve what everybody seemed to regard as the truth. Yet, he assured me himself that all these rumours were either false or distortions of the truth.

Alas, the diabolical sentence of the impious Machiavelli /244/ is only too true: "Slander, and it will always produce some effect, especially on devout persons." One half of the world is always ready to accuse them of the most ridiculous things, and the other half to believe them. When an impertinent practical joke is thought to have been played on a devout person, the story spreads through the town like wild fire, everybody repeats it or listens to it and nobody bothers to question it or to verify the facts. If the truth comes to light, everybody is, apparently, sorry /245/ and congratulates himself at least on having had a good laugh at the expense of the devout person in question. As there are countless slanderers and only very few honest charitable people, hardly anybody takes the initiative of justifying the accused and of unmasking the slander which, like black smoke, always leaves some trace in the mind.

It is a malicious trick of an evil man to prejudice people against those who work to spread the Gospel because he dreads their zeal and their virtues. He takes good care to blacken their reputation by alleging or distorting facts; /246/ he sows tares in the field where the workers sow the good seed by concocting thousand of ridiculous tales and stories which he puts into the mouths of the worldly and the jealous. In Christ's time, the envious listened carefully to his teaching in order to attack it and incite people to oppose it, and envious people nowadays are no less resourceful in their malicious attacks against his followers. Everything a zealous, highly-esteemed priest says is questioned, /247/ his every words pulled to pieces; no allowance is made for thoughtless remarks; he is called to account for everything.

### **LVIII° - HIS WAY OF PREACHING**

This happened to M. de Montfort when he was asked to preach in one of the underground chapels of St Sulpice parish church. All his sermon consisted in paraphrasing the Magnificat to which he was strongly attached because it is the canticle of the Blessed Virgin, and practically the only words spoken by Mary which the Holy Spirit has transmitted to us. What he said was most devout and most soul-stirring; the best evidence of this is that the congregation listened to him joyfully and attentively. /248/ But the malicious critics and the secretly envious who persecuted him everywhere said that there was really nothing praiseworthy in the sermon but that it was rather pitiable and deserving contempt.

It is true that the holy priest tried his best to adopt the simplicity of the Gospel and did not strive to attain worldly eloquence, because he was convinced that the folly of the cross which had defeated worldly wisdom and triumphed over vain philosophy and rhetoric does not draw its effects from beautiful words or from embellishments of an ornate flowery style. After he had prepared his subject carefully and made a mental note of the points which he wanted to make, /249/ he used to warm his heart in contemplation and found in it the fiery darts, the burning words, the God-inspired expressions and movements that one admires in the Prophets and the Apostles and which grip the listener, penetrate his heart and achieve his conversion.

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<sup>73</sup> These difficulties were confirmed in a letter dated October 1703. GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, pp. 46-48. It is likely that M. Grignon got into trouble with the police though his name does not appear in Court ledgers.

He did not strive unduly or rack his brains to compose nice-sounding perfectly phrased speeches in which one hears the voice of man and not that of God when the divine word is tainted by its mingling with profane eloquence thus causing what St Paul calls spiritual adulteration, “adulterantes Verbum Dei”<sup>74</sup>. This type of sermon /250/ requires a lot of time and effort on the part of the preacher and brings little spiritual profit to those who hear them. Montfort let himself be stirred by the spirit of God, he consulted him before preaching, surrendered to him once his preparation was over, prayed to him when he was on the point of delivering his sermons and relied on him when he was in the pulpit. I nearly forgot to mention the main thing: he asked to be given the spirit of God and tried to merit it by severe mortifications; he thought that a good scourging with the discipline was the right kind of preparation /251/ for his sermons and a necessary requirement to ensure their success.

Moreover, his sermons were not meant for fastidious people and he did not have to resort to a polished style and studied gestures to avoid offending the ears of refined critical listeners; all his ambition and his most fervent wish was to address the poorest and those who were least cared for. His zeal prompted him to care for those that were left aside; he tried to bring together such people as chimney sweeps, tramps and vagrants; after he had gathered them together, he gave them the bread of the word of God, being always careful to imitate his divine Model /252/ whose followers and listeners were mostly poor ordinary people. His love of the poor and his zeal to teach them was one of the characteristics of the promised Messiah and was most outstanding in the prophets: Christ revealed these qualities to the Jews and expected them to recognize him by this sign. *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*<sup>75</sup>. The disciple, following in his Master's footsteps, was the friend of the poor and made it his pleasurable duty to teach them. This should have been enough to convince everybody that such a man, who hated flesh and blood /253/ and was so careful not to yield to the promptings of nature which often creep even into the exercise of the priestly ministry, was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This opinion of Montfort should have been the natural result of his behaviour and I have heard some virtuous priests agree with it even when his behaviour was problematic, whereas others argued that he could not be guided by the Holy Spirit, *quia bonus est, alii autem dicebat non*<sup>76</sup>.

## **LIX° - HE IS SENT TO MONT-VALERIEN TO STAY WITH THE MONKS THERE. HE SUCCEEDS IN RESTORING PEACE AMONG THEM**

I think that it was about that time that he was sent to Mont-Valérien to try to restore peace /254/ in this divided monastic community. They lead a very secluded austere life in almost perpetual silence; very much like that of the Trappist monks and I have often heard people call this house the little “Trappe”. The superior of these monks, Brother Jean, was the oldest of them all. He governed them for quite some time in peace and union; but for some reason unknown to me there arose dissension among them. Abbé Madot, who is now Bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône, was their superior and tried /255/ with others to restore peace. But in vain. So he thought that M. Grignon might be more successful because of his great fervour and his good example. He begged him therefore to accept this task, and the servant of God agreed. He left immediately for this mount which is the highest in the Paris area. It was Winter; the weather was raw and bitterly cold, and in these high altitudes the wind, the

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<sup>74</sup> II Corinthians, 2, 17, “adulterantes verhum Dei”.

<sup>75</sup> Luke, 4, 18, “evangelizare pauperibus misit me”.

<sup>76</sup> John, 7, 12.

storms, the rain, the snow, the cold and the heat are more severe than anywhere else in the area.

His recollection, his spirit of contemplation, his fervour and his mortification /256/ astonished the monks and helped them in their renewal. He lived their way of life in every point, was present at all the spiritual exercises and set the example of all the most difficult virtues. The austerities practised by these monks were nothing beside his because to all their mortifications he added his own. They saw him in the chapel between their community exercises, always kneeling in contemplation, freezing and shivering with cold, because his poor cassock and perhaps a shabby jacket could not keep him warm and protect him from the bitter cold. /257/ The monks were sorry for him and begged him to put on one of their habits. Thus dressed in their white robe the man of God looked and lived like one of them. The monks were impressed by his example of virtue, moved by the grace and unction of his words, and won over by his gentleness and humility. They soon yielded to his desire and agreed with him that they should restore among themselves the peace and union which had been destroyed.

### **LX° - ON HIS WAY OUT OF PARIS HE GIVES TO THE POOR THE MONEY HE HAD RECEIVED FOR HIS JOURNEY, AS HAS ALWAYS BEEN HIS CUSTOM**

Then when he had fulfilled his task, M. Grignon returned to Paris /258/ which he had to leave again because he was the object of increasing persecution there. I now lost contact with him and could not say for sure what I heard from him or about him. He was given ten écus for his journey, but faithful to his praiseworthy habit, even before he left he gave this money to the poor as if he had received it simply on deposit. He was not in the least worried about himself or his needs. Once he had abandoned himself to God, he could not believe that he would want for anything; *he relied on /259/ the thoughtful care of Providence and set out on foot, living at the expense of divine Providence without fear of exhausting its resources or of expecting too much of its liberality.*

*I could not say exactly where he was heading for. I think he made for Nantes or Poitiers. So I am unable to give a clear and ordered account of several of his admirable actions and some of the events which created a stir.*

*I will begin with what happened at Poitiers, when Abbé de Villeroy, now Archbishop of Lyons, was then Vicar General. M. de Montfort gave a mission there by his order and under his supervision. All through the mission he worked hard to destroy the reign of sin in people's hearts. He also tried to destroy the exterior works of the devil, such as books against religion and morals, which were then circulated in large numbers in this area by heretics and other wicked people. It seemed to him that in order to achieve this purpose he could do no better than imitate what St Paul did at Ephesus, when he collected all the books on magic he could find in the city and burnt them publicly. Our apostolic missionary thought that it would be appropriate to urge all the inhabitants of Poitiers who might have such books in their possession to bring them to him. He would then burn them in public and this could not fail to create a stir, which would discredit such bad books<sup>77</sup>. His aim was good and he fervently hoped that its achievement would bring very good results.*

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<sup>77</sup> GRANDDET (Joseph) *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon*, pp. 88-92, relates this event which occurred while Montfort was preaching in the Church of the Benedictine Nuns of the Calvary, in 1705. When M. Blain claims that these bad books were spread by heretics in Poitiers, he exaggerates the importance of the latter as they were hardly one hundred in number.

*/260/ He collected a tremendous quantity of pornographic books which were brought to him from all sides. He piled them up ready for burning in a square of the town intending to set fire to them after a sermon in the church where he had preached the mission. Some individuals, however, prompted by a rash, less considerable zeal, wanted to go further than the pious and wise missionary and to make the whole thing more impressive; they thought that it would be appropriate to burn not only the bad books, but also an effigy of the devil who had inspired them.*

## **LXI° - HE RECEIVES A PUBLIC HUMILIATION LIKE A SAINT**

*So, without saying anything to M. de Montfort, they decided to dress an effigy of the devil in showy trimmings and worldly ornaments. Their intention in doing this was to inspire those who saw the effigy with disgust for all worldly pomp. Unknown to the missionary, they planted the effigy on top of the pile of books while he was preaching in the church so that when he came to set fire to the books with due ceremony after his sermon, he might set fire to the effigy of the devil at the same time. As soon as people saw this effigy on the pile, they started saying that the devil was going to be burnt alive, rather than that the bad books were going to be burnt. The rumour spread around the town and reached the ears of Abbé de Villeroy who thus got wind of what was afoot.*

*/261/ In order to prevent it he went to the scene himself while M. de Montfort arrived immediately after him. M. de Villeroy blamed him for having devised and engineered such a strange spectacle, and in the presence of the whole crowd assembled there reprimanded him very severely and omitted nothing that could humiliate and shame him. Never was a fault - if indeed the pious and simple plan of the missionary was one - more adequately expiated; the humble priest received the correction with almost unprecedented submission and calm.*

*Besides the public scandal which he could now witness and which he thought he had caused, though unwittingly, what gave most pain to the zealous missionary, indeed the only thing that mortified and greatly distressed him though he showed no signs of it at the time, was that, after all the piles of pernicious books had been knocked down pell-mell they could not be burnt because the permission had been withdrawn and as no counter order had been given, the people seized the opportunity to pounce on the books and take them home with them. So anyone who felt like it snatched what he could after shouldering his way through the crowd. The town was thus flooded again with the pernicious venom of all these books in spite of the goodly /262/ plan of the charitable missionary to purify and protect the town by destroying the source of the poison; at the same time he wanted to inspire horror and disgust for such corrupt contaminated waters.*

*This circumstantial incident was related by M. de Montfort himself to a trustworthy priest. It was related also by another priest who witnessed the whole incident.*

*An account of the same incident, omitting the extenuating circumstances, was then sent to a priest of St Sulpice by an ill-informed religious. He started his letter by making fun of M. de Montfort, but added that the saintly way in which he received the humiliation inflicted on him by Abbé de Villeroy was worthy of praise. The religious wrote: "I do not think that there is a man more recollected, more unassuming, more humble, more mortified in the whole world. I would even say that there is none more holy if his zeal were more ordered." So for the sake of justice, this religious had to end his letter by paying homage to the virtuous missionary.*

## **LXII° - HE PASSES THROUGH THE ABBEY OF FONTEVRAUD BUT DOES NOT SEE HIS SISTER FOR WHOM HE HAD OBTAINED A PLACE THERE AS A LAY SISTER. WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM**

/263/ The man of God was one day passing the famous Abbey of Fontevraud where, as far as I know, he had had his sister accepted as a lay sister. As usual he went there to ask for alms for the love of God. As there was something strange in his face and expression, as well as his manners, the Sister to whom he spoke was most impressed but even more so by his saintly look and the loving way he said: "For the love of God," when asking for alms. It did not take much to arouse the curiosity of the young lady who tried to gratify it by asking him all kinds of questions. Yet /264/ the only answer she could get out of him was: "I am asking alms for the love of God." This only increased the curiosity of the Sister who thought that by sending for the Abbess she would have less difficulty in finding out the name of the travelling priest and all she wished to know about him. When the Sister informed the Abbess, she showed herself just as curious; however, the priest evaded all her questions and his only answer was: "Madam, there is no point in your knowing my name. I am not asking you for charity for my own sake but for the love of God." And judging him to be insane the Abbess sent him away.

/265/ The poor traveller, who was very tired and weary, accepted this refusal with heroic patience, and all he said to the Sister was: "If the Abbess knew who I am she would not refuse to give me alms." When these words were reported to the other sisters they roused their curiosity and became something of a mystery which would never have been understood but for the explanation given by M. Grignon's sister. After hearing a description of his general appearance and of his face, so easily recognizable by his aquiline nose, she said: "He is my brother." Now, she had often told the other Sisters about her brother and had filled them with a great desire to see him. So somebody was immediately /266/ sent after him to apologise and beg him to come back. But the man of God was indignant that the Sisters should be willing to do for his sake what they refused to do for the love of God; he replied: "The Abbess refused to give me charity for the love of God and now she offers to do it for my own sake! No, thank you." Thereupon, no matter how badly he needed rest and food, he asked for it as before of the poor country peasants<sup>78</sup>.

This very odd incident, which I think is unprecedented, /267/ shows to what degree this holy man was filled with the spirit of God, since he called at the convent where he had placed his sister and was not even tempted to see her; he asked with humility for alms for the love of God; he suffered the refusal with the gentleness of a saint when he was in pressing need of help; but what to me is most remarkable is that he would not accept it when it was offered for the love of him because it had been refused for the love of God. He must have attained a high degree of self-denial, and been filled with the spirit of God to behave /268/ in such a supernatural way when it was so easy to follow his natural inclinations; and when it would have been quite permissible and easy to behave like any ordinary human being.

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<sup>78</sup> M. Grignon was known to the nuns of the Abbey of Fontevraud. In April 1701 he had attended the taking of the veil of his sister Sylvie who was born in 1677. This "incognito" visit, which is omitted by two of his biographers of the XVIIIth century (Besnard and Picot), cannot be dated with certitude. One might suggest that it was in September 1706 when Mr. Grignon was travelling from Poitiers to Rennes. This would place it close, both chronologically and psychologically, to the two other similar "incognito" encounters which follow.

### **LXIII° - ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF ODD BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS HIS DOMINICAN BROTHER**

Here is another incident which bears a great resemblance to the previous one. M. Grignion had a brother who was a member of the Dominican Order and was sacristan in the prory at Dinan, when M. Grignion happened to pass through this town. As he wanted to say Mass, he asked his brother, who had not recognized him and whom he called “Brother” to give him some vestments. The sacristan was not too happy about being addressed as “Brother” instead of “Father”. /269/ He did give him the vestments but not without some grumbling; the following day the same priest came back again and asked for the vestments again but used the words “My dear Brother”, which made the sacristan even less happy. The third day brought no change, and the sacristan was even more displeased and shocked, so he said sharply to the unknown priest that he should go and find his brothers elsewhere. He was greatly surprised and ashamed when M. Grignion, falling on his neck, said: “You are my brother by nature and by grace”<sup>79</sup>.

It is on such occasions that men show themselves as they really are, /270/ without veneer or disguise. The religious reveals all that is human in him and the priest shows nothing of the sort. Everywhere he appears as a man who has come down from heaven, who, after the example of St Paul, does not know any natural attachment, puts aside all natural inclinations and follows only the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which prompts and governs him in everything. In short, he is a man who can truly say “I live, not I, but Christ lives in me,” acting and controlling everything.

The life of M. Grignion offers many similar instances, /271/ all bearing the hallmark of a consummate perfection. Here is another which is very odd. He took the name of Montfort after the name of his birthplace, in imitation of St Louis and out of respect and gratitude for the grace of baptism which he received there. Montfort-la-Cane is a very small village in the diocese of St-Malo, about ten miles from Rennes. He was born and brought up there and in the course of his apostolic journeys he wished to revisit it.

### **LXIV° - HE GOES BACK TO HIS BIRTHPLACE WHERE NOBODY ACCEPTS TO LODGE HIM, EXCEPT HIS POOR NURSE**

He arrived there one day as a stranger and went from door to door asking for hospitality and charity but his own received him not: “et sui eum non receperunt”<sup>80</sup>. /272/ God probably allowed this to happen to grant him the honour of resembling His Son more closely. He finally asked his nurse, who was the poorest as well as the most Christian person in the village. She welcomed him warmly and shared with him all that she had: some milk and cake. This was the usual fare of the poor priest who was very pleased to find it just when he needed it. While he was having his meal the good woman eyed him and taking her mind back to the days when she suckled him thought she recognized him. In order to make sure, however, she went to her neighbours and asked them their opinion. They gathered just outside the door, then walked in one after /273/ the other to have a good look at him. They soon agreed that it was Louis Marie Grignion, son of M. de la Bacheleraie; his aquiline nose gave him away and his other features fitted the memory they had of him as a child. The kind nurse was delighted to entertain in her home her foster-son about whom she had heard such

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<sup>79</sup> This brother, Joseph-Pierre was born in 1674; he joined the Dominican order in 1696. GRANDDET (Joseph) *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignion*, situates this event when M. Grignion passed through Rennes on his way back from Rome, thence at the end of the year 1706.

<sup>80</sup> John, 1, 11.

edifying things; she soon spread the news in the village, helped in this by her neighbours who did not feel inclined to keep it to themselves.

Then they were all sorry that they had closed their doors in his face and vied with each other in offering him accommodation; /274/ however, the poor missionary, who never accepted for his own sake charity which had been refused for love of God, thanked them all by paying them a compliment which is so apt coming from a saint: "I asked you all for hospitality for the love of God; you all refused; my poor nurse was the only charitable person here so it is only fair that I should stay with her,"<sup>81</sup> which he did for the short time he spent there; during that time he did as much good as he could but he met with much opposition because the zeal which he showed to spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin, /275/ to encourage people to say the Rosary and to visit the chapels dedicated to the Mother of God, did not please those who thought that it was in their interest to turn them away from these practices, especially from the last one<sup>82</sup>.

### **LXV° - HE WORKS IN COLLABORATION WITH M. LEUDUGER, A FAMOUS BRETON MISSIONARY; THEN HE IS REJECTED AND CALLED BACK SOME TIME LATER, BUT HE FOLLOWS THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CONDUCT OF HIS MISSIONS**

I do not know where he went when he left Montfort-la-Cane. I could not say whether it was before or after that time that he joined M. Leuduger, a Scholastic theologian attached to the cathedral of St-Brieuc, who organized missions in Brittany and was a man of great merit and virtue<sup>83</sup>. They worked together for some time and would perhaps have continued until the death of one of them if the devil /276/ had not worked for his part to separate them.

For this purpose he turned several priests against M. Grignion who accompanied M. Leuduger on his missions. As they did not like him, they found fault with everything he did. What turned them against him was that they secretly disliked his manners, and perhaps even fell victim to real jealousy, because his virtue was manifest wherever he was, and his sermons, forceful yet full of unction, won the hearts of the people. The result was that their dislike for him increased because he was a man with whom none of them could compete. /279/ The break was caused by a rather trifling incident.

During a mission M. Leuduger, who was a man powerful in words and deeds, spoke very forcefully, as he usually did, about praying for the dead and the necessity of helping souls in Purgatory. When he had finished his sermon, M. Grignion thought that it would be a good idea if he took advantage of the good dispositions of the congregation to make a collection, with a view to obtaining enough money to say a good number of Masses for the

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<sup>81</sup> GRANDET (Joseph) *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignion*, pp. 114-116, reports the same event which must have occurred after M. Grignion's return from Rome, i.e. at the end of the year 1706 or beginning of 1707. However the two versions do not agree: according to Grandet, M. Grignion did not put up at his old nurse's house but at a very poor old man's. The nurse recognized him on the following day. The two later biographers of the XVIIIth century (Besnard and Picot) adopted M. Blain's version and expanded it.

<sup>82</sup> This reminder of M. Grignion's devotion to the Blessed Virgin refers particularly to his stay at the priory of Saint-Lazare, near Montfort. It took place one year after.

<sup>83</sup> Jean Leuduger (1649-1722) was director of Missions in Saint Brieuc, and invited the collaboration of many diocesan Priests, like Father Maunoir (beginning of XVIIIth century) to whom he succeeded. This accounts for M. Grignion's collaboration during part of the year 1707. This collaboration gave shape to one of the dreams of his adolescence.

dead. Nothing could have caused greater annoyance to M. Leuduger /278/ and his associates who on all their missions always made it a point of showing and proving their selflessness. It was an agreed rule among them never to ask for anything and to be content with what was sent to them in the way of food for the duration of the mission. M. de Montfort did not know about this rule, or if he did, an outburst of zeal caused him to forget it. He had no sooner started to take the collection than he roused the indignation of all his confreres and his action earned him a severe reprimand from the man in charge of his group. He was severely censured for taking /279/ the collection as if his mistake were irreparable and unpardonable. M. Leuduger rejected him from his group<sup>84</sup> and said that he would not work in collaboration with him any longer. If the mistake made by M. de Montfort, which at bottom was harmless, had been made by anybody else, it would have passed unnoticed, would not have annoyed anybody or at most might perhaps have resulted in a charitable warning, as was pointed out to me one day by a very virtuous priest of Rennes, who was a close friend of M. Leuduger's and often accompanied him on his missions. However, anything that the humble priest did was regarded as a sin and nothing was forgiven him.

If this rebuff had been the first one, M. de Montfort's feelings might have been hurt /280/ but hardly a day passed but divine Providence kept several similar ones in store for him, so he had had plenty of time to prepare himself for this one. As a result, he had to work on his own and to follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and this was the time when he began to do so. M. Leuduger could think of no one fitted to succeed him or capable of replacing him as mission leader in Brittany, except M. de Montfort. He seemed to regret having sent him away and a few years later wrote to him to ask him to join him again and continue to work with him. /281/ The man of God, however, had started giving missions in his own way, that is, in the way of the Apostles, in a great spirit of simplicity, poverty, penance and abandonment to divine Providence, and, as he could see the good results of his missions, he did not think he should change<sup>85</sup>.

## **LXVI° - HE ALWAYS TRAVELLED ON FOOT. HOW HE GAVE HIS MISSIONS**

Following the example of Christ, the fervent missionary always travelled on foot. I should have pointed this out earlier. He never travelled otherwise even when he had to make the longest and most arduous journeys. He used to walk from one village to another and stayed where the inhabitants were willing to lodge him and for as long as they made him welcome and he thought that some good could be done.

/282/ His usual food was that of country people: milk and a kind of cake; when the parish priests willing to accommodate him treated him better, he counterbalanced this physical comfort by inflicting twice as much penance on his body. Before his instructions, sermons and catechism lessons he always said a prayer which usually consisted in saying publicly a few decades of the rosary. He once told me that the reason for this was that grace was dependent on prayer and that souls must be prepared by prayer to receive the word of God which, he added, is the seed from heaven and needs the showers of heavenly grace gained by prayer as much as the seed in the earth needs rain.

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<sup>84</sup> This conflict looks rather strange as M. Grignon himself was very keen on total abandonment to Providence; he wanted to live on the generosity of the parishioners and he usually refused to take any money. GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, p. 694. This passage from M. Blain is a typical case of explanation put to the account of sin and the devil.

<sup>85</sup> ) It was in 1708, in the diocese of Saint-Malo (near Montfort), but mainly in the diocese of Nantes (south of river Loire) that M. Grignon took over the direction of true missions.

/ 283/ He distributed the bread of the word of God in virtually every possible way without laying emphasis on any specific form; he followed his inspiration and used the method which he thought best suited to benefit his congregation. He used catechism lessons, lectures, instructions and sermons, but he always took care not to be a slave to the prevailing fashion regarding either the arrangement of the subjects, or the time and place for preaching or any of the other formalities which are observed today<sup>86</sup>.

/284/ Once he walked into the pulpit and stood there without speaking a word. What was he going to do? Well, he suddenly pulled out a fairly large crucifix which he always wore, showed it to the assembled congregation, left it on display in the pulpit and walked down the steps. His intention was to make his hearers realize that it was the crucified Christ who was doing the preaching and that they should listen to Him. Then in order to make them more attentive to the voice of the divine Preacher he went about the church carrying another crucifix which he showed to the congregation, then offered it to each one to be kissed, saying: "This is your Saviour; /285/ aren't you sorry you have offended him?" Then, kneeling down, he offered the crucifix to all willing to come and kiss its feet. Strangely enough, it seemed that all the members of the congregation were overwhelmed with sorrow and their hearts overflowing with love and tenderness, as was shown by their floods of tears; each one waited with a holy impatience and wonderful devotion for the holy missionary to come to them that they might kiss the feet of the crucifix. They were all intent on venerating and honouring this particular crucifix, holding it in their hands and kissing it, and they did not feel attracted to honour any other in the same way. All of them in turn admitted that they were guilty /286/ of the death of their Saviour and made an act of public reparation. This novel sermon lasted for as long as it took the missionary to go all round the church and offer the crucifix on his knees to one and all to venerate it, kiss it and implore it. This silent preaching brought about more tears, more lamentations and more spiritual good among the congregation than the most forceful and moving sermon<sup>87</sup>. Which shows that God takes pleasure in confounding the most sublime worldly wisdom /287/ with the apparent folly of the cross. He makes the greatest graces dependent on the manifestations of simple, inspired devotion. He takes pleasure in making his saints powerful in words and deeds; a word they say, a change of tone in their voice, an inspired gesture, are enough to cause miraculous conversions through the power of the Most High.

This occurred at Montfort in Saint-Jean's church

What I have just related was told me a short time ago by a Capuchin Father who accompanied Montfort on several of his missions. /288/ On the strength of what this very worthy religious told me, I add what follows<sup>88</sup>.

Father Vincent

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<sup>86</sup> This freedom in life-style and action which was made up of non-conformism and adaptation to audiences, can be traced in the directives given by M. Grignion to his missionaries. GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *Complete works*, pp. 704-707.

<sup>87</sup> This event must have occurred within the year 1707.

<sup>88</sup> Father Raoul, the archivist for the Capuchin Fathers in France could not succeed in identifying this Father Vincent mentioned pp. 292, 302, 308, 346. It seems that this Father worked with M. Grignion after the latter had broken away M. Leuduger. It might have been in the diocese of Saint Malo or possibly in Nantes.

## **LXVII° - HIS ATTRACTION FOR TEACHING THE POOR WHO WERE ALWAYS HIS FAVOURITES. HIS PIOUS DEVICES AND HIS ART OF WINNING HEARTS**

In order to win souls, the incomparable missionary made use of many different means; he thought that all of them deserved his attention and he examined and studied each one. The poor, the lowly, boys and girls, men and women, all benefited from his work; but in order that they might derive greater advantage he gave each category their own separate instructions.

He always had a tender spot in his heart for the poor and the underprivileged /289/ and they were also his favourites in his apostolic work; they were always the first object of his zeal; those among them who were the most unfortunate and the most repellent were those whom he loved best. He sought for the most encouraging words to comfort them. He was ready to do anything to help them. He who was poor also and as poor as any of them, taught them to love from necessity a condition which he loved from choice and charity. He taught them to endure it with patience if they were not virtuous enough to endure it with joy; he complemented these comforting, consoling instructions /290/ with an alms given to each of them to make sure that what he had told them would move their hearts.

It may be wondered on what funds he could draw for his liberal daily alms-giving. I have already answered this question: he drew treasures from his very poverty. The poorest priest in France gave more alms than the richest beneficed one in the whole country. He always had something to give; divine Providence, who had selected him as her treasurer and had made him the instrument of her largesse for the poor, /291/ provided him with the necessary funds to fulfil his task well.

Young tramps, beggars, waifs and strays enjoyed special privileges in the exercise of his mission and of his charity. He held special meetings for them, taught them catechism, instructed them and gave them advice suited to their age, their idle way of life as vagrants and tramps. His ingenious zeal inspired him with many pious devices with a view to bringing home to them the danger of their condition, the sins it might lead them to commit and the hateful character of these sins. His final purpose was to bring them to make a good /292/ confession.

The Capuchin Father told me how he set about achieving this aim. When he was among these young tramps and poor people he behaved like a father to his children, he talked to them with kindness and love; after he had taught them catechism he used all his skill to change their mentality gradually, mould their minds and achieve his aim, which was to rid them of all feeling of shame at confessing their sins; for this purpose he talked to them about larceny and spared them no detail to discourage them from committing it. When he thought he had touched their hearts he suggested that they should not be ashamed of admitting their guilt in this respect. /293/ He said: "Children, do not be afraid to admit that you have stolen; as a sign of your repentance put up your hands if your conscience reproaches you with any thefts." After the guilty ones had put up their hands, he took them all out of the church to a place where he ordered that fire should be set to a pile of straw; then in the presence of all those who had gathered there he asked what punishment was reserved for thieves: "The fire of hell," they replied. /294/ "Well, this gives you a faint idea of it," he said forcefully then he went on talking about the eternal pains reserved for thieves, trying to inspire his audience with a great aversion for stealing, and also to get them to make a frank private confession of the sins they had confessed publicly.

This was the double aim he set himself and the result which he expected from this peculiar behaviour which impressed uneducated people far more than the best sermons. I must admit that whoever tries to please the worldly is strongly prejudiced /295/ against this kind of practice. Such conduct would not go down well in large towns and would not be to the liking of well-mannered and well-educated people who can be moved without resorting to any of these external practices; in fact some think that they are not suitable anywhere, but in this they make a mistake. Experience teaches us that these practices are more effective than any other when dealing with simple, uneducated people; though they are not intelligent enough to understand purely spiritual things, they are not for all that devoid of the faculty of forming an idea of them through exterior practices used as a kind of visual aid.

### **LXVIII° - HIS WAY OF INSTRUCTING PEOPLE IS JUSTIFIED BY THE BEHAVIOUR OF M. LE NOBLETZ, A FAMOUS BRETON MISSIONARY WHO DIED IN THE ODOUR OF SANCTITY**

/296/ It is well-known that in the last century M. Le Nobletz found this method effective in instructing his fellow-countrymen of the mysteries of our religion; by fellow-cuntrymen I mean the ordinary people and peasants of Lower Brittany and of a few neighbouring islands, who could be called sub-humans because they seemed to be undoubtedly the coarsest and most uncivilised in the kingdom. By making use of his drawings and pictures, which he presented to the public and whose prints are sold in Paris, he had found the secret to open the minds of these people to the religious truths, which he could not do by using words; he /297/ also succeeded in giving them an idea of the nature of sin, of the aversion they should have for it, and of its various kinds and degrees. He managed to impress them with the idea of death, the judgement, Heaven and Hell. He even taught them how to meditate on the mysteries of the life and death of Christ. In short; this great Breton missionary who died in the odour of sanctity, managed, through his use of striking actions and pictures, to change the face of this part of the world in which he lived and to turn virtually sub-human beings into good Christians.

M. de Montfort walked in his footsteps and used similar practices without caring about the prevailing taste; without worrying about the censure of over-critical or over-delicate people, his sole aim was to do good to souls and to save them; he chose the means which he thought most appropriate to this end without paying any attention to what people might say. When a person considers God alone and seeks only his glory it naturally follows that he does not care much about what the worldly may say. He does not fear to displease them because he does not try to please them; if this person is a priest, he tries to find in all /298/ the exercises of the priestly ministry what is most conducive to the good of religion and the sanctification of souls.

Once he has reached this stage, he does his best and lets the worldly talk because they often regard as ridiculous actions which are very meritorious in the eyes of God and produce very good results among the faithful. It is therefore no wonder that M. de Montfort, who took no notice at all of what people might say or think, followed the inspiration of the grace of God very faithfully and used the most appropriate means to instruct uneducated people and move hardened hearts without trying to spare the susceptibilities of the worldly prudent. In this he was imitating the Prophets, who took no such precautions, and even more the Apostles, who had been taught by Christ himself and trained by him; missionaries who try to follow in their footsteps have therefore every right to imitate them in their way of preaching.

If the worldly were consulted about the different preaching method which was used after the one which I have just mentioned and if their advice were followed, it is probable that

they would not accept it; /299/ perhaps they would find it ridiculous; but here human reason must keep silent for the spirit of God, which takes pleasure in making use of the weakest instruments, also delights in hiding Himself under the cloak of very modest appearances and of contemptible actions; the graces which accompany them are the guarantee of his approval.

After the missionary had shown his ingenuity in winning the souls of the poor and the lowly by distributing to them the bread of the word of God, he decided to concentrate his efforts on the rich. He gathered them together in the parish hall, then before he spoke to them he asked for a needle and thread. His request seemed out of place and ridiculous to those who did not know him; however, M. de Montfort insisted and the parish priest, who expected something of the kind, muttered his disapproval and was not the only one to do so. Eventually Montfort was given what he asked for and tried to thread the needle but he could not because the thread was too thick. He took as the starting-point for his sermon the words of Christ: "It is more difficult for a rich man to enter Heaven than it is for camel to pass through the eye of a needle."<sup>89</sup> "The oracle of Christ," he /300/ said, "is that heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will not. In vain will the world proclaim maxims contrary to this; in vain will nature and the flesh give them their support; in vain will the powers of hell rebel and try everything to destroy this infallible oracle: it is impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." He went on to show what a danger riches are, what abuse is made of them, how they should be used, how the rich should sanctify them by detaching their hearts and minds from them, by alms-giving, prayer and good works.

On such occasions, when the man of God gave full play to his zeal, nothing could have been more moving, more to the point, more stirring than the words which fell from his lips. Each word had, as it were, the colouring of the Holy Spirit and penetrated the soul. There was something divine about his voice, his face, his gestures and his arguments which partook of the powerful virtue which enlightens the minds and wins rebellious hearts. The eloquence of the Prophets and of the Apostles helped /301/ a man who did not want other any kind of eloquence, and whose only aim in his sermons was to convert people and instil in their hearts the love of Christ.

## **LXIX° - THE GOOD RESULTS OF HIS INSTRUCTIONS SANCTION HIS WAY OF PREACHING**

When people came away from his sermons they were converted or at least had acquired the desire to be converted; they had tears in their eyes and were deeply moved. Such was the result of his preaching. Those who had started by laughing when first listening to him often returned home in tears. A fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos<sup>90</sup>; you will know them by their fruits. That is the rule given by Christ; the real test of the quality of a sermon is the effect it produces, no other test is reliable. No matter how much the preacher or what he says may be ridiculed, if he has moved people and converted them, then his sermon was good. Writing to Nepotian, St Jerome said: "The amount of applause given to a preacher counts for nothing; it is the effect he produces that matters."<sup>91</sup> He is eloquent when he can draw tears from the eyes and sighs from the hearts, which are signs of repentance and penance. The less notice people take of the preacher, the less they talk about him, the less they praise him, because they are too busy examining their conscience, asking God's forgiveness, planning a new life, the /302/ more eloquent he is. If he is to be judged by these standards, M. de

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<sup>89</sup> Matthew, 19, 24.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew, 7, 16.

<sup>91</sup> From Saint Jerome's letter no. 52.

Montfort can be ranked among the greatest preachers of the century as he is one of those who had mastered the art of moving hearts and winning souls to Christ. How many profligates, criminals and bandits have found that during their private talks with him or during his sermons their hearts at first as hard as stone or as cold as marble, were softened, torn, warmed, completely changed! The Capuchin Father whom I have already mentioned told me that one day M. de Montfort saw a large crowd of people assembled; he climbed up a tree to speak to them; then he saw the Capuchin Father and some priests drawing near and took this opportunity of humiliating himself: "Look how humble these good priests and religious are," he said, "they deign to come and listen to me when they should be in my place and I should be listening at their feet." Then he began his sermon and spoke so movingly, with such unction, grace and forcefulness that the priests who were /303/ there and those who were least prejudiced in his favour admired him and seemed to say: "Nunquam sic locutus est homo"<sup>92</sup>. No man has ever spoken like this man."

### **LXX° - DURING HIS MISSIONS IN THE COUNTRY DISTRICTS HE ESTABLISHED A KIND OF SEPARATE CONGREGATIONS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS**

I have said that during his missions he gave separate talks appropriate to the age, sex and social status of those taking part in the missions. The boys had their own, and so had the girls. He gathered together into a kind of congregation the boys who had been moved by his sermons and whom he hoped to convert. After he had given the appropriate instructions, he drew up for them a set of regulations, and prescribed some spiritual exercises to ensure their conversion and their perseverance in the right path. On Sundays and feast-days these boys assembled in some chapel and performed their special spiritual exercises in the intervals between the services held in the parish church. This good practice is still extant today in some places visited by the zealous missionary; they are a good example for the young people there and souls derive great profit from them.<sup>93</sup>

As for the girls, he took great care to remind them of the virtues proper to their age and sex: /304/ decency, modesty, piety, purity, a spirit of recollection, a love of solitude. In order to encourage those who intended to dedicate their lives to God in the world because they were unable or unwilling to do so in a convent, he established societies of virgins, drew up rules of conduct for them, and prescribed spiritual exercises and a way of life adapted to their condition. These girls lived alone in their own houses or with their parents or in their employers' houses if they were servants, and were no different from ordinary girls except that they tried to be very pious and modest. On Sundays and feast-days only they wore a large white veil and a white dress and had separate places in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; on feast-days two of them carried a picture of our Lady in a solemn procession, and the others followed very piously with their veils pulled low down over their faces. They took the vow of chastity but only for one year; this was a wise measure because in a fit of fervour some girls are ready to undertake and promise anything, then /303/ when they lose their first fervour they become thoughtless and unsettled and are a discredit to religion. This measure is even wiser in the case of girls living in the world where they are exposed to its dangers and bad examples. Moreover, it is well-known that the frivolity and fickleness of girls make it necessary to test their best intentions and it is not safe to trust their good resolutions. As their

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<sup>92</sup> John, 7, 46.

<sup>93</sup> These were confraternities of "White Penitents". M. Blain met some at Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre in 1724 (cf below p. 357).

constitution is frail and their imagination vivid, some of them venture to take vows without asking for advice or without due consideration, carried away as they are by the strong blind impulses of their pious feelings, then they are sorry for having been too impulsive and, in defiance of piety, have to obtain dispensations, which are never a subject of edification. So it does happen that some who have made a good spiritual start end by yielding to the desire of the flesh.

In order to spare the girls these disadvantages, they were subjected to tests before joining the society, and were not allowed to take the vow of chastity until they reached a certain age, and even then they took this vow for one year only; this arrangement was made so that when the year was over, if they regretted the choice /306/ made, or were disinclined to renew their vow, or if through lukewarmness, thoughtlessness, slackness, frivolity, inconstancy or for some other motive they resolved to change their state, they were then at perfect liberty to do so; on the other hand, they could be asked to leave if they did not behave properly, aroused gossip, and were no longer truly Christ-like.

Such congregations of virgins are still to be found in some places where they were established by M. de Montfort; however, as this is one of the practices which met with the greatest opposition, I will try to justify their foundation later on<sup>94</sup>.

### **LXXI° - HE WAS SPECIALLY GIFTED FOR ORGANIZING PROCESSIONS AND KEEPING EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL DURING HIS MISSIONS**

The holy priest had a lively imagination when it came to thinking up anything that might increase the piety of uneducated people and give them a taste for it. He was incomparably ingenious when he had to put into practice all that his zeal prompted him to do. It is generally agreed that he had a special gift for organizing processions on a vast scale and for keeping order in all the exercises of the mission. His friends and enemies alike agree that he had this gift and /307/ was matchless in this respect. Father Vincent, a Capuchin who worked with him on several of his missions, told me that he had seen him organize admirably and in a very short time one of the largest Corpus Christi processions. He divided the people by states of life, ages and sexes, and had them walk in fours in such a short time, so effortlessly and ingeniously that the large crowd caused no trouble at all. There were no delays and no incidents of thoughtless behaviour. When the procession reached the temporary altar, which was in the open country, he knelt down at the feet of Christ for a few moments of recollection; then he spoke with such grace and unction that everybody burst into tears.

### **LXII° - HIS POWER TO MOVE HEARTS. HIS GIFT FOR SERMONS**

It was not because their imagination was fired by a few fits of devotion. sudden and short-lived, which brought tears to the eyes, it was because the hearts were deeply moved and the tears were the proof of genuine devotion. People shed tears without being even aware they were doing so; their eyes betrayed their hearts by disclosing its secret feelings. /308/ “In short,” as the Capuchin Father told me, “I thought I saw an angel when I heard M. de Montfort speak. His radiant, beaming face showed his burning love. He said only what the Holy Spirit prompted him to say; his voice, gestures and countenance reflected his union with

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<sup>94</sup> Those were confraternities of Virgins. Blain met some at Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, in 1724, cf. below, pp. 357-359. M. Blain did not write any justification as he said he would; in the meantime he might have come to know about the one written by Grandet.

God present in the host, and were an indication that the words he uttered were those of Christ himself.”

The Capuchin Father was not the only one who told me about the rare gift of M. de Montfort for preaching the word of God with great success. Several other Capuchin and Jesuit Fathers, who were experts in this matter, have testified to the same fact. One of these told me that he had heard of the great power which M. de Montfort had to stir the hearts, and of the divine art with which he could subdue the most obstinate, warm the coldest and soften the hardest; he was anxious to hear him with his own ears. He went to one of his sermons in the company of a distinguished priest<sup>95</sup> who had a reputation for having a fine, penetrating mind and was Vicar General at Nantes. When he arrived he found the whole congregation in tears; including even some priests, although it is generally accounted as a feat to move priests to tears, /309/ which only made the fact the more remarkable. The distinguished priest made a firm resolution to check his tears because crying is an undeniable proof of a softened and touched heart. At first he was able to keep his resolution and his eyes remained dry; but he could not resist for long the impression made on him by the fiery words of M. de Montfort which touched his heart to the quick and filled him with the tenderest feeling of devotion; finally, almost without being aware of the fact, he began to cry and joined with the rest who were all in tears. The Vicar General who was with him and who regarded M. de Montfort as a saint and justified him on all occasions, could not check his tears either and thus paid to the holy preacher the compliment that most of his hearers paid him.

**LXXIII° - HE ERECTS A CALVARY. SOME ENVIOUS PEOPLE INFORM THE COURT AND THE BAILIFF IS ORDERED TO HAVE IT PULLED DOWN IF HE THINKS IT FIT TO DO SO. HE COMPLIES WITH THE ORDER UNDER THE PRESSURE OF PREJUDICED PEOPLE. THEN HE REGRETS WHAT HE HAS DONE**

The Calvary which Montfort had erected a few miles from Nantes at such great expense of money and labour is an undeniable proof of the grace that God had given him and of the influence he had on souls<sup>96</sup>. This work, which a provincial governor /310/ would hardly have dared to undertake and which would have cost a prince large sums of money, was not only undertaken but carried out by the poorest of all priests. I am told that he asked peasants and workmen living within a radius of 30 miles or more to come and work. Prompted by his own zeal, these poor people accepted his invitation and flocked in their thousands to the place. They worked all day long, sweating and labouring for a man who had no reward to offer them but the promise of heaven. Some people have even told me that more than twenty thousand men worked at the erection of the calvary, and they did not grudge the time they devoted to the glory of God; on the contrary, each of them worked as hard as two mercenaries. This is easy to believe because this work which would have cost a prince quite a lot of money and would have taken fifty thousand men several months to build was

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<sup>95</sup> Jean Barin was born in 1646; his family was related to that of M. Grignon; he was then Vicar General at Nantes. This event might have occurred in 1708, when M. Grignon came to that diocese. Louis Martinet (1662-1714) was director of retreats for women between the years 1708 and 1712; he gave his testimony for the first biography of Montfort; this testimony was published by GRANDDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon*, pp. 461-463.

<sup>96</sup> This Calvary was erected on a heath called La Madeleine, in the parish of Pontchâteau, diocese of Nantes, between May 1709 and September 1710.

completed down to the last detail in a fairly short time, thanks to the care and industry of the zealous missionary.

Envious and jealous People were bound to raise their voices on seeing such a beautiful achievement. They turned this work of piety into a crime and the poor priest was going to be regarded as a state criminal because he had erected a calvary to represent /311/ the cross of his Saviour and renew in Christian hearts the feelings of love, tenderness and compassion which they owe to Jesus crucified.

The authorities were immediately informed, the provincial governor was told what was going on, the zealous missionary was sued and reported as plotting a revolt in which his calvary would be used as a shelter for mutineers and rebels, or at least for criminals. A letter was sent to the king and those who wrote it thought they were doing the State a great service by informing the authorities about the large numbers of men who had worked there, and about the stupendous crowds that were attracted by this so-called devotion, which could very well serve as a cover for some plot. After this information had been sent, the Governor received an order from the king to visit the place and to have it destroyed if he thought it dangerous for the security of the State and suitable for sheltering ill-disposed people. The governor visited the place with prejudiced eyes. He saw the places of worship and the underground chapels suited for prayer and recollection, especially for meditation on the mysteries of the Passion of our Saviour, which were already represented there or were to be completed soon. In all this he saw something very akin to a plot against the State. The day for the dedication of the Calvary was drawing near and crowds of people from far /312/ and near planned to come and take part in the religious ceremony when the Governor ordered that the calvary should be destroyed. M. de Montfort was very sorry and ashamed to have to watch the destruction of such a pious edifice which would have served to remind people of the sufferings of Christ; he had looked forward to the day of its dedication and it was the result of the hard work of a vast number of poor people.

His father had come a long way to attend the ceremony and was overjoyed to see his son and to hear what the people said about him. He was even more upset than his son by the insult visited upon him. As he was having supper with a large assembly of religious, priests and other distinguished people who were trying to comfort him, he kept praising his son, who, he said, had never caused him any pain.

M. de Montfort welcomed the days which brought trials as days of rejoicing, so he bore this public outrage with his usual equanimity and patience. The destruction of the calvary was a cross which he had not expected; he then thought only of being nailed to it after the example of his Master, contenting himself with suffering silently without any bitterness in his heart or any complaint on his lips. Some time later, the governor realized what his order had meant and regretted having given it. Although it was too late, he realized that M. de Montfort was waging war /313/ only on vice and sin and that those who had reason to fear him were the devil and the powers of hell. The governor was ashamed of having imagined that a calvary and a place of worship could become a drill ground and a fort for would-be mutineers<sup>97</sup>.

I will make no mention of the miracles related by the men who worked at the famous calvary under the orders of M. Grignon. They talk of them even today with tears in their eyes and their hearts still full of devotion. This is a matter for the Church to judge and decide. I

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<sup>97</sup> All the given details have been confirmed by one of the collaborators of M. Grignon, one M. Gabriel Olivier, and quoted by GRANDDET (Joseph) *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon*, pp. 152-156. The number of people who worked at the erection of the Calvary seems to be exact.

will give more examples of prodigies of charity which, while making it easier to believe in the miracles, are more worthy of our attention and are more apt to edify us.

### **LXXIV° - EXTRAORDINARY CHARITY SHOWN BY M. DE MONTFORT ON THE OCCASION OF A SEVERE FLOOD OF THE RIVER LOIRE AT NANTES**

The people who live on the banks of the River Loire, acquainted as they are with its treacherous ways, are well aware that their position is unsafe. This unreliable river is, as it were, uncomfortable in its bed and overflows its banks frequently much to the prejudice of the riverside residents. It is far more dangerous when the floods spread very far causing havoc everywhere and sometimes destroying entire villages and causing the death of the villagers who have been caught unaware or could not flee.

M. de Montfort was at Nantes when the River Loire overflowed its banks as a result of the melting snow and heavy rains. /314/ Part of the town was under water. The people who were caught by the flood when they were in their homes could escape only by going up to their lofts but even after they had escaped drowning they ran the risk of starving to death from lack of bread and other food supplies. This entailed much distress and misery. There seemed to be nothing anybody could do to help these poor people imprisoned in their own homes without any hope of getting out. The situation was really desperate both for those who were trapped and for the rest of the population, as nobody dared to face the danger involved in trying to rescue them because this would have been courting death.

So and I must say that had M. de Montfort not been at Nantes at the time, those who were trapped in their homes would have starved to death. The man of God resolved to find a means of helping his brothers in distress, even at the cost of dying himself for their sake. Charity is ingenious and the spirit of God suggests ways and means which do not occur to those who are not filled with it. As I have already said, M. Grignion /315/ was naturally inventive and he had a lively imagination which hardly ever failed him in emergencies. It did not fail him on this particular occasion; his industrious zeal together with his imagination provided a means of helping these desperate people at the risk of his life. He begged for money, collected alms, bread and food supplies, and filled several boats with them, but nobody was willing to take him and the load to the people surrounded by water; the bravest boatmen feared to ferry him there and had not the courage to risk their lives for the sake of their brothers. But he exhorted them, filled them with his courage and kindled in their hearts the charity which was burning in his. They finally took up the oars and the rest of the town watched them in fear and trembling striving to plough their way through the waves of a river turned into a raging sea, so wide was the stretch of water and so swift was the current; they eventually got there through sheer physical strength and courage.

The houses could be recognized only by their roof tops; when he reached them the charitable priest let bread and the necessary food supplies down the chimneys and through the openings in the roofs and thus brought some relief to the starving /316/ people who were finally rescued after they had fought so hard to escape the raging waters<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> This event is confirmed by GRANDDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignion*, p. 168. It occurred in February or March 1711.

## **LXXV° - IN SPITE OF HIS HEROIC CHARITY DURING THE FLOODS AT NANTES, M. DE MONTFORT WAS PERSECUTED THERE AND EVEN SUSPENDED AND DRIVEN OUT OF THE DIOCESE**

The whole town of Nantes witnessed this miracle of M. Grignon's charity but this does not mean that as a result he was persecuted any the less. If only one such charitable action had been performed by anybody else in the previous centuries, it would have earned its instigator the reputation of being a saint and no envious or slanderous people would have dared to open their mouths and speak ill of him afterwards; nowadays, however, hardly anybody is edified by anything; the actions of the saints, their heroic acts of virtue, scarcely make any impression at all and only very few people take any notice of them.

M. de Montfort did so much good at Nantes and performed so many similar charitable deeds that he was driven from the town first, then from the diocese, as well as from several others. That is the way a person of great virtue is rewarded nowadays. Mediocre and lesser virtue is often highly praised in the world, whereas heroic and perfect virtue usually finds only persecutors or critics. God allows this so that one's virtue may be purified and increased. Great merit of any nature always causes envy because it is a kind of insult which jealous people cannot forgive. Extraordinary virtue dazzles the /317/ eyes of hypocrites and of the mediocre as well as of the worldly. None of these can appreciate it because it does not yield in anything to natural tendencies and self-love; so they join forces to decry it.

Besides, it is no wonder that M. de Montfort was not very popular with some priests and even some missionaries either at Nantes or elsewhere; he did not hold them in very high esteem either. Some of them were domineering and wanted to have their own way in everything and they knew better than to follow his spirit and manners in their missions; they tried to win him over to their point of view and get him to adopt their method. Others could not agree with his apostolic way of life, which was an extremely hard one, involving hard work, poverty, mortification and complete reliance on Providence. A degree of perfection which is deemed too high is regarded as a crime by those who are not courageous enough to strive to attain it and are not humble enough to acknowledge it. Some people accused him of their own faults and thought that they could see in him what they could not detect in themselves, namely, subtle pride and intolerable vanity. Others said he was eccentric, intractable and lacking in common sense; others again said that his zeal was too impetuous, that he was ignorant /318/ and constantly indiscreet. None of these however had one tenth of his talent, of his intelligence or of his knowledge, and wherever they went the reputation that followed them was blemished with those very faults of which they accused the servant of God.

Among his accusers were some good priests who had the reputation of being virtuous, but his virtue outshone theirs and this very much hurt their pride. Some of them had even taken it as an insult when he refused to collaborate with them; they resented it very deeply and did not fail to make him feel it whenever the opportunity occurred. Even now that M. de Montfort has been dead for some time they dislike people saying that he was a saint just as much as they disliked the reputation which was given him in his lifetime. The only way to please them is to keep silent on the subject of his virtues; less still should be said about the miracles he performed which they regard as fables or old wives' tales. If there were an Inquisition in France they would not fail to sue all those who testified to his miracles as people of unorthodox faith who spread what they would call errors. /319/ I remember hearing a priest who was regarded as virtuous speak to me on several occasions in very similar terms and I was rather disedified, and wondered whether some secret passion did not prompt him to use words which revealed his real feelings. I soon found out that he thought

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that the servant of God meant to hurt his feelings on one occasion and he had never forgiven him. It is therefore no wonder if the late bishop of Nantes grew tired of the complaints and criticisms about M. de Montfort that were constantly reported to him by the people whom I have just mentioned. He thought he would please them by telling M. de Montfort to leave, although one of the Vicars General, M. l'Abbé Barin, who was an intelligent and pious man, was an ardent supporter of the persecuted priest and praised him as an extraordinary man of heroic virtue<sup>99</sup>.

The last mission which he gave at Nantes was, as it were, the final warning regarding his faults and the ultimate cause of his exile. I am not sure with what he was reproached; the vast crowds that came to listen to him and the extraordinary way in which God blessed his activities /320/ where perhaps the main cause of his indictment; and in order to ensure that he should be punished as he deserved, those who envied and opposed him added a few more, which may have been true or false. Be that as it may, they agitated so much that M. de Bauveau, Bishop of Nantes, thought it his duty to put an end to everything by suspending the persecuted missionary just as he was on the point of concluding his mission in his own usual way, that is, with some exhortation inspired by his piety and marked with the apostolic eloquence, in which he was really an expert. The humiliation reached its height when he heard that the priest who had been appointed to complete the mission in his place was none other than the one whom he had rejected as a companion, and this was capped by the fact that it was the very same person who handed him the bishop's letter of interdiction. This priest was rather pleased with the opportunity thus given him of riding roughshod over M. de Montfort while getting some credit for himself. Although he was a virtuous man, he still thought too highly of himself not to show his human weakness; his self-love was gratified by the letter of interdiction which he had been entrusted to hand to M. Grignon, as this letter supplied him with a good opportunity of amply revenging M. Grignon's rejection of him as a collaborator<sup>100</sup>.

He then watched closely the natural reactions which the man of God might /321/ show on being humiliated so bitterly and spared nothing which could make the humiliation more painful; he watched his face to find out whether it would show any sign of wounded pride, which would have indicated that he had not yet reached perfection. He did show that he was mortified, because he had tears in his eyes, but he showed no signs of being either perturbed or embittered. His motto on these occasions was to suffer in silence so he uttered no complaint or murmur and showed no sign of displeasure to the messenger who seemed so glad to bring such an unpleasant order. The indefatigable missionary left immediately for Nantes and walked all night with the hope of having the suspension cancelled. But he could not prevail on the prejudiced bishop to change the order and M. de Montfort left immediately<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> Gilles de Bauveau was the bishop of Nantes between the years 1679 and 1717. We are short of precise details on those priests who opposed M. Grignon. Their pictures might have been slightly darkened; among them M. Blain tends to include M. Olivier.

<sup>100</sup> According to GRANDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon*, pp. 161-162, this priest is no other than Gabriel Olivier. However, this accusation directed at M. Olivier has been proved groundless; at the most there might have been a passing clouds between the two missionaries. Once more M. Blain's assertions prove questionable.

<sup>101</sup> On this point M. Blain confuses two episcopal interdictions against Mr. Grignon: the one forbidding the blessing of the Calvary at Pont-Château, on September 14, 1710, and the other one about the mission at Saint-Molf, on September 24, 1710. The sudden visit of Mr. Grignon to Nantes is related to the first one, not to the second.

## **LXXVI° - HE MAKES A RETREAT AT THE HOUSE OF THE JESUIT FATHERS AT NANTES**

He went to a house of the Jesuit Fathers to make his retreat under the guidance of Rev. Fr Martinet, who was edified both by his prompt obedience and by the purity of his soul when he made a general confession /322/ and told him all about his interior life. Fr Martinet was so delighted to find the combination of two virtues so rare nowadays, namely, innocence and mortification, in the poor priest who had been so badly persecuted that he has been his protector and panegyrist ever since.

This provides me with an opportunity of doing justice to the members of the Society: they always were M. de Montfort's friends, they supported him and advised him; although, like so many other virtuous people, they did not approve his peculiar manners or some of his extraordinary actions, yet they were always wise enough not to censure him respecting the principles which inspired his actions, pure intention, ardent zeal, admirable Christian simplicity and contempt for what people might say or think. These experts in true piety, who knew its paths so well, realized that God does not mean all his elect to reach the same end by following the same way; they knew also that it is unwise to condemn those who follow unbeaten paths if there are no good reasons for believing /323/ that they are guided by the prince of darkness; and it soon becomes clear which spirit guides them if they fall victims to pride and disobedience.

M. de Montfort gave them only examples of heroic blind obedience to the most vexatious and unexpected orders; of ever-increasing humility and patience in bearing the most cutting insults and the most bitter sorrows. There was no reason for them to condemn the outbursts of his zeal or his peculiar manners, which sometimes seemed ridiculous in the eyes of the over-fastidious but which may have been prompted by the Holy Spirit, as is exemplified in the lives of the saints.

The insult I have just mentioned was one of the most cutting; now, he was to bear another, even more cutting because it came from a person whom he respected very much, who had been his Superior, whom he regarded as a saint, and who in fact was one.

## **LXXVII° - AS HE PASSES THROUGH ANGERS HE RECEIVES A VERY CUTTING INSULT FROM THE SUPERIOR OF THE SEMINARY**

The person I am referring to was M. Brenier, who was superior of the seminary /324/ at Angers when M. Grignon passed through this town and asked to see him to pay him his respects. He had hardly been introduced when he was rebuffed and rejected in an insulting way on the presence of all the community, who were having their recreation at the time. The insult would not have been so cutting if the superior had been charitable enough to offer him a meal; instead of that he told him to leave the house as soon as possible on an empty stomach, disregarding his priestly condition and his needs.

M. de Montfort, who was so inured to humiliations, felt this keenly. It must be admitted that if M. Brenier, who for six months had taken every opportunity to cut him to the quick, had waited until then to mortify him, he was perfectly successful. It was perhaps the only occasion on which the patient priest uttered a complaint. After such outrageous treatment from a man whom he held in very high esteem, he could not help uttering this heartfelt comment: "Is it possible that a priest should be treated like that in the seminary?" He himself /325/ told me that he had never felt any other humiliation so deeply. Everything contributed to make it bitter and cutting. He received it in a seminary, that is, in a house

which all priests regard as respectable, in the presence of all the seminarians, none of whom dared oppose the Superior whose every word was an oracle and every action an example of virtue; and he was humiliated in this way by a man who had once been his teacher and whom he regarded as a miracle of perfection.

Any humiliation is hard to bear, any sign of contempt is hurtful, but when it comes from our Superiors or our teachers whom we love as if they were our fathers and respect as if they were saints, then the wound inflicted to self-love is really cruel, and the saints themselves find it painful. This is another example of a saint persecuting another saint in the way God allows such things to happen. It is difficult to find the reason which prompted such a humble man with so much self-control as M. Brenier to act like this. /326/ He may have planned to humiliate his former pupil in order to test his virtue once more, or he may have yielded to his natural quick temper, which it took all his mortification to control at times. His penetrating mind and his consummate wisdom may have inspired him to treat in this way in the presence of all the seminarians a man of extraordinary virtue but whose manners at the same time were too peculiar, so that none of them might be tempted to imitate him. It may have been God's design to deprive M. de Montfort of any human consolation or support which his former teacher could have given him. It may have been that Providence meant to show us that the saints do not always esteem each other and that, although led by the Holy Spirit, they do not follow the same paths on their way to Heaven. It is impossible for me to determine the cause of this incident; all I can do is to respect the ways of God who allows saints to persecute /327/ each other and to hurt each other most deeply.

### **LXXVIII° - HIS JOURNEY TO ROME. HE MAKES IT ON FOOT LIKE ALL HIS OTHER JOURNEYS IN COMPLETE ABANDONMENT TO PROVIDENCE. THE REASON FOR THIS JOURNEY, WHICH HE TOLD ME HIMSELF**

Having borne the shame and rebuffs of the most humiliating and dependent poverty in his own country, M. de Montfort could not find it so very difficult to face them in a foreign land. It was not curiosity which urged him to visit the capital of the Christian world, nor was it the desire to see the remains of the capital of the ancient world and of the queen of nations; since he usually used his eyes to see only where he was going - it will be remembered that he left Paris after a stay of nine to ten years without having seen any of the many rare and beautiful things which attract people from all parts of Europe. He could not be tempted to see the sights of Rome after refusing to see the sights of Paris and I am sure that he left Rome without having gratified his curiosity any more than when in Paris<sup>102</sup>.

*Father Dutemps, a Jesuit Father, told me that on his returning from Rome, Mr. de Montfort was asked about what he had seen: "nothing" was the answer.*

The reason for his journey was to offer his /328/ respect and obedience to the Head of the Church. His great zeal had always attracted him to the foreign missions; if he had not yielded to this attraction it was because he had not been advised to do so. On the other hand he had experienced so much difficulty in France in the exercise of his zeal, that he was uncertain whether he should discontinue his work there and go elsewhere for a more plentiful and more assured harvest. I had it from him.

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<sup>102</sup> Jean Dutemps (or du Temps) was born in 1689. Between the time of his religious profession (1706) and the year 1724, he had been teaching successively in the colleges of Saintes, Poitiers and Périgueux. He might have known this from one of his colleagues at Poitiers, namely Father La Tour.

In order to find out what was the will of God regarding such an important choice, he felt inspired to go and consult the oracle of Christians, the first Superior of the Church and Head of all the others, convinced that by obeying him he was obeying Christ. So he went to kneel at the feet of Clement XI and volunteered to go wherever he chose to send him. This holy pope, who was so zealous in his fight against the new errors spreading in France, so gentle and patient in bearing repeated insults from those who opposed his Constitution and the Church, thought that the humble priest, who was asking him what his mission was, could do no better /329/ than return to France and continue exercising his zeal to check the progress of the new doctrine<sup>103</sup>.

M. de Montfort obeyed and returned home to resume his work, ready to bear the new opposition with which he constantly met. It is therefore very understandable that a man who was so devoted to the Holy See, so obedient to its orders and so violently opposed to the errors of Fr Quesnel, would not be welcomed by the latter's supporters. This also accounts for the opposition he met and for the interdictions he had to bear in some dioceses in spite of the sanctity of his life and the purity of his morals. One of the bishops who had declared his opposition to the Constitution "Unigenitus" had no sooner heard of M. de Montfort than he sent for him and ordered him to leave his diocese immediately adding that this was the only service he expected of him, and the only one he was capable of rendering him<sup>104</sup>. The humble priest obeyed the order immediately, calmly and uncomplainingly without showing the slightest sign of sorrow.

I had it from him

## LXXIX° - HOW HE MAKES A JOURNEY TO ROUEN

/330/ I will end what I know of his life by relating the visit he paid me at Rouen just after he had completed a mission at Saint Lô in Lower Normandy<sup>105</sup>. As we had not seen each other for a long time he wrote to me from Caen inviting me to come and visit him, but as circumstances made impossible my acceptance of his invitation, I wrote back suggesting that he came to Rouen, which he did soon after.

He arrived about noon in the company of a young man<sup>106</sup>; he had walked six leagues in the morning on an empty stomach wearing an iron chain round his body and bracelets on his arms; he always wore some instrument of penance, often several, and never removed one without taking another. The moment I saw him I found that he had changed very much: he looked exhausted and worn out by his works and penances and I was convinced /331/ that his death was not far off, although he was only 40 or 41 at the time. In fact he died about two years later. The reason which he gave me for this great loss of strength was that after he had given a sermon at La Rochelle the Huguenots had had poison put in a broth which had been

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<sup>103</sup> GRANDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignion*, p. 100, who reports this audience, makes no mention of Jansenism. M. Grignion himself was not so fundamentally opposed to the trend which after 1714, was to reject the Constitution Unigenitus. On this point M. Blain might be projecting projected his own anti-jansenist stand.

<sup>104</sup> This bishop is none other than Vincent-François Desmaretz (1657-1739). He had been bishop of the Diocese of Saint Malo since 1702. He rejected the bull "Unigenitus". There had been two different interdictions: one in 1708 and the other in 1707. Neither of the two biographers, Picot and Besnard, alludes to Jansenism. They both account for these interdictions by tense relationships between the missionary on one side and the clergy and gentry on the other side.

<sup>105</sup> This journey to Rouen took place at the end of September or beginning of October 1714, after the mission at Saint Lô.

<sup>106</sup> This "young man" was one of the lay Brothers who had joined Montfort's company.

given to him<sup>107</sup>, and although he had taken some antidote as soon as he had become aware of it, had not been able to counteract the effects completely.

### **LXXX° - HE FIRMLY REFUTES ALL OBJECTIONS TO HIS BEHAVIOUR**

I began by unburdening my heart of all I had to say or had heard said against his conduct and manner of acting. I asked him what object he had in view; whether he ever hoped to find people who would be willing to follow him in the life which he was leading. I pointed out to him that a life so poor, so hard, so abandoned to Providence, was for apostles, for men of rare fortitude, grace and virtue, for extraordinary men, for himself, who was drawn to it, and had the grace to embrace it, but not for the common sort of men, who could not reach so high, and for whom it would be rash to attempt it; /332/ that if he wished to associate other ecclesiastics with himself in his designs and labours, he ought either to relax the rigour of his life and the sublimity of his practices of perfection, in order to condescend to their weakness, or to pray for them to be raised to his own height by the inpouring of grace.

By way of answer he showed me his New Testament and then asked me if I could find fault with anything which Jesus Christ had practised and taught, and if I could show him a life more like that of our Bessed Lord and His Apostles than a life which was poor, mortified and founded upon abandonment to Providence; and he added that he had no other object but to follow such a life, and no other design but to persevere in the same. He told me that, if God wished to unite with him certain ecclesiastics in this kind of life, he would be delighted; but that this was God's business, not his; /333/ that, so far as he was concerned, he had no other course to take but to follow the Gospel, and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and of His disciples. "What can you say against it?" he continued. "Am I doing wrong? They who do not wish to follow me are walking by another path, less laborious, and less thorny, and I approve of it. For, as there are many mansions in our heavenly Father's house, so also are there several paths by which to reach Him. I leave them to walk in their own way; leave me to walk in mine, and all the more so, because you cannot dispute its advantages. It is that which Jesus Christ has taught by His example and His counsels; it is, therefore, the shortest, surest, and most perfect way to Heaven."

Having thus silenced me on this point, he lost no time in doing the same with regard to the next. "But where do you find," I asked, "in the Gospel any proofs or examples of your singular and extraordinary manner of acting? Why do you not renounce it, / 334/ or ask of God the grace to give it up? Repulses, contradictions, persecutions, follow you wherever you go, because your singularity draws them down upon you. You would do much more good, and you would meet with much more help in your labours, if you could persuade yourself to do nothing extraordinary, and not to furnish licentious and worldly men with arms against you and the success of your ministry, drawn from your own eccentricity." Then I mentioned to him the names of certain persons of consummate prudence. "Here are men," I said, "who are for you models on whom you can mould your conduct. They do not give rise to criticism; not would you, in your turn, if you would follow their example."

He replied that, if his way of acting was singular or extraordinary, it was quite contrary to his intention; that being natural to him, he did not perceive it, and that being of a nature to humble him, it was not without its use to him; that, as for the rest, it was necessary

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<sup>107</sup> In the manuscript itself we find the name "Poitiers"; someone erased the word to write "La Rochelle". This second version is more likely the correct one as Protestants were more numerous at La Rochelle and Montfort himself had to face them often and could not easily set aside a certain anti-protestant aggressiveness.

to explain what was meant by a singular and extraordinary way of acting; /335/ that, if by that were understood actions of zeal, charity, and mortification, and other practices of heroic and uncommon virtue, then he esteemed himself happy in being in that sense singular; and that, if this kind of singularity was a defect, it was the defect of all the Saints; that, after all, the title of singular is acquired at little cost in this world; that we are sure to be called so, if we refuse ever so little to resemble the multitude or to conform our life to its taste; that we are under the necessity of appearing singular in this world if we would separate ourselves from the multitude of the reprobate; that, the number of the elect being small, we must refuse to belong to them, or become singular with them; that is to say, we must lead a life altogether opposed to that of the multitude.

He said, moreover, that there are different kinds, as there are different degrees, of prudence; that the prudence of a person living in community is one thing, the prudence of a missionary and an apostolic man quite another; that the former had nothing new to undertake, /336/ and nothing to do but to let himself be guided by the rule and customs of a well-regulated house; that the latter, on the contrary, had to procure the glory of God at the cost of his own glory, and to execute new designs; that we must not, therefore, be astonished if the former lived a hidden life in peace, and was not spoken about, because he undertook nothing new; whereas the latter, having continually to fight the world, the devil, and sin, had also continually to suffer terrible persecutions; and that it is a sign we are exciting no great fear in hell, if we remain friends with the world. He went on to observe that the persons whom I had proposed to him as models of prudence were of the first kind, men who remained hidden in their houses, which they governed in peace, because they had nothing new to establish, and nothing to do but to follow the footsteps and customs of those who had gone before them; but that it was not the same with missionaries /337/ and apostolic men. As they have always something new to take in hand, some holy work to establish or defend, it is impossible that they should not attract attention, and meet with the approval or disapproval of all around them; that in a word, if prudence consisted in doing nothing new for God, in undertaking nothing for His glory for fear of being spoken about, then the Apostles were wrong in leaving Jerusalem; they should have remained shut up in the Caenaculum; St Paul should not have made so many journeys, or St. Peter have attempted to plant the Cross upon the Capitol and conquer for Jesus Christ the queen city of the world; that with prudence such as this, the Synagogue would never have been stirred, nor have raised persecution against our Saviour's little flock; but, then, on the other hand, this little flock would never have increased in number, and the world would be still at the present day what it was then, idolatrous, perverted, corrupt in its morals and its maxims to a sovereign degree.

After this I told him that he was accused of doing whatever came into his head, and that it would be far better /338/ to do less good, and to do it in a spirit of dependence upon others, by consulting his superiors, and by undertaking nothing without their order or permission. He agreed with this principle, but added that he thought he acted on it as far as he could. He would be very sorry, he said, to follow his own will in anything, but in certain unforeseen circumstances it was not possible for him to take advice or orders from his superiors, and that in such cases it was enough to have the intention of doing nothing to displease them nor merit their disapproval, and to be disposed to obey at the least sign of their will. Then, too, he said, it sometimes happened that superiors gave permission for some undertaking but later withdrew their consent, either because they had been prejudiced and estranged by ill-intentioned persons, and false reports, or because they gave ear to the judgment of the worldly-wise, who hardly ever approve of holy works. In this case, he continued, there was no other course /339/ to take but to submit to the orders of Providence, and to receive gladly crosses and persecutions as the crown and recompense of our labours.

For himself, indeed, he was convinced that obedience, being the certain mark of God's will, must never be discarded and said that his conscience did not reproach him upon this point; that, although he was ready at all times and in all circumstances to obey, and to do nothing except with the consent of his superiors, yet that it was beyond his power to prevent false reports, slanders, calumnies, envious and jealous actions, which the enemy knew well how to bring within the reach of his superiors, in order to prejudice them against him, and to render both himself and his services odious in their sight.

I brought up several other objections which I thought unanswerable; but he refuted them in words so sound, so concise, and so full of the Spirit of God that I found, to my astonishment, that upon every point on which I had felt sure I could silence him, he had silenced me.

### **LXXXI° - FOR THE SECOND TIME HE FORESEES WHAT WAS TO HAPPEN**

/340/ At the time I was very perplexed about a post as parish priest of Rouen; I was not sure whether I should accept it or not. M. de Montfort said to me very clearly: "You will go there, you will have to bear many crosses, then you will leave the place." Things happened as he had foretold. It was the second time that he predicted the future in very clear terms regarding things which he could know only through divine inspiration<sup>108</sup>.

During the talk I had with him he told me that God had granted him a very special grace, which was the continual presence of Jesus and Mary in the depth of his soul. I found it difficult to realize that such a high favour had been given him, but I dared not ask him to explain it to me, which he might not have been able to do, for in the mystical life there are some operations of grace that cannot be explained even by those who are favoured with them.

The young man who had come with him did not remain idle: /341/ he was kept busy making iron chains and disciplines. During his missions M. de Montfort used many instruments of penance, so it became him very well to preach on mortification after setting such a good example himself. The following day in order to give him a chance to gratify his devotion to Mary I asked him to say Mass at the altar called the altar of vows<sup>109</sup> in the cathedral of Rouen which is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. He said Mass with such piety and such heartfelt tenderness that he attracted everybody's attention, for people were not accustomed to seeing priests say Mass so devoutly.

Then he paid a visit to an acquaintance of his, a nun, who was a member of the Order of the Blessed Sacrament; she asked him to give a talk to her community; his subject was the spirit of sacrifice, and he spoke with the unction peculiar to him. He was rewarded at lunch by being given the portion of the Blessed Virgin for which he asked. It is customary in this Order to leave an empty place in the refectory, which is regarded as that of the Blessed Virgin, first Superior of the house. This portion is given to the poor every day. The nuns had it sent to the poor priest; /342/ from a spirit of poverty and because of predilection for anything connected with the Blessed Virgin he preferred this to what I had asked should be prepared for him.

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<sup>108</sup> This refers to the post of parish-priest of Saint Patrice, rectory which M. Blain was to resign two years later (1716).

<sup>109</sup> This altar was so called because in 1637, during an outbreak of plague, the Municipal Magistrates made a vow to keep an oil lamp burning perpetually in honour of the Blessed Virgin.

In the evening I asked him to give a talk to a community of school teachers<sup>110</sup>. His subject was the advantages of virginity; he very much liked to talk about this because of his love of purity; he did so in the spirit and words of St Ambrose and St Jerome who have treated the subject so admirably.

During his talk he showed one of the peculiarities of conduct for which people reproached him but which he could not control because he was not aware of them. While giving his talk he noticed that one of the young ladies in the audience was gazing at him. He thought that this was wrong, and carried away, as it were, by his enthusiasm, he called out to her: "You are gazing at me. Is it fitting for a young lady to gaze at a priest?" Afterwards I asked him privately what harm there was in gazing at a preacher /343/ and whether he thought it possible to listen to him attentively and follow him without looking at him. He told me that he could not think of anything wrong with this. Then I reproached him for rebuking the young lady; he was surprised on hearing this and told me that he did not remember anything about it. This showed me that he could not control some of his peculiar actions because he was unconscious of them and they served to humiliate him.

After his talk he spoke about the Rosary, one of the devotions dearest to his heart. The teachers asked him to recite it in the way he recommended, and this he did with such apparent devotion and love for Mary that he inspired the same feelings in those who heard him. They called him the missionary with the big rosary. His rosary was indeed very big as it consisted of fifteen decades, which is the rosary proper; he used to say it every day and strongly recommended others to do the same..

### **LXXXII° - HE LEAVES ROUEN TAKING THE BOAT CALLED LA BOUILLE. HE SUGGESTS TO PEOPLE TO SAY THE ROSARY. PEOPLE LAUGH AT HIM AT FIRST BUT FINALLY AGREE TO SAY IT.**

He left the next day and took the boat called La Bouille, which is a regular Noah's ark loaded with all kinds of animals. /344/ It usually carried about 200 passengers who use it on market days<sup>111</sup> to Rouen and return home. This was not exactly the best suited place in which to speak of God in the presence of people who often undermine the fundamental principles of religion. The usual subjects of conversation were of the coarsest kind and the songs were sometimes lascivious.

However, M. Grignon had barely set foot on the boat when he knelt down in the presence of all the passengers and, taking his big rosary in his hands, exhorted his companions to say it with him. The face of this priest on his knees and the suggestion he made to say the rosary with him provided everybody on the boat with a wonderful subject for fun and laughter. The holy priest remained on his knees praying and allowed the passengers to make fun of him to their hearts' content, as he was destined to find humiliations wherever he went; he bore this one silently and quietly and probably offered it to God for the conversion of those who were laughing at him. /345/ When they stopped laughing he suggested again that they should say the rosary. The passengers began again laughing and mocking him, and this went on for quite some time. Finally the devout priest whose zeal was inflamed by humiliations, made the same suggestion for the third time and he seemed so filled with the spirit of God that all the passengers accepted to say the whole rosary and to

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<sup>110</sup> These school teachers formed the community of the Sisters of Ernemont. M. Blain had been their religious Superior for the last few months.

<sup>111</sup> This boat regularly plied between Rouen and La Bouille, a village situated on the left bank of river Seine, some 30 km down stream.

listen to the instructions which he gave them until it was time to disembark. This was related to me by one of the persons on the boat on that occasion. Those who know what kind of boat La Bouille is and what kind of passengers use it will admire the results M. Grignon obtained as a miracle of grace.

### **LXXXIII° - THE SUCCESS OF THIS ACTION JUSTIFIES OTHERS**

The incident which I have just related is an example of the peculiar manners and extraordinary actions for which the holy priest was blamed; it was however a sign of great virtue and of extraordinary grace. One has to be perfectly impervious to what others may say or think to suggest the recitation of the rosary in common to a crowd /346/ made up of all kinds of people, most of whom have hardly any knowledge at all of the first principles not only of piety but even of religion. One must be devoured with dauntless zeal to bear the mockery of such a large crowd and wait patiently for the opportunity to win them over to God, and exhort them to pray. One must possess extraordinary humility and a love of contempt to remain kneeling on a boat loaded with this type of passengers and maintain this posture in spite of their laughter and mockery. One must be filled with grace to obtain the hearing of such a throng, and get them to join in prayer for such a long time in the course of a journey.

Another incident was related to me by the Capuchin Father whom I have already mentioned. One day M. Grignon came upon a group of people who were dancing; this amusement is usually accompanied by lascivious or objectionable songs and immodest behaviour. He forced his way through them, /347/ fixed at the end of a pole the crucifix which he always wore, planted the pole in the ground and knelt down to revere it. Strangely enough, all the dancers followed his example. Realizing that they were ready to listen to him, he began to preach a sermon; then he sent them home after he had touched their hearts and persuaded them not to dance again.

On another occasion he came upon some men playing the viola, the violin and other musical instruments to entertain the peasants who had come to a fair and to accompany the dancers. He spoke to them so convincingly that they all handed him their instruments, which he took away with him. He did this often with dauntless zeal, but this behaviour sometimes earned him ill-treatment.

These examples are only a few taken at random among a hundred which show that the peculiar manners and extraordinary actions of M. de Montfort originated from his burning zeal, from his fullness of the spirit of God and from his genuine virtue which made him insensitive to any kind of disgrace, humiliation or bad treatment when the glory of God and the salvation of souls were at stake. /348/ Although they deserve to be respected, they should not be held up for imitation, as it is a well-known fact that the saints have so often acted in such a peculiar and extraordinary manner that it would be unwise to try to imitate them. They were inspired souls, who had received special graces which enabled them to succeed when anybody else would have failed.

### **LXXXIV° - HE RETURNS TO THE DIOCESE OF LA ROCHELLE. WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM AT POITIERS**

The zealous missionary then returned to Poitou, I think, to the diocese of La Rochelle where he was always made welcome by the worthy bishop, whom he held in high esteem<sup>112</sup>. Mgr de Champflour

All I know about the rest of his life is that while he was staying at Poitiers he heard that Madame de Bouillé was ill in her father's house. He paid her a visit, as he was in the habit of visiting the sick wherever he happened to be. As soon as he was inside the house he knelt down and bowed deeply before the crucifix which he always carried with him. Then he walked to the bedside of the sick lady who had become delirious and was on the point of dying. He looked at her for quite some time with a bright quiet expression on his face; /349/ then he knelt down by her bedside and prayed for some time; after a while the sick lady opened her eyes and saw him for the first and last time praying for her. His prayers were not in vain, nor was the prediction which he made when he said to her father on his way out: "Do not worry, Sir, your daughter will not die yet." In fact the lady recovered shortly afterwards and after her husband had died, three months later, she was free to give herself to God and to strive to attain the highest perfection, which is all that can reasonably said of a person who is still alive<sup>113</sup>. This happened some time before M. de Montfort's own death brought about prematurely by his burning zeal. He was robust and his constitution was so strong that he could have expected to live for many more years if he had not curtailed his life by his hard work and the austerities which he had always found it difficult to moderate.

### **LXXXV° - HE DIES DURING A MISSION AT SAINT-LAURENT-SUR-SEVRE, A VILLAGE IN THE DIOCESE OF LA ROCHELLE**

He gave his last mission at Saint-Laurent, a village in Lower Poitou, in the diocese of La Rochelle; the great piety /350/ which still prevails there is undeniable evidence of the way God blessed the activities of the zealous missionary. When he began to feel the effects of fever he was deeply involved in his work, and his zeal which was more burning than his fever, did not allow him to take any rest, his conviction being, as he told me again at Rouen, that the harder he treated his body the more God took care of it. However, on this occasion as on so many others, he really overdid it. As the bishop of La Rochelle had come to the mission, he thought it his duty to climb into the pulpit and preach a sermon; it was his last, for the fever became very high and he died a few days later<sup>114</sup>.

He died as he had lived, like a saint, with the most lively faith, the most tender piety, the most perfect abandonment to God, the purest charity and an almost unrivalled confidence in and love of the Blessed Virgin. It is said that life is just a dress rehearsal for death; his life was summed up and reflected in the way he died; /351/ as if he were sorry not to be able to suffer any more after his death and as if he intended to go on with his penance in his tomb, he asked that his discipline and his hair-shirt should be buried with him together with the

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<sup>112</sup> A footnote in the manuscript gives the name: Mgr de Champflour. As a matter of fact, it was in the diocese of La Rochelle that M. Grignon stayed the longest: from 1711 to 1716. It was one of the three dioceses from which he was never banned. The other two were Luçon and Coutances. Etienne de Champflour died on November 26, 1724. This enables us to fix a date to Mr. Blain's manuscript.

<sup>113</sup> Madame de Bouillé, Renée-Françoise Le Vacher, had married Mr. de Collasseau, lord of Bouillé. This healing is to be located in 1713 which means four years before the death of her husband. M. Blain must have heard of the healing in 1724 at the time he visited Saint-Laurent where Madame de Bouillé was actively helping the Montfortian communities.

<sup>114</sup> Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre is now in Vendée, district of Mortagne. Mgr.de Champflour visited the place on April 23, 1716 while he was on a pastoral tour in the region. The missionary died on the 28th of April.

crucifix and the image of the Blessed Virgin which he always carried. I learnt these details a few days after his death through a report which was sent to the seminary of St Sulpice, where I was at the time; these details were confirmed by those who attended him when he died and to whom I spoke when I made a journey to Saint-Laurent which I will relate now

For several years I had suffered from colds in the head, and in the winter my nose and lips were covered with a kind of scales which caused me a great deal inconvenience and which were very difficult to cure. When I was at the seminary of St Sulpice, four years ago, I had a most violent attack of this disease accompanied by the ill effects I have just mentioned. In order to get some relief I turned to God /352/ and asked him to give me an undeniable proof of the sanctity of M. de Montfort, who was said to have worked several miracles. I vowed that, weather permitting, I would go to his tomb if God kept my nose and lips free from the infection. I did not ask to be cured of the cold but only of its effects on my face. I think that my prayer was heard because on Christmas Eve, as I was in bed owing to a severe attack, the scales which had begun to appear on my lips grew fewer and gradually disappeared. My lips and nose have never been affected since, although I had a pain in my nose. Even the pain in the nose has left me since I visited the tomb of M. de Montfort.

### **LXXXVI° - PEOPLE COME FROM FAR AND NEAR TO HIS TOMB. THE GREAT PIETY OF THE PARISH WHERE HE FINISHED HIS LIFE AND WHERE HIS BODY LIES**

/353/ People come from far and near to visit and honour the place where the body of the holy priest is kept. In accordance with his wish he was buried in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The body was exhumed two years ago, I think, so that a small mausoleum made of stone might be erected. It is covered with a marble slab engraved with his epitaph which is a very apt and genuine summary of his character and of his main virtues: burning zeal, admirable innocence and austere penance. When his body was exhumed in the presence of about thirty people it was slightly dried up but had suffered no decay and exhaled a pleasant smell. I owe these details to the eye-witnesses themselves.

While at Saint-Laurent I was told at length of the miracles which he is reported to have worked both during his life and after his death. If they are true and authenticated they will be divine signs proclaiming his happiness and glory, and they will testify to the sanctity of his life. /354/ Those who opposed him in life are no more favourable to him after death, and are shocked and offended at the fuss created by these miracles. They grow angry and resent the fact that some people seem to believe in them<sup>115</sup>.

The undeniable truth, however, is that pilgrims from far and near flock to his tomb to revere it and pray to him to intercede with God for them. It is obvious that the parishioners of Saint-Laurent and of the neighbouring villages, who are fortunate enough to keep his body among them, show a kind of deep piety not to be found anywhere else. This piety is so tender, so manifest and so widespread that it is part of the air one breathes there and everyone sets a good example to everyone else. In no church in any town, and still less in the country, have I seen such modest, recollected and pious people. As I was looking at these country people I felt as if they were most fervent religious; /355/ nobody talked nor turned round nor looked distracted. Everybody, small and great alike, keeps silence and is respectful and attentive. I was there on the feast of the Nativity of our Lady, and I saw so many people

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<sup>115</sup> Popular reports of miracles worked after praying to the missionary, between the years 1716 and 1723; cf. GRANDET (Joseph), *Life of Messire Louis Marie Grignon*, pp. 428-436, 442-445. In the preface of the same book, Grandet mentions opposition to the memory of M. Grignon.

going to confession and holy communion that I thought that all of the five to six hundred people who had permission to receive holy communion must be there. The parish-priest and the Dean told me that in fact, with the exception of five or six libertines, all of them would have received holy communion if he and three or four other priests had been able to hear the confessions of all those who wished to receive holy communion. They had begun hearing confessions the day before, had continued the whole morning and yet by midday on the feastday of the Nativity of our Lady there were still a fair number of people who had not been able to go to confession. This happens on other feast days and on ordinary Sundays. Then the Dean added that the number of pilgrims visiting the tomb of M. de Montfort, /356/ was to be taken into account as they made up a good proportion of the people I had seen<sup>116</sup>.

The spiritual exercises performed in this parish help to maintain the piety of the local people and of those living in the neighbourhood. Every Sunday and on feast days the rosary is said there as well as in other places where M. de Montfort gave missions and where the parish-priests are pious and zealous enough to keep up the practices introduced by the holy missionary. The day begins with morning prayers, which are followed by the first rosary, which is a kind of meditation as it is suggested that during each decade the people should honour and reflect on one of the mysteries of the life of Christ and of Mary. The singing of canticles is a preparation for Mass which includes a homily. /357/ From then until high Mass the penitents, whom I have already mentioned, perform their exercises separately in a private chapel, and I think the virgins perform theirs in a different place.

The morning ends with high Mass during which those who have not yet done so receive holy communion. After the elevation of the Host a member of the choir sings hymns expressing the adoration, love and gratitude that Christ, immolated on our altars and living there, expects from all Christians. The singing continues during holy communion. These hymns are followed by others in honour of Mary, in which the holy missionary expressed his love in such a tender, moving and touching way that they fill with the same feeling of devotion to the Mother of God the hearts of those who hear them sung. There are better canticles than these but nowhere are there any sung more devoutly. /358/ Whoever has known M. de Montfort and his feelings towards Jesus and Mary recognizes him immediately in his hymns and realizes that he alone could have composed them. They are the reflection of his heart burning with charity; and those who seek a subject of edification enjoy them more every time they hear them because of the unction and grace they contain.

The spiritual exercises are interrupted for the midday meal, which is followed by religious instruction, the second rosary and the singing of hymns until Vespers. When there is a sermon it is preached before the procession which takes place on all feast days of our Lady; a picture of her is carried in the procession, litanies are sung, then the third rosary is said in the manner I have mentioned; after that, more hymns are sung in honour of Mary. This holy /359/ day often ends with an instruction given to the society of virgins. That is how the people who keep the body of the holy missionary observe Sundays and feast days. It would seem as if M. de Montfort were still alive and incited them with his voice and his example of piety, so great and lively is theirs.

It would seem that divine Providence may establish there two communities filled with the spirit of M. de Montfort: one of zealous priests relying only, after his example, on divine

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<sup>116</sup> M. Blain's testimony to the fervour of the people of Saint-Laurent-surSèvre and other neighbouring places is most important. However, the admiration M. Blain manifested towards Montfort has to be taken into account. In any case Saint-Laurent had been, for a long time, one of the most fervent parishes in the diocese of La Rochelle.

Providence; the other of nuns destined to teach youth and to care for the sick. May God bless them! I will not offend their modesty by saying more on this subject.



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## CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX

This index is an attempt at arranging the events mentioned in this text according to the time of their happening. In fact the text is lacking in chronological information and often misleading as far as dates are concerned. Either Blain lacked information or he himself changed the order of events to serve his own composition. Some passages are difficult to date (e.g. pg. 302), sometimes the author has merged events which took place at different times (e.g. pgs. 155-156). Uncertain dates are put between brackets.

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\* It is difficult to date the details reported by Blain on these rather regular years. It may have happened that Blain transferred some of the events from the years 1695-1700 to the years 1693-1695 or vice versa.

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