

DOCUMENTS ET RECHERCHES

Charles BESNARD

LIFE OF

M. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT

Volume I

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL MONTFORTAIN

Charles BESNARD

**Life of
M. Louis Marie Grignion de
Montfort**

Volume I

Translated into English by Fr Paul Allerton, SMM

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Foreword

The book which is now being printed in its first edition, has come down to us in a manuscript which is doubly anonymous. The frontispiece, which gives the title, makes no mention of the author. And the person who, for the benefit of the author, transcribed the original pages, does not identify himself either. However, these two anonymousities can be overcome, at least in part.

In fact, the name of the *author*, thanks to certain details contained in the text itself and thanks to a tradition which has never been challenged, gives rise to no doubts. It is Father **Charles Besnard**, superior general, after Fathers Mulot and Audubon, of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom. See, for example, the personal testimonies given on pages 136, 216,...

With regard to the *copyist*, we have certain indications which could prove interesting:

The archives of the Daughters of Wisdom have preserved as precious:

1. The manuscript of the “life of Marie Louise of Jesus”, by Charles Besnard.
2. A copy of this manuscript which was used by Canon Allaire for the publication of “Summary of the Life and Virtues of Sister Marie Louise of Jesus. Poitiers 1768”.
3. A copy of the manuscript of the “Life of Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort”.

Father **Pierre H. Eijkeler**, who made a long and serious study of the documents concerning our congregations, left an *archive note* on the *two copies* mentioned above:

“It should be noted,” he wrote, *“that the handwriting in these two copies is the same, but, despite a comparative study of this handwriting with that of a fairly large number of Montfortians who were alive at that period, and with that of a certain number of people who were in contact with them, as for example Canon Allaire, we have been unable to identify the copyist.*

“Besides, there is a great difference between the copy of the ‘life of Marie Louise’ and the copy of the ‘life of Montfort’. For the first work, the copyist has allowed himself to make only a small number of corrections... But the copyist of the Besnard manuscript of the ‘life of Montfort’ has made many corrections and re-touches for which he consulted the author...

“The two biographies come from the same author, but he himself remarks that certain facts have been treated more fully in the other work which, because of the subjects of which they treat, are necessarily correlative. But here we must point out two significant details. If the author was working on both works at the same time, we have to admit that the ‘life of Marie Louise’ was finished earlier than the other, since Allaire was able to reproduce it as early as

1768, while Besnard states that he was still working on the 'life of Montfort' in 1770..."

The reader who is aware of this might make a personal comparison of the handwriting in the facsimiles published at the start of Besnard's text.

Who was Charles Besnard?

Charles Besnard was born in Rennes, in the parish of Saint-Germain, in August 1717. Having been a student in the seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris, he joined the missionaries in 1743 and took part in the missions for the first time at Saint-Jean de Courcoué: 8 September - 6 October 1743. During the generalates of Fathers Mulot and Audubon, he participated in about sixty missions.

On 9 December 1755, Father Besnard, while chaplain at the Saint-Louis Hospital in La Rochelle, went to visit the missionaries who were giving a mission in Poiré. He was surprised to find Father Audubon, the superior general, gravely ill. Father Audubon died on 15 December. We know the details of his illness and death from a letter that Father Besnard wrote to Father Croissant, dated 16 December 1755: cf. *Chronicles of Sr Florence*, pg. 38, n. 35. In this letter—a copy of which is kept in the SMM General Archives in Rome—the author notes that the dying man had designated Father Besnard to succeed him. A little later the missionaries, meeting in chapter, confirmed the choice made by the dying superior. Father Besnard was then 38 years old.

Despite the absorbing tasks of his time as superior, he continued to take part in a certain number of missions,

and to write the life of our founders, Father de Montfort and Marie Louise of Jesus.

Charles Besnard died in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre on 22 April 1788.

Besnard as Biographer

Charles Besnard, the 3rd successor of Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, was a great admirer of the founder. He had heard of him while in the seminary of the Holy Spirit, and he knew that the only biography in existence at that time, that written by the Sulpician, **Joseph Grandet**, left something to be desired. His own direct contact with people who had known M. Grignion well, notably Brother Mathurin, Sr Marie Louise of Jesus and the first Daughters of Wisdom..., put him in a unique situation regarding information. He therefore collected the material necessary for a new biography, on which he was still working in 1770 (cf. pg. 167).

We might say that *his text satisfies all the basic conditions for any biography*: good information, a respect for the facts, and an honest interpretation.

In his **“Preface”**, the author cites his sources and expresses his intention of carrying out a serious work. Having finished the work, he re-read it, line by line, making corrections intended not only to improve the style but above all to clarify, here and there, such and such a fact.

It is also interesting to note that other biographers who followed him, had only rare errors to point out in the Life, which was known, even though never published, thanks to many copies made in the last century: errors

due not to negligence but rather to faulty information considered in good faith to be correct.

The author could therefore claim: "*I have nothing to reproach myself with, in regard to exactitude...*" (pg. 5).

These positive aspects do not, however, hide the *limitations* of Besnard's text.

We can reproach Besnard with what we reproach all the hagiographers of his day with: he writes with the intention of edifying. A holy person is above all an exceptional work of God... Hence a certain tendency to emphasise certain facts or to place them in a light which appeals less to hagiographers of our own day...

It is certainly in this perspective that we must understand certain silences (such and such a fact which might not be understood, is left in the shade) or certain rather forced explanations.

To take an example: the eccentricities of M. Grignon. They had a certain public notoriety. The author considers them at length in his "Preface". What is surprising is that he considers them, at a certain point, as willed, sought after—or at least exploited—by M. Grignon himself to attract the attention of the people. He might even in part have invented them as a means of apostolate. This is going quite far when it is undoubtedly a case, not of ministerial acts properly so called—such as certain spectacles which struck his hearers—but of things which arose simply from his physique or his mannerisms. The need to present him as a person, not only without faults, but even without physical peculiarities or particular mannerisms, caused Besnard to force the point. Given the sense of "grandeur" which, with Louis XIV, had be-

come a sort of mystique, church writers also came to colour their heroes with this quality. Besnard was just as much a child of his own time, a little ingenuous, but full of faith.

There is also, in the last part of Besnard's text (which will be published in the second volume), the question of the Rule. Besnard speaks of Montfort, the founder, endowing the Company of Mary with a Rule adapted to its missionary role. But, instead of citing the primitive Rule he cites a new Rule which he had written himself—a rather vague derivative of Montfort's Rule—in the hope, no doubt, of gaining the good graces of the government and thus obtaining Letters Patent for the Company of Mary.

For our historians, then, there is here good material for further research...

Why are we publishing this text of Besnard today?

Besnard's manuscript was written around 1770, but remained unpublished. Fifteen years later, in 1785, Father **J. Picot de Clorivière**, the rector of Paramé, published *La Vie de M. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, missionnaire apostolique, instituteur des missionnaires du Saint-Esprit et des Filles de la Sagesse*.

This was just a re-working, with very few additions, of the work of Besnard.

No doubt very conscious of his own literary limitations, Father Besnard had preferred to entrust the publication to a well-known writer, Fr. J. Picot de Clorivière (the same man that would be charged in 1814 with the reor-

ganisation of the French Province of the Society of Jesus).

Besnard's manuscript was therefore not offered to the public: Clorivière's book was a good replacement.

So, why are we now bringing the primitive text out of the archives?

First of all there is the fact that, today, the Life published by Clorivière is unobtainable outside a few privileged libraries.

There is also the need, more urgently perceived today than formerly, for a return to the sources. It is easy to see that a work which has remained in its primitive state is of no less interest than its publication in a more careful style. In Besnard's time the memory of Montfort was still nourishing the piety of many parishes and areas of the West of France. We sense that the author is speaking to people who had known M. Grignon or had heard tell of him.

What is the shape of Besnard's manuscript?

The text was written in a series of notebooks which have been brought together and bound in a volume which has the following dimensions:

height : 25.7 cm

width : 20.5 cm

thickness : 3.5 cm

A total of 213 sheets, plus some others attached: 420 written pages and a few blank ones.

In general the manuscript is legible enough. But the number of corrections is quite high: some are important, while a few concern details which would only interest specialists.

This is what **Fr. Eijkeler** wrote in the note previously cited:

“The corrections are of various kinds. There are some made by the copyist during the editing which concern the style or the construction of a sentence. But there are others which include texts written at a later date in a visibly blacker ink, and which sometimes stretch to whole pages added later. There are also corrections due to the intervention of the author...”

“There are occasionally corrections which are regrettable. To take a single example: on page 11 in the first pagination, the first page of the first book of the ‘Vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort’, Besnard had written when speaking of the Saint’s family: ‘The one we are speaking about was the eldest of eighteen’.

“This figure corresponds to the reality. But in the copy, above ‘eighteen’ there has been an ‘eight’ written, which is just about legible; and this corresponds better to the tradition established by Grandet who had written of Louis Grignon: ‘He was the eldest of two brothers and six sisters...’ (Grandet, pg. 2).”

Again **Fr. Eijkeler** writes:

“At the top of the first page of the first notebook an indiscreet hand has written, in a modern ink, this note: First part. This so-called ‘First Part’ comprises 58 pages in two notebooks, and carried no numeration, which was added later. At the beginning of the third notebook we find the note ‘Second part’, and then the numeration of the pages starts again at 1, and continues up to 362. In reality, then, the whole work consists of $58+362=420$ written pages. After page 205, the copyist, no doubt distracted, turned over two sheets, which leaves us with 2 pages without text at this point. On the other hand, he introduced before pages 73 and 79, two extra pages, to write on these texts which replace others which have been suppressed...”¹

Some remarks concerning the 1981 edition

The *texts* of this present edition have been carefully compared with the manuscript: the few cases where there is hesitation over the reading have been indicated in notes. Apart from some details of spelling and punctuation, the text has been scrupulously respected, even where it is a case of forms of style which are seen as less correct today.

¹ The indications of the ‘First Part’ and ‘Second Part’ Have been omitted in this English translation. So also have the indications of the ‘First notebook’, ‘second notebook’, etc.

To facilitate the reading of the text and future references, *titles* and *numbers* have been added: the manuscript contains neither.

Regarding the *pagination of the manuscript* we thought it worthwhile to indicate this, even though sometimes this is distracting.²

The notes are normally corrections of the text. Some will seem to be very slight; we might have done without indicating them. However, the aim of the present edition being to supply researchers with an *authentic text*, we preferred to indicate the additions, hesitations, rectifications and suppressions... Specialists will find in them, here and there, precious indications for further efforts at historical interpretation.³

It has not been possible to publish in a single volume the 700 pages of printed text. But the continuous numbering of the titles and the double pagination of the second volume will facilitate references. The principal *tables* will be found at the end of the second volume.

Thanks

Yes, thank you to all those who will continue this work. And thanks also to all those who have sent it on its way, especially the General Secretariat in Rome.

² This indication of the pagination of the manuscript has not been included in this English translation of the 1981 French edition.

³ These notes, which are, for the most part, simply corrections of the text, have not been included in this English translation. Specialists who wish to take account of them, would be better using the French text.

Thanks to Fr. Joseph Frissen who, for many years now, has been searching through the Montfortian archives and offering precious insights into the history of our congregations. Thanks also to Fr. Henri Derrien for his help in reading the texts and in establishing the notes for this edition.

Thanks to Fr. Eugenio Falsina for having established a concordance between Grandet, Blain and Besnard, which will benefit the second volume, and which might also constitute a separate volume in our series “Documents and Research”.

Thanks to our Sisters Anne-Marie du Saint-Esprit, Marie-Thérèse du Sacré-Coeur, Thérèse de la Croix, for many hours spent—apart from their routine work—in front of the IBM computer... and to Sr. Bernardetta della Immacolata for the drawing up of the final index.

Thanks to our St. Gabriel Brothers for their fraternal collaboration in the printing of the volumes.

Thanks to each one for having given their collaboration to bring about, in a timely fashion, this simple *family edition*.

Rome, 8 December 1981.

Marcel Gendrot, s.m.m.

75
L'assaut m'arriva de jeques touchoit à trentes et
ansime, arrece, quund elle partit de poitiers
ansois de mars Delans 1715 prunders en
elastochelle, quoiquacontunee au baual,
elle estoit plus xaitte nlas fatigues de voyages,
elle est leuueys et souffrir en celuy cy, tant
pour les peines du corps, quipour celle de luynt.
Des l'adinee. Aupremier jour, espine elle
est accompagnee furent entree dans le chambre
de laubreye quinquen enuuei delapuz
deux se. Alant fort portés en l'aye de hater
leur sort de poitiers, vabs Doune et sans
autre préambule, par un e quopier de sans

Offering to Jesus Christ

Sovereign Priest and Pastor of Souls

To whom else, O Jesus, might I dedicate the life of a holy priest and a zealous missionary? You are at one and the same time both the eternal priest and the heavenly missionary that your divine Father sent from heaven to earth to procure his own glory and to convert sinners. But if your election, your vocation and your mission were the principal for those of all good priests and apostolic missionaries, they are also their model. Like you, they have been chosen from all eternity to work for the glory of God, as your Spirit has said through one of your prophets: “In gloriam meam creavi eum” (Is 43: 7).

They were called like you to the priesthood; they offer with you and through you the adorable sacrifice of your body and blood; like you, they are sent to work to save souls. They are your lieutenants, your vicars, your coadjutors in the work of salvation, and the mission they have received from you is the one you received from your Father, as you yourself said: “Sicut misit me Pater, et ego mitto vos” (Jn 20:21)⁴.

The priest, O Jesus, whose life I am going to write while consecrating my work to you, appeared to have this divine mission which presages the holiness of a faithful minister, and which ensures the success of his ministry. It was nothing human that decided his vocation; he was not

⁴ “As the Father sent me, I also send you”

ambitious for the honour of the priesthood; he feared the burden of it, but felt called like Aaron, and the first sacrifice he offered to you was that of his obedience. The same spirit which introduced him to the sanctuary would guide him in his evangelical labours. He only undertook them with the most perfect submission to the orders of the first pastors of your Church, and, the better to ensure his vocation, he wanted to be sent by him who represents yourself and that you have established as your vicar on earth.

The graces and blessings that you bestowed on the enterprises of his zeal are proof enough that you were their principle and their end, and the virtues that he practised also show that your life was the model for his own. Humiliated, calumniated, persecuted, he shared with you those characteristics which made for his merit and his glory, truly worthy to be proposed for the imitation of those whom your grace causes to enter upon the same career. Be pleased, O my divine Saviour, to increase their number; spread among your ministers that spirit of zeal, that apostolic spirit of which your servant has given them an example. “May his bones still prophesy after his death!” (Sir 49:10). From the depths of his tomb, may a voice make itself heard to invite numerous labourers to work in your vineyard, and from his ashes may sparks arise from that sacred fire by which he was so mightily embraced, and which he wished he could light throughout the world.

This is the grace asked of you by the one who is undertaking with your help, O Eternal Wisdom, to write the story of such an edifying life, and to give to his pen that swiftness of which the prophet speaks, to satisfy as

quickly as possible the ardent desire of so many holy clerics who are urgently requesting it, and who wish for nothing more ardently than to make it their rule of conduct.

Amen

.

Preface

Whatever fruits of piety may have been produced by the first printed life of M. de Montfort, it was necessary to offer this one to the public. The pious author, too hasty in his work and badly served by his memories, left out many facts and misinterpreted a still greater number. My purpose is not to point out his mistakes and his anachronisms; I just want to supply his omissions, tell of the events in the order in which they should be placed, and finally to give an exact and complete life of Monsieur Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort.

1 - The author's personal reasons for writing this life

I have undertaken this work with so much more satisfaction in that I have always had a deep veneration for this great servant of God, having been born in a town where his memory was still very fresh when I came into the world, having often had his name on my lips from my earliest youth, when I stammered out a hymn composed in his honour and others that he himself had composed on the great truths; being even in some sense indebted to him for having been called to the work of the missions, to which I determined to dedicate myself after reading his life, while I was still in minor orders.

2 - Guarantees of exactitude

I have gathered all the information necessary to avoid omitting anything in a life in which everything seemed

interesting to me, and I have concentrated on the surest recollections so as to speak nothing but the truth. I have even been to visit nearly all the places where this holy missionary exercised his zeal, and I have spoken with several people who assisted at his missions. I have profited by all the writings left by those who were prevented by a sad revolution or death itself from continuing their labours. I have nothing to reproach myself with on the score of exactitude, but I very much fear that my book may share the lot of the one to whose memory I dedicate it.

3 - The difficulty of the subject

I am writing here of a man whom the less informed spirits often accuse of indiscretion and eccentricity; whom a stupid and wicked people treated as a sorcerer, someone possessed, even anti-christ; that impious people passed off as a cheat and an imposter, and that the false wise men of the age considered it a favour to regard as just an extravagant and foolish person. The very sincerity that I shall put into my accounts must give people an idea of an extraordinary man, and sometimes an inspired man, and perhaps I may be reproached for not having sufficiently veiled what they might be pleased to call the defects of the image. It is true, the faithful will see with edification a priest who has dedicated himself to the salvation of souls, putting into practice in our own time the life-style of the Apostles, journeying always on foot, with no money, no credit, no help, obliged to sleep in barns or stables or church-porches, dead to all natural sentiments to the point of not allowing himself to stay with, or eat at the home of, his parents, or to visit them, even when he

was in the place where he was born; eager for humiliations, crosses, sufferings; seeking out the company of the poor, living with them, and almost like one of them. But what will be the thoughts, I no longer say of the false wise men of this age, but even of those who claim to practice evangelical prudence, when they see a priest who makes a spectacle of himself by a series of actions in which they can scarcely see this prudence: a cleric trained in the most distinguished seminaries, setting out to cover vast dioceses with no other guide than his own zeal, no other plan of conduct than that which he appears to have formed himself, walking bare-headed in winter, in periods of rain and in the most intense heat of summer, with a Rosary always on his belt, carrying a crucifix on the top of his staff as he journeyed, entering into houses without announcing himself, kneeling down to recite a prayer before speaking with anyone, taking up the burdens of the poor people that he met with on the road, and putting them on his own shoulders so as to relieve them, getting priests to follow him without knowing where they will sleep the first night, nor where they will take their first meal next day? What idea will they form above all of this new missionary, when they see several great bishops, who had invited him into their dioceses, making him leave again, and others refusing to receive him because of what they had learned of him?

4 - The author intends to prove that the conduct of M. Grignon was not contrary to the spirit of wisdom

It is evident that my intention is not to pass over actions which appear at first sight more admirable than imitable.

But that is not enough: I undertake to prove, first of all that these actions contain nothing that is contrary to the spirit of wisdom that one expects to find in the conduct of servants of God, and secondly that they are even in line with the pious designs of the man whose life I am describing.

And first of all, there is no doubt that those prophets that God had filled with his spirit to declare his will to the people, to frighten them with menaces and cause them to enter into the ways of salvation, possessed the spirit of wisdom. Yet, with what mysterious peculiarities did they present themselves in their mission? In reading of them, we need to recall constantly that it was at God's orders that they acted. All those to whom God communicated the gift of prophecy were extraordinary men, and they never seemed more so than when the Spirit of God seized them, in the expression used by Scripture: "et insiluit super eum spiritus Domini" (1 Sam 10:10)⁵.

But is not the testimony of the world, in this matter of wisdom, very much open to challenge, since the masterpiece of God's wisdom, by which I mean the mystery of the Cross, seemed to the world to be folly, and since the world treated as a fool the Son of God himself, Eternal Wisdom? He is out of his mind, said the relatives of Jesus on the occasion of miraculous works that gave such clear proof of his divinity (Jn 10:20).

The silence he maintained at the court of Herod was the wisest reproach to the incredulity of this impious king and the most fitting chastisement for his indiscreet curi-

⁵ "The spirit of God seized on him..."

osity. Yet what we admire today caused him to be treated as weak-minded and an imbecile (Lk 23:11). The disciples on numerous occasions were treated no differently than their Master. The governor Festus said to St. Paul that too much study had turned his head (Acts 26:24). And if on the Areopagus, such a wise and enlightened assembly, some listened to him with praise, others made his discourse an object of laughter (Acts 17:32). What did the life of the first Christians seem like to the philosophers and those among the pagans who, in everything not connected with the worship of idols, lived in the greatest conformity with the light of reason and the principles of natural law? Among Christians themselves, what do many people think when they see a man spending his life standing on the top of a column, or wrapped in an iron breast-plate whose weight alone was a torture?

You would have to follow the whole story if you wanted to recall all the saints who have done things that do not seem to be quite reasonable; and what is said of St Francis de Sales, who was unusual by the very fact that he never had any peculiarity, is a proof that there are few Christian heroes who have never been accused of extraordinary conduct. St. Simon Salus was seen all his life as a madman; St Philip Neri, St Felix of Cantalice, St Ignatius of Loyola, all did actions that it was felt could not be justified except by calling them an excess of devotion. St John of God was shut away, like one of those that are entrusted to the religious of his Institute to hide them from the public gaze or so as not to reveal family secrets.

Among those in whom the spirit of wisdom is found in a special way, because they have received the fullness of the priesthood, there have been those who have shown

involuntarily characteristics that people scarcely recognised as good sense. St Martin, according to Sulpicius Severus, was taken in the mind of many for someone deranged, because he nearly always had his eyes turned up to the heavens.

So it is true that there are in the lives of the saints peculiarities which are not contrary to supernatural wisdom. God sees them in ways that is not permitted to us, and which we are not even able to understand. His Spirit blows where it will and as it wills. Sometimes it endows chosen souls with a charity so great and so ardent that these souls need to breath forth the sacred fire that consumes them, and these heroes of divine love appear to be above humanity. How could we want to force them to follow ordinary ways? They move forward by that sacred impetuosity that alone guides them: “ubi erat impetus spiritus illuc gradiebantur” (Ez 1:12)⁶.

At other times, lost in their own nothingness, they want nothing other than humiliations and mistrust; the more they work for the glory of God, the more they fear that they themselves might be glorified. They know that the least attention paid to themselves could become an obstacle to the success of their ministry. In their fear of seeking the good opinion of men, they go so far as to shed all human respect. In order to cast off its yoke more surely, and not to be tempted to follow its laws, they are happy to go beyond certain bounds and not to be compelled by what worldly people call decency, respect and delicacy. Taught in the school of the Apostle, they regard themselves as the rubbish of the world. Anxious to follow

⁶ “They went where the spirit urged them...”

Jesus Christ himself, they want to be, as the prophet said of him, the shame of men and the dregs of the people.

5 - The extraordinary conduct and designs of M. Grignon

It was on these great maxims of humility and self-denial that M. de Montfort founded his plan of conduct, and if they are to be found on the side of wisdom in the lives of other servants of God, we could say that they entered necessarily into the plans which he made in devoting himself to the evangelical ministry. What, in fact, did he propose, and what did all his zealous efforts tend to? He did not wish to ally his own career with any particular land, nor to limit his labours to the boundaries of a diocese or a province. If he had wanted to work only in the sphere inhabited by the common run of priests, we can believe that he would have behaved like so many holy clerics who, under the authority of whichever of the first pastors to whom they have vowed obedience, share with him the care of souls or dedicate themselves to other functions to which he appoints them. But, wishing to dedicate himself to an apostolate which was unlimited in its extent and in its length, he had to imagine a style of life that would be in line with the aim he had given himself; and as he was undertaking only that great work that God had inspired in him, he could scarcely proclaim it without a kind of peculiarity, and he was bound, if I can put it that way, to appear to be one of a kind.

We are not party to the deep reflections that he undertook before he set out on a career in which he never had any regrets, but the effects seem to tell us by what a chain of ideas he arranged his pious system and on what

foundations he built the holy edifice that he wanted to raise. He took himself back in spirit to the first centuries of the Church, or to those places where the Gospel had been recently proclaimed. He saw an apostle or a missionary undertaking by himself to convert whole nations, traversing vast tracts of land with all the asceticism prescribed by the Gospel and with no other resource than the care of Providence; attracting the crowds more by the extraordinary spectacle he presented than by the truths he proclaimed; preaching in hamlets, in public places, often interrupted by boos and clamour; content to find a few simple people or a few children who would listen to him; scorned, insulted, lacking all things and deprived for himself of the help that he exhorted people to give to those in misery and suffering.

Following on difficulties and set-backs, the new imitator of these great men could perceive their success. And that was enough for him: he set himself the same goal and clung to the same way of acting. He strove above all, like Jesus Christ their common master and model, to instruct the little people and evangelise the poor. He even believed that this was, as it were, the sole object of his mission; so his only thought was to make use of the best means possible to proclaim the word of God effectually to this part of the flock of Christ, which was too much neglected, because it is rare to find a zeal that is pure, humble and disinterested.

6 - Close to the people

It was for the people that he prepared his sermons and conferences, and that he even wrote his hymns. It was so as not to lose the attention of the people for an instant

that he said nothing that was not within the grasp of the most simple, and that often he said things that well-informed people found not very apt and too naïve, and that libertines turned into a joke. It was to touch more easily the people that he mixed in with his mission exercises, pious ceremonies and religious spectacles that those who were inclined to complain of them could not help admiring.

It was not only in the public exercise of his apostolate that he fought against vice and exhorted to virtue; he wanted all his actions, all his behaviour, all his conversations, and even his exterior comportment to serve this end.

It was therefore essential for his plans to give way to movements of zeal and to do many things that in others would have appeared reprehensible. It was necessary for him to perform in public with all that could make him recognisable as a priest detached from everything, seeking in his sacred ministry nothing but trouble, humiliations and crosses; rising above all human respect, sacrificing to the desire to bring salvation to souls, his rest, his health, the best days of his life, even life itself.

7 - Final summary

We will see, from the account we are going to give of his holy works, what it was that provoked this charge of singularity imputed to him. Allow me to justify it in advance by a few short reflections, which form a summary of them as well as an apologia.

All the missions he gave in seven or eight dioceses, over the course of more than ten years, won the applause

of all people of good will and were followed by an enormous number of striking conversions. We can still observe in a great number of places the edifying practices that he was accustomed to establish and that serve to keep his memory in great veneration.

Several bishops who, on the basis of complaints made to them of his alleged indiscretions, had forbidden him to enter, or had made him depart from their dioceses, were the first to give favourable testimony to him after his death, and to manifest a trust in his protection before God. Some have invoked it themselves.

8 - M. de Montfort's establishments

He established two religious congregations: one to perpetuate the work of his missions - the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit; the other, which is, as it were, the testament of his charity towards the poor, is that of the Daughters of Wisdom, destined to carry out all the works of mercy towards them. These two establishments have lasted for more than fifty years, without any change other than their becoming more useful and more worthy of their aim. The missionaries are in demand in a great many places; they work in conformity with the maxims that he laid down for them in his writings and in their rule. They give their missions in the way he himself handed on to them, and everyone knows the fruits of piety that they bring about. In carrying out such a demanding ministry, they scarcely find a few days each year to gather together around the tomb of their father in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, where the only house they occupy is to be found.

The Daughters of Wisdom, whose community is in the same town, profit by the short time they stay there to

accept from them salutary advice and useful instructions, of which they make good use in the fifty or more establishments where they are to be found.

The founder of these two congregations endured rejection and mistrust all his life. His sons and daughters need fear, perhaps, only the applause and praise offered them. He was charged with a number of singular traits, and today one cannot help admiring the persistent fruits of his profound wisdom. If this contrast seems in itself rather extraordinary, it must be admitted that it can only redound to his glory.

9 - In conclusion

Lastly, I would like for a moment to put any priest who has the same objectives as he had on the spot, and ask him if, in the same situation, he would not see his aims in the same light, and if he would act very differently?

M. de Montfort set out to work for the conversion of sinners and sought to obtain specially for them the concern of Her who is their asylum and refuge. He wished, in order to arrive at a more perfect self-renunciation, to bring on himself humiliations and mistrust. His aim was to work above all among the humble and the poor, to attract crowds of them and show himself to them most of all through an appearance capable of at once surprising and edifying them. Thus it was essential that everything should point to the devoted servant of Mary, the hero of asceticism and the apostle of the people.

God alone!

The Life of Monsieur Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort

Priest and Apostolic Missionary

Book One

The apostolic man, whose life I am undertaking to write, was born on 31st of January in the year sixteen hundred and seventy-three, in Montfort-la-Canne, a small town in the diocese of Saint-Malo in Brittany. His father was called Jean-Baptiste Grignon de la Bacheleraie, and his mother Jeanne Robert, both of them from an honest family, of limited means, especially having regard to the great number of children they had of their marriage.

The one we are speaking about was the eldest of eight.⁷ He was given the name of Louis at the baptismal font, but the tender devotion he always had towards the Blessed Virgin made him desirous later of adding the name of Mary to that of Louis, and this grace was af-

⁷ He was in fact the second child—but the eldest surviving—of a family of 18 children, many of whom died in childhood.

forded him when he received the sacrament of confirmation.

1 - First inclinations

His first inclinations were inclinations to virtue, and the amusements of his childhood were pious practices. Being respectful towards his parents and submissive in everything to the slightest signs of their will, he tried to foresee their intentions and to be ahead of everything that might be agreeable to them. A missionary, one might say, from the cradle, he seemed to show clear signs, through little trials among children of his own age, of the prodigies that he would one day bring about in his apostolic endeavours. His brothers and sisters were the first objects of his zeal, but of a zeal that was already enlightened, seductive, gentle, tender, compassionate and always supported by example.

There were domestic irritations. Who is exempt from such in this life? The mother of little Louis was sometimes subject to these; but she found in this tender and pious child, who would not have been more than four or five years old at the time, a consoling angel. He who makes the tongues of children eloquent (Wis 10:21) placed in the mouth of this child words so efficacious, so as to teach him to suffer in a Christian manner the pains and sadnesses of this life, that only the Spirit of God could have given them to him. Instructed in the school of this Spirit of holiness, Louis often withdrew into the secret depths of his heart to listen to the Spirit's lessons, to taste their sweetness and to pour out his soul before the Lord. Nothing was more touching than to see him humbly prostrate before the image of the Blessed Virgin,

regularly paying a daily tribute of praise to this worthy mother of God, and saying the Rosary with an admirable devotion, a practice that he kept to until his life's last breath with the greatest fidelity.

2 - At the College in Rennes

He was almost twelve years old when he was sent to the college in Rennes, one of the most renowned in the kingdom. His innocence, his simplicity, his great piety and his zeal accompanied him there and would never leave him. His time was divided between prayer and study, and his teachers often put him forward as a model for all those of his own age.

Yet relaxation is necessary for the spirit, and virtue does not condemn innocent recreations, often necessary so as to take up work again with more ardour and success. Each to his own taste, and there is no real pleasure except what suits it. The pleasure of the young Grignon lay in visiting hospitals and conversing sometimes, though quite rarely, with his fellow pupils, so as to edify some of them, and to draw others away from impiety.

3 - A natural talent for art

He still practised art, for which he had a natural and definite talent. His small means did not permit him to have teachers in this subject who might cultivate and perfect this talent. But his own genius supplied for this, and he created with his pencil and brush a few small works that art teachers would not have disavowed. Such, for example, was the copy he made of an excellent little picture in miniature, in which he succeeded so perfectly that a man of some importance who was well-thought of in this area,

was so satisfied that he gave him a *louis d'or* to have it. He gave back to art what he had received from it, for he sacrificed this *louis d'or* to pay for some lessons that he was afterwards to take from a painter whose acquaintance he had already made.

4 - A tutor for his brothers

The arrival of his father and mother, who found themselves obliged to move to Rennes to provide education for their other children, brought him a new occupation. He became a tutor for his two brothers, and he acquitted himself of all that could be desired of him in this regard with a capacity, a prudence, a gentleness and an application worthy of the greatest admiration. Having become a teacher for others, he certainly did not forget that he did not cease, because of that, to be himself a disciple, and he was able to reconcile perfectly what was demanded of him by both roles.

5 - Clerical friends

During this time, his fervour received daily increases, and the intimate relationship he had always had with his teachers as well as with the most virtuous clerics, contributed to this very much. All his life he had a profound veneration for them, and in particular for Father Gilbert, a Jesuit, who had been his teacher in Rhetoric, and for Monsieur Bellier, a secular priest, whose memory was to be ever blessed in Rennes, where he gathered together, every week, in his house, a certain number of students, to give them pious talks, among whom the young Grignon was one of the first and the most fervent.

6 - Sodality member

But his tender devotion towards the Mother of God played a greater part than all the rest in the eminent sanctity of which he was laying the solid foundations. As there was in the college, as in all the other colleges of the Society of Jesus, a sodality established under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin, to which only those among the students were admitted who wished to make profession of a more exact regularity and a more distinguished piety, he asked with the greatest eagerness for the favour of being admitted, and this was accorded him. Having been from his earliest years a servant of Mary by inclination, he felt the greatest consolation in seeing himself again a servant by choice and by his state in life. It was to this august Queen of heaven and earth that he had recourse in his spiritual and temporal needs. He loved to hear her spoken of; and he himself spoke often of her, and he never spoke of her but with the greatest heartfelt emotion. In returning from school and in going there, he never failed to visit the church of the Carmelites, to adore Jesus Christ there and to pay his tender and deep respects to his divine Mother.

7 - His austerity. His kindness to others

The natural and regulated course of studies had already brought him as far as philosophy, and, far from allowing the liberty that they began to enjoy in the upper classes to alter in anything at all his practices of piety, to the extent that he acquired new knowledge he formed new projects of perfection, and his fervour responded to his lights. Eager for austerities at an age when one is normally only eager for pleasure, he reduced his body to servitude by

continual mortifications of all kinds, to the point that one did not know what to admire most in him, whether his innocence or his penance. But he was hard only on himself, and his compassionate charity made him ingenious at relieving the ills and the miseries of others. A single example will justify what I say and show, at the same time, the liveliness of his faith.

Among the students at the college there was a young man so poor and so poorly dressed that he hardly dared show himself, because he had all kinds of reproaches to put up with from his fellow students whenever he appeared in their company. M. Grignon shared his pain, and without being encouraged to do so other than by the movements of his prevenient charity, he thought about how to provide an effective remedy.

In this spirit, he did not stop at becoming a beggar himself; he approached those of his school companions that he believed to be more able to make some contributions, and he succeeded in collecting a sum of money, but so small that it would take as much again to reach the goal he had set himself. In spite of this, he went off to find the poor student, and took him to a merchant, and on introducing him to the merchant, he said to him: "*Here is my brother and yours. I have begged in class all that I could to dress him properly; if this is not enough, it is up to you to supply the rest.*" The merchant, struck by this trait of simplicity, took what he was given, and, charity producing charity, took from his own pocket the extra that was necessary to complete the good work.

8 - The esteem of his neighbours

Virtue, when it is marked in a certain area and carried to a certain degree, might try to hide itself from the eyes of men, but God loves to draw out of the depths of darkness those hidden just actions of his humble servants. M. Grignon experienced this, and however hard he tried to hide what he was undertaking, what he did and what he suffered in the interests of God's cause, he could not succeed in turning away from himself the regard, esteem and even veneration of his fellow students, his teachers and all those who had some relations with him. A modest exterior and one in which everything spoke of mortification, recollection and the most intimate union with God, a conversation full of ardour and that had no other object than the glory of God and the salvation of souls, a more than paternal affection for the poor—these were the things that one could not help noticing in him, always with renewed sentiments of admiration.

One of his fellow students, with whom he went to the home of a mutual friend to spend part of the holidays at the end of the philosophy course, caught him on more than one occasion, despite his attempts to conceal himself from the eyes of men, in carrying out the kindest practices of charity with regard to the poor. He gives testimony in particular that one day he found him treating with affection a poor drunken beggar, quite ugly by nature, embracing him and kissing his feet.

9 - Treated badly by his father

Although he never complained of the annoying severity of a father who did not always give his children examples

of gentleness, we know, however, what he had often to endure, and we cannot praise sufficiently the unshakeable patience he showed in the face of the bad treatment he received in payment for the essential services he rendered in his father's household.

The Lord who allowed this trial wanted to set limits to this, or rather, in calling him to the clerical state, opened up for him a career in which he would have even more severe trials to endure. The certain knowledge that he had of his vocation was the fruit of his confidence in the Blessed Virgin, to whom he continually recommended this great affair which is normally so decisive for the success of the business of salvation. The inner answers that were given him reassured him perfectly regarding the path that he wanted to take.

10 - He hears about the seminaries of Saint-Sulpice

He had already started his theology course in the same college where he had followed all his other classes, when Providence brought about a means for him to go to Paris to perfect there in him the spirit of the Levites of the new law, in a school which, since its foundation up to the present time, has formed the most illustrious and the most worthy subjects for all the various degrees of the Church hierarchy. I mean the seminaries of Saint-Sulpice. He only came to know of them for the first time through the favourable account given to him by a lady from Paris, whom certain business matters had brought to Rennes and who took lodgings with his father. From that moment he turned his mind and his wishes to this. But he would have to pay for his lodging, and his own family was in no

position to furnish this expense. But Providence saw to it, and the means used for this cause was Mademoiselle de Montigny, the same woman who had first spoken to him about Saint-Sulpice. On her return to Paris she arranged resources for the execution of the plan which she herself had inspired in M. Grignon.

11- The journey to Paris

It was a spectacle, as touching as it was edifying, to see him set off alone and on foot, with a staff in one hand and his Rosary in the other, his spirit raised up to heaven, his heart burning with love for God, insensible, not through hardness but through detachment, of the tender good-byes of his parents and friends, with a total abandonment of himself to divine Providence, with no cares or anxieties for the future, though he knew perfectly well that nothing was less assured than the resources he was tempted to expect.

Such was his manner of travelling for the rest of his life. The small amount of money he had been given was not sufficient to bring him to his destination, but he took the opportunity to practise two virtues that were always so dear to him, namely humility and poverty. The taste he had for these was to be satisfied by the necessity he found himself in of begging for alms and the rejections he had to submit to on more than one occasion. Meanwhile continual rain was breaking up all the roads and it did not cease to fall until he arrived in Paris.

12 - The use he made of his eyes

On entering the capital, he made a pact with his eyes, to deny them the view of everything that might excite and

flatter the curiosity natural to all men and particularly to young people. An inviolable rule that he stuck to throughout his stay in Paris, whence he departed after many years with such little knowledge of all that is to be seen there of a curious nature, that he might never have lived there. The only things that never escaped his notice were the pictures or statues of Our Lord or of the Blessed Virgin, which he saluted wherever they were to be found as he passed by, that almost no-one paid attention to.

13 - He enters the community of M. de la Barmondière

The charitable Mademoiselle de Montigny, of whom we have already spoken, welcomed this new guest with the respect for him inspired in her by the knowledge she had of his eminent sanctity. She wanted him to stay at her house for a few days, to relax after the fatigues of the journey, and he consented to this; but she could not detain him as long as she would have liked, and in response to the eagerness he showed to reach the goal proposed for him, she took him soon to the house of M. de la Barmondière, who was then parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice, and she presented him for admittance to his community, on the basis of a small income that she had procured for him.

There is among good people a sort of sympathy that enables them to have a mutual appreciation of one another at first sight and even before knowing one another well. The respectable superior gave the most generous welcome to the new member and accorded him the place requested for him that he desired with such eagerness.

14 - "I rely wholly on God"

However, the charitable woman who had committed herself to paying for his board and lodging kept to her promise for just a few months, after which her heart and her purse tightened and closed up at the same time. This trial would have alarmed anyone other than M. Grignon, but he sustained it with that unalterable equanimity of soul that brought about in him his abandonment to Providence. Without support or help, on the eve of being ejected from the community and of not knowing what would happen, above all in a year when misery was so widespread in Paris that the richest faculties could hardly suffice for the needs of the poor, he hoped against hope, and did not allow his mouth to open with the slightest complaint, his heart to show the least agitation, nor his mind to dwell for a moment on what he had to fear for the present or the future. Always united with God, always getting down to his tasks, always content, he rested gently in the bosom of his heavenly Father, in whom he had placed all his trust. "What would you have become," he was once asked, "if M. de la Barmondière had turned you out?" - "I have never thought about it," he replied calmly, "I rely wholly on God."

15 - Watching over the dead, and a beggar

God spoke to the heart of M. de la Barmondière in favour of him who was abandoned by men. He inspired him to choose him to go to keep watch over the dead of the parish of Saint-Sulpice, so that he might find, in the stipend attached to this service, the wherewithal to cover his board and lodging. All things were equal and indifferent for M. Grignon, who sought only God, his love, his

glory and the accomplishment of his will. He accepted this proposal without hesitation and submitted to whatever was desired. By this means his food was assured. But he still needed to find the wherewithal to maintain himself in linen and clerical and decent dress. If he had not had such a decided taste as he had for whatever might mortify his self-love, this situation would have seemed annoying to him, but he was able to see in it a double advantage: to take on all the humiliations of begging, and to be able to show charity to others, sharing with them the kindnesses shown to himself. This was in fact his constant practice while he was obliged to ask and receive help from elsewhere. One would have said that he received only to give, and that he was merely a trustee for the alms given to him. He was seen, not only to give away in favour of those who called on him for assistance the money given to himself, but also to divest himself of his own clothes in order to clothe those whose need seemed to be equal to his. This was how he was at one and the same time both the object of the particular care of Providence, and also the channel through which Providence poured out goodness on those who, like him, had no other resources.

16 - Direction by M. de la Barmondière

Once he was attached to the community of M. de la Barmondière, he chose him for his confessor, and, in order to provide him with a fuller knowledge of himself, he made a general confession to him. I would rather call it the details of his innocent life and the manifestation of the most exquisite gifts of the Lord and the most distinguished graces. It was judged this by the director, who was himself a man of great virtue, but one to whom the justice he

deserved was not given until after he was relieved of his office of *curé*. He found nothing to reform in his holy penitent, and he believed he should leave him to himself, or rather to the Spirit of God, with which he saw him completely filled and penetrated.

M. Grignon thus found himself the arbiter of all the austerities he wanted to practise, and from then on they were limitless and without measure. Bloody and daily disciplines, hair-shirts, iron belts and bracelets studded with spikes—there was a continual and uninterrupted succession of all that could crucify the flesh and imprint on the body the mortification of Jesus. (2 Cor 4:10).

The vigils that were so capable of battering both mind and body did not seem to him any reason for taking away from his mortifications. Rather he found in the sight of the corpses, in the presence of which he passed his nights, matter to enliven more and more his desire for and practice of penance. In spirit he followed their souls to God's tribunal. There he saw them alone and without friends, deprived of all the imposing apparel that surrounded them on earth and that earned them the respect, homage and almost adoration of other creatures. He saw them judged by the just Judge, and, putting himself in a certain sense in their place, he took on the same sentiments that they would have experienced at that terrible moment. Also he regarded these vigils in the presence of the dead as an urgent exhortation to himself to die to everything and to live no longer but for the immortal and invisible King of the ages. (1 Tim 1:17).

The regime that he normally observed in these vigils was to give four whole hours to mental prayer, always on his knees, his hands joined and almost unmoving; then

two hours to spiritual reading; the following two to sleeping, and what remained to the study of notebooks of theology, in which he was going to take lessons in the Sorbonne with the community. It was the custom for those who watched over the dead to take some refreshment, and this was all the more necessary for them as the food in the community of M. de la Barmondière was a little less than frugal. In spite of this, M. Grignion never wanted to make use of these refreshments, and the food of the community, in his opinion, was too refined and too abundant.

His spirit and heart were no less mortified than his body, and there was perhaps never a man who knew better than he how to rise above human respect. Every time he entered the Sorbonne or left there, he did not fail to say his prayers on his knees in the middle of the class.

He was seen to stay outside, bare-headed, on his knees and at prayer, at the door of houses, while waiting for the one whom he was accompanying to finish the visit he had gone to make. Within the community, he had manners so simple and so far removed from any political manoeuvring, that they might have appeared eccentric. People would often take the opportunity from them to make fun of him, and even sometimes to treat him harshly enough. But he accepted joyfully and with gratitude all these mortifications, as though they had rendered him some essential service. The extraordinary graces he received from God, and which often, despite himself, manifested themselves exteriorly, increased still more the prejudice entertained regarding his eccentricity, and gave rise to further persecutions. Sometimes he was seen, in the middle of a meal, or during a conversation, to break

out all of a sudden in sighs and sobs that he could not contain, and sometimes to become as though immobile and without support, in a state of some kind of ecstasy, according to some, or of stupidity according to others.

It is not given to everyone to know extraordinary ways, but everyone should at least respect them, especially when they are justified by examples of the most heroic virtue of every kind. Nevertheless, for M. Grignon, this was the source of much mistrust and of many insults in the time of which we are speaking and for the rest of his life.

17 - Death of M. de la Barmondière

The Lord sent him a trial that was even more terrible: M. de la Barmondière died, and his death brought with it the end of his community. The same blow that struck the shepherd, struck also and dispersed the sheep. Here is M. Grignon once again without support, with no human resources. But what affected him even more was that, in losing a powerful protector, a tender father and a zealous friend, he again lost a holy director, an enlightened director. People watched to see how he would take this event. He seemed to be hardly affected at all! Search as they might in his eyes and on his face for grief and sorrow, they saw there only the same serenity.

Was this insensitivity? No, M. Grignon naturally had a good heart, a tender and grateful heart. Also he always gloried in trampling underfoot that false wisdom and that so-called strength of mind that might inspire the conceited dogmas of a profane philosophy. This superiority of soul which raised him above all, came from a more distant and a higher source.

Immersed and lost in God, he believed that everything remained for him in its entirety, so long as he found God in his heart. He would wait in patience for whatever it pleased him to ordain for him. Silence and trust would be his strength. (Is 30:15).

These were the sentiments he expressed with an admirable simplicity and unction in a letter he wrote at that time to M. de la Visulle, his maternal uncle, a most virtuous cleric and “*prêtre habitué*”⁸ of the parish of Saint-Sauveur in Rennes. It is dated from Paris, 20 September in the year 1694. We willingly give here an extract from it.

18 - Letter to M. de la Visulle

“May the perfect love of God reign in our hearts!

It was with great pleasure that I received your letter, coming as it did from one who has great affection for me. Your letter brought me news of a death and in return I too have to tell you of a death. It is that of Fr. de la Barmondrière, my superior and director, who has done so much for me here. He was buried last Sunday, mourned by the whole parish and by everyone who knew him. He lived a saintly life and died a holy death. It was he who founded the seminary here and had the kindness to receive me for nothing. I do not know yet how things will go, whether I shall stay or leave, as his will has not yet been made known. Whatever happens I shall not be worried. I have a Father in heaven who will never fail me. He brought me here, he has kept me here until now and he

⁸ The “*prêtres habitués*” of the 17th century in France were priests who had as their only official duty to say Masses for the dead.

will continue to treat me with his usual kindness. Although I deserve only punishment for my sins, I never stop praying to him and rely completely on his providence. I was not able to reply to your letter as soon as I wished because I was making a retreat at St. Sulpice in preparation for the reception of minor orders which, thanks be to God, I have now received.”

19 - In the community of M. Boucher

The community of M. Boucher offered M. Grignon a new sanctuary where he took refuge. The poor, hard and obedient life that was led there was in exact conformity with his own likes. But his strength, already diminished by his great austerities, was finally exhausted, and a very short time after his entry into this house he fell dangerously ill. Because the house was itself more a hospital than a community, they had him transferred to the Hôtel-Dieu, where he went with more joy than if he were going to take possession of a rich and magnificent palace. Nothing equalled the consolation he felt in thinking that, being poor himself, he was in the house and in the company of poor people, and this in the wake of a poor God with whom he had at least this point of resemblance. This was how, in the joy of his heart, he explained it to one of his friends who came to see him during his illness. Yet the danger was still on the increase, and, being burdened with the remedies, perhaps as much as with the sickness, he showed no signs of any kind of cure. He alone was sure that he would not die of it, but he claimed this with such firmness as could scarcely be based on anything but a supernatural knowledge. The outcome justified his prediction, or, if you wish, his presentiment. He got better, and his convalescence was almost as rapid as his sick-

ness. But what was of longer duration was the happy and edifying impression he left on all minds of the great examples of humility, gentleness, patience, resignation, love of God and all the virtues that he showed during the course of his illness.

20 - M. Grignon enters the Little Saint-Sulpice

When he left the Hôtel-Dieu, the Little Seminary of Saint-Sulpice opened its doors to him, and this was again the work of an extraordinary Providence, that would abandon him less, the more he abandoned himself to it. He himself tells us this in the following letter, also written to his uncle.

11 July 1695

“My dear uncle,

May the perfect love of God reign in our hearts!

This letter brings you my very best wishes and is to let you know that Providence has placed me in the Little Seminary of St. Sulpice through the kindness of Madame d’Alègre. She is the lady Mademoiselle de Montigny told you about, and Mademoiselle Le Breton lives with her. This lady has given 160 livres a year for the maintenance of a student for the priesthood. After the death of Fr. de la Barmondière the sum was passed on to the Little Seminary of St. Sulpice where, however, the fee is 260 livres. Madame d’Alègre told Mademoiselle Le Breton and the superior of the Little Seminary that she wanted me to have the place she was helping to provide. Madame d’Alègre heard Mademoiselle Le Breton talking about you and asks you to offer Mass for her at our Lady’s al-

tar. I would heartily beg you to do so. As this money is not enough to cover the fees at the Little Seminary, God in his loving Providence, without my ever having thought of it, has provided me with a benefice of about 100 livres, a few miles from Nantes, from which I will also be provided with a title. Please in my name thank almighty God for the graces he has given me, not just for the temporal blessings, which are not important, but for the eternal ones.”

21 - M. Grignon’s spirit of prayer

M. Grignon found in the little seminary two great masters in the science of saints, M. Bouin and M. Brenier. The former was his director, the latter his superior. They judged it fitting to withdraw him from his studies at the Sorbonne, even though he had excelled in them to the point that M. de la Barmondière had not hesitated to give preference to him, for his mind and ability, over all the great people who made up his community.

As a result M. Grignon only had more time to concentrate on spiritual things and to cultivate his interior life. And it was to this that he applied himself with redoubled fervour. His prayer was continual, and he carried its spirit even into the recreations. For him, the only recreation was to speak of Jesus and Mary. He talked endlessly on these two topics, and they thought they saw excess in the length of these pious conversations which took up too much of a time intended solely for a relaxation of the mind, so much so that complaints were made, in the absence of the superior, to the one who was taking his place. This was his own director, who ordered him to en-

gage in them with more circumspection and to join discretion to zeal.

Here begins, strictly speaking, the story, I might say, of the pious excesses of M. Grignon or those excesses of the impenetrable depths of the spirit of God that seize hold of a soul, raise it up, carry it off, lead it by ways unknown to the majority of mortals. And here begins, at the same time, the story of the great contradictions that he had to endure, that henceforth were to characterise all the days of his life. Just as we might see a fierce but enclosed fire, trying to escape from captivity, that, having consumed everything that surrounds it, seems to seek to break out so as to carry the burning far and wide; so we see the fervent seminarian, burning with the fire of divine love, whose holy ardour he cannot keep captive within himself, seeking to spread it and encompass everyone.

22 - Reading Boudon, St Bonaventure, hymns, etc...

Everyday there were new practices of piety, but always solid ones, that he had to suggest to the other seminarians. The book by M. Boudon, the holy archdeacon of Evreux, in which he deals with the slavery of the Blessed Virgin, fell into his hands. Immediately he dedicated himself to this devotion and wanted to engage others in it. Scarcely had he made acquaintance with the psalter of Saint Bonaventure, the masterpiece of the transports of a heart most devoted to Mary, than he made it an obligation for himself to recite it, and advised its use by those who were not yet in Holy Orders. Since he was accused of being too centred on himself during recreations, he wrote hymns and would sing them. His heart set his mind in

motion to compose them, and it also guided his gestures and his voice while he sang them to offer pious entertainment to his audience and to edify and touch them. At other times, he suggested that his confreres should direct towards each other's guardian angels the greetings that civil society had accustomed them to make to one another. If he found an image of Our Lord or Our Lady that seemed to him likely to inspire devotion, this was a happy discovery that he would then hasten to share with all those he met with. No matter how poor he was, he was never lacking in the means to make these pious purchases both for himself and for others. He always carried on his person a crucifix and an image of the Blessed Virgin in relief, but we can be sure that both of them were engraved more deeply in his heart.

Nevertheless he made continual use of these external symbols to encourage his devotion and to arouse devotion in those whom he knew. While studying he always had before his eyes an image of the august mother of Jesus Christ. One day in Paris, finding two young men who had drawn their swords and were fighting, he stepped in with his crucifix in his hand and spoke to them so movingly that he managed to separate them.

Quite differently from those false mystics who, through the specious pretext of a purely internal worship, condemn or mistrust sensible means of rising up to God, he recommended them to everyone and helped himself with them. The crucifix and the image of the Blessed Virgin were, his whole life long, his greatest resources, or rather his sole resource for all his undertakings.

23 - The “singularity” of M. Grignon

Yet, from all that we have just said, there arose a nature made up of something singular: a man who was not like others, a man who, while living in the world, appeared not to belong to this world; and he seemed to be ever increasing in this kind of singularity; the more he lived among men, the less he lived like other men. Earthly things meant nothing to him; he simply did not think about them, or he saw them in their real aspect, that is in the emptiness that is proper to them. From that time on, being well above all that is called polite society in the world, he knew only those things that his faith and love for God laid down for him. All that is human disappeared from his eyes, and among the multitude of visible things that assailed his senses, he saw only the invisible. Whence his ways of thinking, speaking and acting, which were anything but ordinary. Displaced, so to speak, once he was withdrawn from things divine, he seemed either alienated or lacking in spirit or awareness. It is true that as soon as it was a question of the things of God, he recovered completely: sublime thoughts, tender and affectionate sentiments, solid reasoning, discourse full of power and unction—he left nothing to be desired, and one could only admire.

If one had only seen M. Grignon fleetingly, as one sees those rare and extraordinary men who show themselves only like moving pictures, he would have passed not only for a man of extremely sound judgement and extremely sensible, but even for an oracle, a saint of the first order, a unique man, a seraph on earth. But they were living with him every day, and everyday he was seen as one of those phenomena that appear once in a

century and of which one observes with curiosity the beginnings and the progress towards the end, but with which one does not become familiar for the most part. It does not take long for this to become a problem, and M. Grignon was one for those with whom he lived in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.

24 - M. Leschassier's direction

He had had as his director in Rennes the Jesuit Father Descartes. M. de la Barmondière and M. Bouin were then his directors in Paris, and then M. Leschassier, that most worthy superior of the seminaries of Saint-Sulpice, whose name alone commands praise. M. Leschassier took over the task of directing him last of all. As on the one hand there arose, on the part of the seminarians, a sort of general outcry against the singular ways of M. Grignon, and on the other hand the directors who knew him most intimately and his superiors who examined him most closely saw in him the most sustained regularity, the deepest humility, the most exact obedience, the most perfect detachment, and the most heroic virtues of all kinds, these latter, through a temperament worthy of their exalted prudence, were afraid either to approve of him or to condemn him.

M. Leschassier went further and united trials with examination. While, in particular things, he kept his penitent in total dependence on him, and made him enter a state of veritable childhood; while he went against all his personal tastes, whether good or indifferent, to make him die absolutely to his own will; while he affected to deal with him in the hardest and most rejecting manner, he

had also charged Monsieur Brenier to exercise the same in public.

25 - The role of M. Brenier

This latter was perhaps one of the most capable men in the world to acquit himself perfectly of such a commission. For himself he exercised a rigid and austere virtue, and his serious and imposing external appearance inspired, as soon as he appeared, respect and fear. He did not need to speak to cause anyone to get on with their duty; it was enough for him to show himself, as severe in character as by obedience; and he had all that was necessary to answer to the views of M. Leschassier concerning M. Grignon. He constantly corrected him, never softening his corrections. To hear him speak, his zeal was merely natural activity, his silence was a taciturnity of mood, his regularity hypocrisy, his prayer pure illusion, his pious practices imagination, his external appearance a compound of foolishness and stupidity, his mortifications peculiarities, and his whole behaviour stubbornness and doggedness. It was in public that he delivered these reprimands, in the course of the exercises of a seminary where there was in truth much virtue, but where there was even more youthful spirit, and perhaps just as much of that strain of antipathy that looks upon anyone who does not act like the majority as an enemy. At least it was certain that minds were so prejudiced against the accused that they were always ready to believe him guilty of all that was imputed to him. M. Brenier thought very differently; but as a master who was well-versed in the art of testing the spirits to see if they were from God, (1 Jn 4:1) he seemed always to be punishing and never to be approving. The more respect and esteem one had for the

superior, the more also his corrections would appear to be just and well-founded, and as a necessary consequence, the more humiliating they were for the one who was subject to them.

Six whole months passed in this way, during which it was hardly a question of anything other than faults, ridicule, or mistakes by M. Grignion, and M. Grignion—always at peace, always true to form—never excused himself, accepted that he was guilty of everything, asked pardon for faults he had not committed, and still discovered the secret of believing that they were treating him well.

After the sharpest and least deserved reprimands, he was seen to approach the one who had delivered them, to speak to him with trust, and to act in his regard as though he had received only praise and benefits. M. Brenier was unable to take it upon himself to continue testing any longer a young man whose virtue he already knew, and about whom he could have even less doubts after a trial undergone in such an edifying and admirable a manner.

26 - M. Grignion is appointed Master of Ceremonies

M. Leschassier did not reduce anything of his firmness with regard to his penitent. He placed on him the duty of Master of Ceremonies under M. de la Garde. This function demanded action and movement, and the aim of the wise director was to distract him through this from the deep recollection for which he showed a marked attraction, but in which he was accused of excess.

He acquitted himself of this new task with all the exactitude, ability and success that one could desire. He even completed, during the six months that he held the office, a work that several others had undertaken before him, but had all abandoned. This was to list and arrange in order all that applied to the offices and functions of deacons, sub-deacons and acolytes, so that one could look into and learn them more easily, finding what had been spread under several titles now brought together and marked under its own title.

27 - A pilgrim to Chartres

It was a holy practice, among several others in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, to depute some subjects each year to go on pilgrimage, in the name of the house, to some celebrated church dedicated to God under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin. M. Lechassier cast his eyes on M. Grignon, with a view to withdrawing him a little, by this pious amusement, from the concentrated attention that he always had on God and that threw him sometimes into a period of abstraction that one could not get used to.

If there was one thing in the world that must be agreeable to him, it was this with which he was charged. It was a case of the honour of Mary, and he never separated her from Jesus in his discourse, in his mind or in his heart. It is true that in this mission one was not looking for one's own satisfaction, but he found it fully in this. Our Lady of Chartres was the goal of the pilgrimage. He was given a companion in M. Bardou, a cleric in whom had also been noticed a great attraction for prayer and for mortification. Nothing could be better arranged, and the two of them set off on foot. But what might amuse a man

who saw God and only God in everything? Also, talking to God and speaking about God took up all his time both going and coming. With regard to the goal, scarcely had he arrived than, carried on the wings of the love he had for his good mother, he went into the church of Chartres to seek from her the relaxation of all the fatigues of the journey. The following day, he was up before dawn to make his way to the underground chapel, the particular object of the devotion of the pilgrims. There he received Communion and spent six hours in all, on his knees, in prayer and as though in ecstasy. It was only with regret that he allowed himself to be drawn away from this holy place to take a very frugal meal. In the afternoon, he returned there and again spent six whole hours in prayer, as in the morning.

On his return, the seminary of Saint-Sulpice found him in as deep a recollection as on his departure, but in the grip of a quite new fervour.

28 - The author justifies the directors of Saint-Sulpice

One might be surprised that men who were so virtuous and so expert in the great art of directing souls in the ways of perfection, as were the directors of the seminaries of Saint-Sulpice, should have treated M. Grignon with such severity. But in this regard they are exempt from all reproach, and it is not necessary, to establish that, to have recourse to the impenetrable depths of divine Providence, which sometimes permits the saints to be persecuted by saints. It was the duty of these gentlemen who were so zealous and enlightened, not to authorise by their approval, or even by their silence singularities

that, however good their principle, are always a dangerous example for a community. In fact, the common life being properly what constitutes a community, not to combat what might be opposed to it would be to destroy it while wanting to perfect it. Besides, these extraordinary ways are always rightly suspected to be illusions if they are not powerfully tested. Finally, we should not admire less the operations of the Lord in privileged souls whom he draws to himself in a special way, and who respond with fidelity to the designs he has on them.

The holy patriarch Jacob discovered, at least in a confused sort of way, the secret of heaven in the simple and naïve account that his son Joseph gave him in the presence of his brothers of his mysterious dreams (Gen 37:11). Yet, for all that, he did not believe he was dispensed from remonstrating quite severely with this child, no matter how privileged and favoured by the eternal he was (ibid. 10). It was on this admirable model, canonised by the Holy Spirit himself, that the superiors and directors conducted themselves with regard to M. Grignon. The latter, no more than the chaste Joseph, was no less great and no less holy in the eyes of God; and if we cannot rightly blame those who tested him, we can blame him, himself, even less with any grounds, for if we look at it closely, his only crime was to be more holy than is the norm or even than many others, and to be so through less common ways.

29 - M. Grignon is ordained a priest

M. Grignon was old enough and more to be admitted to Holy Orders. He was told to prepare himself for them, and he did so. But when he was told that he must dispose

himself to receive the priestly anointing, this man who up till then had shown an unalterable equanimity, exhibited a troubled mind; he shuddered, seized with a holy trembling, and for the first time in his life resisted authority. Nothing could bring him back to submission but precise and formal orders; they were issued and from that moment he bent his shoulders under the burden that was to be imposed upon him, and whose whole weight he felt in advance. But in receiving the august seal of a priest of the new law, with what fullness did he receive its spirit? It can be judged both by the dispositions he brought to it, and by the sensible effects it produced in him.

It was at the altar of the Blessed Virgin in the parish church of Saint-Sulpice that the new priest celebrated his first Mass. Those who assisted at it, of whom several were not prejudiced in his favour, agreed that they had never seen anything so edifying, and that he seemed like an angel at the altar. These are their own words.

30 - Incertitude in choosing his route

M. Grignon, now consecrated priest, thought he would only have to dedicate himself to the saving of souls. Persuaded that the priesthood, according to the beautiful remark of Saint Augustine, is not a personal honour, but a ministry established by Jesus Christ for the benefit of the whole Church, he believed that he no longer belonged to himself, but that he must be at the service of this Church. His difficulty was in knowing the particular route he must take in this new state. He would willingly have devoted himself to the missions in Canada, where the priests of Saint-Sulpice had various establishments. M. Leschassier was not of this view and absolutely discouraged him in

this. On the other hand, he was not attracted to the sedentary life demanded by staying in the seminary, where they would have liked to keep him. The small benefice that he possessed, which served him for his title, was the most his ambition required. Greater revenues would be due to him, and they were in no way consonant with his overriding taste for poverty.

31 - In the community of M. Lévêque

While he was deliberating, an event took place that gave him the opportunity, if not to make up his mind completely, at least to make a trial. M. Lévêque, the founder and first superior of the clerical community of Saint-Clément in Nantes, was at that time in Paris at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. Having got to know M. Grignon, he suggested that he should join with him. Our holy priest sought advice, and the response being in line with his own inclination, he accepted the suggestion.

On his arrival in Nantes, he dedicated himself for a whole year to the work of missions with untiring zeal, but without letting up in any way in his practices of penance and in his continual union with God. If all the people who made up the community of Saint-Clément had resembled their superior, the new missionary would have been entirely devoted to it. But they had—far from it—neither his spirit nor his sentiments, and this was what prevented him from staying there. The revolutions that have since taken place in this community show well enough how right he was in his thinking and what foresight he had. The good order with which it is governed today, as is the diocesan seminary, by the priests of Saint-Sulpice, have

repaired with advantage all the upsets that followed on the death of the first superior of this house.

31 - Praise of M. Lévêque

We will see here with as much pleasure as with edification, a short account of what can be said of this great servant of God, who was the first teacher of M. Grignon in the carrying out of missions. M. Lévêque had been one of the first disciples of M. Olier, the holy founder of the Congregation of Saint-Sulpice, who because of this merits to be counted among the most important benefactors of the Church in France. The disciple had perfectly imbibed the spirit of the master in the heavenly school of perfection, situated at that time in the chateau of Avron, and now in Issy, near Paris.

Humility and penance were his dominant virtues, and he carried them both to the highest level. From time to time he went to Paris to renew his fervour in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, which he regarded as the cradle of his spiritual birth. One écu was all he needed for his journey from Nantes to Paris, for he ate only bread and drank only water. Also, in the inns where he was known they would not dream of offering him anything else. In the last years of his life, his journeys to the seminary of Saint-Sulpice were more frequent and his stays there were longer. He even wanted to die there, and his wish was granted. It was to Issy that this venerable old man, aged more than 80, went to prepare himself for the great passing from time to eternity. Still clothed in a dreadful hair-shirt, his normal garb, there he spent the Lent that preceded his death, in solitude, prayer and penance. He regularly spent eight hours a day in mental prayer, and, as he

had been forbidden to do so on his knees, he consoled himself only with prostrating himself on the marble pavement of the pious chapel of Our Lady of Loreto, where he delighted to be. He spent the rest of his day saying his breviary, reciting his Rosary and reading books of piety. As they exhorted him to moderate his austerities, he only replied that he feared that death might surprise him without doing penance. It was with these sentiments and after such a perfect preparation that, detached from everything, he passed peacefully to a better life, full of days and of merits.

33 - Visit of M. Grignon to Fontevault

M. Grignon, having decided after mature deliberation before God, to leave the community of Saint-Clément, found himself sunk in the first uncertainties regarding the path he should take. He thought he could not do better than to return to Paris to consult the Lord's oracles that he had left there. He took the road by way of Fontevault, where he had a sister who had made her profession there a short time before. It is to be presumed that it was on the occasion of this journey that the events we are about to relate happened to him. Since he only wished to live on alms and on the funds supplied by Providence, he went to the Abbey of Fontevault to ask for charity for the love of God. The religious sister to whom he spoke found something rather singular in his external appearance and in his manners. But above all she was struck by his devout air and by the affection with which he pronounced those words: "For the love of God". This was enough to arouse in her a curiosity that was perhaps too natural, yet after all excusable, and that could have a good basis. The man of God would not satisfy her curiosity, and in response to

all the different questions put to him he did not cease to repeat: "I ask charity for the love of God." The Abbess, being told what was going on and asked to come and see for herself, went to the place and asked the poor traveller for his name. "Madame," said he, "what is the good of asking my name? It is not for myself but for the love of God that I ask charity." The question was not out of place, but the reply, whose meaning was not then recognised, made them think that the one who gave it was mad, and he was sent away without being given anything.

M. Grignon, exhausted, received this refusal with heroic patience and contented himself with saying to the sister from outside: "If Madame knew me, she would not refuse charity." These few words, said with much gentleness and modesty, being relayed to the convent, gave cause for thinking that there was some mystery behind them. M. Grignon's sister became the interpreter of them. In fact, they had no sooner told what had taken place and described the appearance and the figure of the traveller, than she immediately cried out: "It is my brother!" Now, she had often spoken to the Sisters about this brother, and what she had said had inspired them with a great desire to know him. They immediately sent after him, to make their excuses to him and beg him to return, but, the pious pilgrim being unable to agree that they should do out of consideration for him what he believed was due to him only out of pure charity, he replied: "The Abbess was not prepared to give me alms for the love of God; now she offers me alms for the love of me; I thank her." And that said, whatever need he had at that moment of rest and nourishment, he went off to seek both among the poor of the countryside, with whom he loved to deal.

One might think that the prudence of these women may have restricted their charity a little too much, and that the humility of M. Grignon may not have sufficiently avoided giving some hint of humour. But, on the one hand nobody is unaware of the immense alms that this holy and celebrated house is in a position to give, for a long time now, to the poor of all conditions and kinds. And, with regard to M. Grignon, apart from the fact that he no doubt wanted to offer to God the sacrifice of seeing his sister, no longer valuing relationships of flesh and blood, we should remember that, being filled solely with the faith views that inspired him, he saw things in a way that placed him completely above the judgements of the world.

34 - Meeting with the poor of Poitiers

M. Grignon continued his journey by way of Poitiers. The Spirit of God led him there, but without showing him his designs, and without letting him know that Poitou would one day be one of the principal theatres for his zeal, a zeal to be well tested through many obstacles and contradictions. On his arrival in the capital of this province, he went straight to the hospital and there celebrated the sacred mysteries. They thought they were seeing a seraph at the altar, and were no less edified by the fervour with which he made his thanksgiving, which lasted a whole hour, during which he remained always on his knees, his hands joined, immobile, and in the most profound recollection.

The poor had all the time they wanted to regard him, to admire him and to share their ideas regarding this stranger. "Come," they said to one another, "come and

see a saint! This is the man we need to live with us and guide us. We must stop him, and prevent him from leaving us.” Action followed on the heels of their deliberations. As soon as the poor saw M. Grignon getting up to go out, they crowded around him and begged him, in the tenderest terms and with great insistence, to stay with them and not abandon them. “My dear children,” he replied, “ask if this is the will of God.” Meanwhile he consented to await the response of the Bishop of Poitiers, to whom one of the poor people did not hesitate to write in the name of the others. The absence of the prelate did not permit them to have as prompt a reply as they would have liked. The man of God devoted the delay to exercises of zeal, to which he gave himself with the permission of the Vicars General. He gathered together, almost every day, in the market hall, the poor and the children to teach them catechism. And since curiosity also drew there other people of every age and condition, he thought he ought to join to this casual instruction some lively and moving exhortations. The grace and unction of the Holy Spirit animating all his talks, they left touched and moved, and came back again with a spirit of faith and religion. The college students of Poitiers did not escape his zeal and he did great good among them, of which they later saw the ongoing fruits.

35 - Chaplain to the General Hospital of Poitiers

The wishes of the poor were finally granted; M. Grignon was given them as their chaplain and confessor. The hospital was in great disorder, both as regards the spiritual and the temporal. There was practically no rule, no sub-

ordination, no economy. The evil was great and it demanded an effective and immediate remedy. The new, zealous, director omitted nothing for the suppression of abuses and the establishment of order. He proposed rules, and did not spare either prayers or exhortations to get them accepted and observed. Temporal needs drew his attention also. He was to be seen placing himself in the forefront of some of the poor that he sent around the town, going about it with a donkey laden with baskets to receive alms. But the more he did to make himself useful to the hospital and to win hearts and minds there, the more he found opposition to the success of his zeal, to the point where he decided to withdraw and to continue his journey to Paris.

36 - In Paris

On arrival he presented himself at the Salpêtrière, one of the biggest hospitals in the capital of the kingdom. There he offered his services. They were accepted, but if he found there, as he wished, plenty of occupations and work, he also found many contradictions and crosses. M. Grignon was one of those men who, in the way of virtue and perfection, take flight to such a height that one would not dare to undertake, I do not say to equal him, but even to follow him, even from afar. Then emulation, when discouragement sets in, often changes to jealousy, a fault from which even the holiest people are not always exempt, at least to judge by an external way of behaving that it would be hard to justify in the eyes of the world, but that too strong prejudices can make less culpable in the eyes of God. We cannot say how long the new confessor in the Salpêtrière stayed with his confreres; what

we do know is that it was they who easily managed to get rid of him.

Since he was unwilling to take anything of what is given yearly to the priests who serve this hospital, they clothed him and made him a gift of a new hat; but finding it too shiny, he gave it to a poor man when he went out and took his. Then, just as uncertain, and even more than ever, concerning his way forward, he did not know which route he should now take. His oracle was silent and was no longer willing to give him a response. He was even strongly rejected when he went to see him; and especially one day when his humiliation was all the greater in that it was witnessed by several churchmen. It is not to be doubted that the master, in refusing his advice and his assistance to his former disciple, was guided only by motives that should be respected, and that it would be rash and even unjust to condemn. We must make the same judgement of another of his former superiors who, having been made the superior of the Angers seminary, did not offer him a more favourable reception when he presented himself to him to pay his respects and seek his advice. The man of God knew how to draw profit from all these insults, and divine Providence took care to compensate him with super-abundant consolations. Never more filled with confidence than when he was most abandoned, never happier than when he lacked what was needed, he suffered all in silence and opened his mouth only to utter tender thanksgiving to the Lord.

His refuge on leaving the Salpêtrière was a small cubbyhole under a staircase, in a house in the neighbourhood of the Jesuits' novitiate. A poor couch, an earthenware vessel, a breviary, a Bible, a crucifix, an image of

the Blessed Virgin, a Rosary and his instruments of penance, made up all his furnishings. A beggar by force and by profession would have found it hard to be content with such an obscure and unhealthy place. But this great zealot for the poverty of Jesus Christ, was more at ease there than in the most beautiful palaces in the world.

There he spent the greater part of his days and nights in prayer. The taste he evinced for the intimate communications he enjoyed with God gave birth in him to a desire to spend the rest of his days in solitude, or at least to suspend for a time the movements of his zeal. He consulted on this point a Father of the Society of Jesus whom he had taken as his director, and he was told that he should neither abandon, nor even suspend, the practices of his holy ministry.

Meanwhile he needed to find something to live on, and Providence provided it. An excellent cleric, called M. Bargeville, a very worthy priest of the community of Saint-Sulpice, informed by M. Grignon himself of the extreme misery to which he was reduced, spoke of it to the superior of the Religious of the Blessed Sacrament, in the Rue Cassette in Paris, and at the same time spoke so well to her of the person he was recommending to her, that he inspired in this Sister an urgent desire to know him. This great servant of God had no sooner laid eyes on him than she conceived a high esteem for him, and at the end of the first conversation she had with him, she suggested that he should accept every day the portion that the community served up before the image of the Blessed Virgin placed in the refectory, where she represented the first superior of the house. This portion was intended for the poor, and so it could not fail to be acceptable to the

holy priest. But he asked, and was granted, permission to share it with another poor person. Every day he made his way, at the appointed hour, to one of the parlours, accompanied by the first poor person he met with, whom he made to sit down at table by his side, and whom he served first.

But he also had to provide for the needs of one of his sisters, who was in Paris in a situation that was quite distressing. Mademoiselle de Montigny, on her return from Rennes to Paris, had brought along one of them for whom she had felt affection, and Madame de Montespan endowed another at Fontevault, where she had made her profession while her brother was passing by there asking for charity, but without making himself known, as we have already recounted. The first, after the death of Mademoiselle de Montigny, was obliged to leave the community where she had been lodged so as to provide her with an education, and Madame de Montespan had placed her with the Daughters of Saint Joseph, in the faubourg of Saint-Germain, on the recommendation of Madame the Duchess of Mortemar. Various happenings placed her once again in the situation of being sent away, though it was not for any fault of hers. M. Grignon suggested to the religious of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, to accept her in their house or in another of their houses, as a lay-Sister. They were already his benefactors, and they sought only to oblige him, not just through charity, but even more because of his eminent sanctity. They asked to see her. But they found her to be so delicate that they judged it more fitting for her to serve religion as a choir Sister rather than a lay Sister. The problem for him was to find her a sufficient dowry.

Two postulants of the same Institute were getting ready at that time to leave for the community of Rambervillers in Lorraine, in the diocese of Toul. As this house was lacking in subjects, they were persuaded that a third postulant might give them pleasure, and that they should be content with a modest dowry. The Sisters and a number of women from outside took great pains to bring this project to fulfilment. But their attempts were useless. Already everything seemed desperate and the two postulants must leave within two days, when a person of quality, much less rich than those whose charity had been solicited, and who had heard only by chance what was afoot in this matter, was inspired to promise the sum required for the third postulant, and even to clothe her and provide all the expenses of the journey. This miracle of Providence was the effect of the perfect abandonment of the servant of God to his dispositions that are often impenetrable but always adorable.

37 - Among the hermits of Mont-Valérien

Meanwhile the Abbé Madot, who since then became bishop of Chalons-sur-Saône and filled that see with so much edification for many years, cast his eyes on M. Grignon for a good work that he had very much at heart but in which he had not yet had success. He was the superior of the hermits of Mont-Valérien, near Paris. These hermits formed a very severe community, and if the demon of discord had not divided their spirits and alienated their hearts, nothing would have been more edifying. The one at the head of these hermits called himself Brother Jean. He had governed them for quite a long time in peace and unity, when the sacred bonds of charity were unfortunately broken. The illustrious and zealous supe-

rior, having in vain made every effort to re-establish agreement among them, at last had recourse to M. Grignon, whom he begged to take on this task. M. Grignon accepted and left immediately to go to this mountain, the highest of those in the neighbourhood of Paris. It was a case of a good work, and the humble servant of God, having had no part in the choice made of him, believed he saw in this an order of divine Providence, which left him no other course than to submit to it.

Having arrived at his destination, he did not present himself with an air of authority or domination, but with all the virtues that might bring forth respect and confidence. His recollection, his spirit of prayer, his fervour and his mortification astonished these hermits. They saw him following their rules with the greatest exactitude, present at all their exercises, and giving them, in every way, examples of the highest perfection. These men who were so austere, no longer seemed so compared with him, for to all their penances he added his own particular ones. During the intervals between their exercises they were sure to find him in the chapel, always on his knees and in prayer, frozen and trembling with the cold, because his poor clothes could not warm him and protect him from the rigours of the season. The hermits took pity on him and begged him to take one of their habits. He gave in to their demands and clothed thus in the white robe of these hermits, he appeared and lived among them, just like one of them without distinction. Struck at last by so many great examples, touched by the grace and unction of his words, and won over by his meekness and humility, they did not hesitate to give in to his desires and to unite their voices with his to re-establish among them the peace and concord that had been banished. That was all that was

demanded of M. Grignon, who, having fulfilled his mission so happily in this way, returned to Paris. There he found again crosses and contradictions, for they seemed to spring up under his feet, and the persecution became so violent that he decided at last to leave the capital.

38 - M. Grignon returns to Poitiers

The hospital in Poitiers, or rather those people who desired the real good of the hospital, asked for M. Grignon again. His departure had left a great void there which had not yet been filled. M. Girard had died, and M. de la Poype de Vertrieu had replaced him. This prelate, worthy of the most beautiful and first ranks in the Church, breathed only zeal for his own perfection and the salvation of the souls entrusted to his care. He had been told about the former chaplain of the hospital, and he beheld him taking up his former functions with joy.

When M. Grignon left Paris, he was given out of charity ten écus for his journey, but he accepted them only to distribute them immediately among the poor. The resources of Providence were the only ones that he wished to count on, and his abandonment to this Providence, so admirable in itself, did not permit him to take any thought for tomorrow. He found the hospital in Poitiers in as great a disorder as that in which he had left it, and he undertook with renewed zeal the re-establishment of order there. He ensured that the times of meals should be regulated, that the poor were all served at the same time, that the men and women were separated, and that there was a pious reading during the meal. He succeeded also in having morning and evening prayer said in common. Finally, since the good of society in general de-

pend on good education for the children, he imposed the authority of the bishop to have a special teacher appointed for them, whose sole occupation would be to teach them to read and write and to train them in piety.

Even though there was nothing but the greatest wisdom in these rules, they were subject to many contradictions on the part of the governors, and of those of the administrators who had been won over by the former. These latter found themselves subjected to and regulated by, at least as far as services were concerned, the rule of the poor people. Accustomed to knowing no other rule than an almost arbitrary governance, in which they consulted their own convenience much more than the needs of the hospital, a reform that was going to tie them down was not to their taste. However, no matter how inimical they were to order and the rule, they did not like it to appear so. So it was from this point of view that they attacked the holy reformer. First of all, they tried to bring upon him, by themselves and by the administrators, the greatest mortifications. They contradicted everything that was not either of absolute necessity or of evident benefit. Thus they would not allow a lamp that a pious person wanted to maintain at their own expense, to be placed before an image of the Blessed Virgin. The tender and lively zeal of their holy chaplain for the honour of Mary was well-known to them, and they rightly judged that this would entail for him a very sensible mortification.

The pretext they used to justify their opposition to all the other practices that the man of God believed he must introduce and bring about as a rule in the hospital, was what innovation normally suggests as odious. "Why," they asked, "change long-established customs and bring

in new ones? Must we therefore condemn the former administrators and the former governors? And we, who succeeded them, must we go back into childhood and accept lessons from an upstart, as though the old times were not as valid as the last?" This is how laxity, once introduced into a community, finds the secret of maintaining itself and of authorising itself. Yet what is less reasonable, especially when it is a case of establishments that concern public good as much as hospitals do? For, in fact, it is not a question of what has been, but of what always should have been, and of what ensures a good administration. Abuses, by the fact of being consecrated by a long possession, do not cease by that fact to be abuses, and just as it would be silliness to change habits that are good in themselves, it would also be unreasonable stubbornness to refuse those changes that are demanded by good order and that become necessary.

Monsieur Grignon could easily understand that young women who had not been trained early on for the governance of hospitals rarely become capable of it, especially when they have not been raised in a certain interior spirit and in the practice of obedience and subordination. Saint Vincent de Paul had understood this just as well before him; and it was this in particular that had decided this great saint and great man to establish the famous congregation of Daughters of Charity, known commonly as the Grey Sisters. It was also what had given rise to another congregation that was so edifying and respectable, known under the name of the young ladies of Saint Thomas de Villeneuve. The holy chaplain of the hospital in Poitiers, walking in the footsteps of what had been most enlightened before him, conceived a similar

project and this was for him the source of many new contradictions.

39 - The first “Wisdom”

It is true that he began the establishment he planned in a most extraordinary manner. First of all he chose, from among the poor young women in the hospital, ten or twelve of the most virtuous. The majority were very infirm. Some were lame, others blind; some among them were covered in sores. But the fervour inspired in them by the man of God enabled them to find the strength to keep the rule he gave to them. They had to get up at four o'clock, make an hour's meditation, recite the Rosary, attend Mass and then occupy themselves with work until dinner. At one o'clock in the afternoon, they had to say a second Rosary and continue work as in the morning. At half-past five there was another half-hour of meditation laid down, which was followed by a third Rosary, or the third part of the Rosary. Silence was recommended for them all the time except for an hour of recreation which was allowed them after dinner and a half-hour after supper. He appointed a particular superior for them, chosen from among themselves, who was charged with presiding at all their exercises. They were housed in one of the hospital houses, in an apartment apart from the halls. In the middle of the common chamber was a large cross, and the new patriarch called this place “Wisdom”, and his daughters bore this name, being called from then on, as they still are called today, the Daughters of Wisdom.

The man of God was perfectly well aware that these poor young women were in no way in a position to govern hospitals, and that an institute formed on this plan and

made up of such subjects could be very edifying in itself, but could not provide resources for these asylums of public misery. Also he had more sublime ideas. In setting out in this way, he wanted to begin the work of God in humiliation and abasement and raise a trophy to the holy folly of the cross, persuaded that here lay the most infallible secret for drawing down the blessings of heaven on all kinds of enterprises.

40 - Heroic action of M. Grignon

Meanwhile, the particular attention that he was paying to this chosen little flock did not lessen in any way his zeal and solicitude for everything to do with the others parts of his administration in the hospital. He set no limits to his giving to the poor people all the spiritual help flowing from his ministry, and he extended his charity even to the needs of the body. He was never happier than when he could bandage their wounds, make beds for them, repair rags for their use and sweep out the rooms and the courtyards.

One day, having learnt that the elders of the poor had sent away a sick man covered in infected ulcers, whose sickness might be contagious, he went in search of them to beg them to let him bring this sick man to the hospital, telling them that there was a room separated from the halls, so that the sickness, if it were truly contagious, could not be spread to anyone; and that he did not want this poor unfortunate man to be put in the care of anyone in the hospital, but that he alone would take care of him. By his prayers and his insistence he obtained what he asked, and he did not cease to help the sick man day and night, not letting anyone else approach him, until nature

and the severity of the sickness had brought him to the grave.

It was on this occasion that M. Grignon performed one of those actions that, no matter how revolting it is for nature, should not be hidden from the edification of holy souls. As he felt on one occasion a reluctance to serve him, he recalled that great maxim that we can advance in virtue only to the extent that we do violence to ourselves, and that a great sacrifice makes all the others less painful. Fortified by this thought, he collected in a little dish the pus coming out of this poor ulcerated man's wounds, and swallowed it. We read about this in the life of Sister Marie-Louise de Jésus, to whom he confided this story.

41 - Mademoiselle Louise Trichet

It was this holy young woman, known in the world as Mlle Trichet, that he used to lay the first foundations of a congregation, a very imperfect preliminary sketch of which he had made in the little group of young women in the hospital that we have spoken about. This young woman, aged nineteen and a half, had placed herself under his guidance while he was dreaming up the plan for the Daughters of Wisdom. She revealed to him the idea she had of leading a withdrawn life. "My daughter, come and live in the hospital," said the holy chaplain of the poor, without adding anything more.

The Spirit of God had dictated these words; and the Spirit of God engraved them on the mind of the young person. She reflected deeply on them, and they passed from her mind into her heart. She told her saintly director of this, and, to test her further, he replied that he had not spoken seriously, and furthermore he did not want to be

mixed up in this affair that would involve many difficulties. "Allow me, at least," she replied, "to speak of this with the Bishop." She had scarcely received permission than she went to throw herself at the feet the Bishop of Poitiers, telling him that she was leaving a community, that she wished to stay no longer in the world or in the house of her parents, and that she begged him to have her accepted at the hospital. The bishop replied that he was quite willing, but that he did not believe there was a need for administrators, but he would speak about it in any case with the governing body. He found in fact that they did not need anyone, and that they did not want any new personnel at the hospital. In these circumstances, the pious young woman being interiorly anxious not to abandon her plan, begged the Bishop to be so good as to have her accepted as a poor person, since she could not be accepted as one of the staff. He agreed to this and gave her a letter addressed to the gentlemen administrators. These individuals' surprise was very great when they learnt that the daughter of a man of the same standing as the majority of themselves was asking to be accepted in the hospital on the level of the poor. They would have thought themselves dishonoured if they agreed to her desires. Yet, in deference to the recommendation of their bishop, they came up with a compromise, which was to admit her to act as an aid to the superioress, laying down that she was to be treated just like the other staff.

The solution of the gentlemen administrators was praiseworthy, but they were thinking in a wholly human way, and M. Grignon had other ideas. He had no doubt from then on that Providence wished to provide him with someone who would be capable of helping him in founding his new establishment, when he would be able to

carry it out in full. As soon as he was told what was happening, he ordered his new postulant to join the group of young women that he had brought together in the apartment called “La Sagesse”, and he wished to introduce her himself to the Superior. “Make her, then,” said the latter, “the superior of these poor young women.” “No,” he answered, “she must know how to obey before she can command.” He then wanted her to have no other food than that of the poor. A few days later, he proposed that she should change her clothes and put on a dress, grey in colour and made of coarse fabric. He had just received ten écus as an alms, and he made use of them for this purpose, desiring that everything he undertook should be characterised by humility and poverty. Even though she had warned her mother of this change, nevertheless, when she presented herself before her in this new habit, she was profoundly shocked by it and declared that she would not put up with it, believing that the honour of her family was involved. Nothing was more strange nor more unknown to the man of God than these ideas of honour according to the world. He persisted in demanding that his humble penitent should meet this assault with firmness and without flagging. She obeyed, and it is this same person who, dressed as she then was, has been for nearly fifty years the Superior General of the Daughters of Wisdom, whose headquarters have been established in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre in Poitou, in the diocese of La Rochelle, as we shall relate later.

42 - Suppression of the first “La Sagesse”

Yet this singularity was very unpopular with the administrators and the governing staff. They said that it was not good to have in a hospital, as it were, two different hospi-

tals, each with their own superior; that this could only cause trouble and division, through getting rid of that uniformity which is the soul of all well-regulated communities; that it would be much more fitting to have all united for the common service of the house; and they concluded that it was necessary to destroy this establishment. In line with this, the bureau of administration took a decision that was carried out.

43 - Monsieur Grignion withdraws

It must be agreed that the gentlemen administrators based themselves on plausible reasons in taking the course they had decided upon. Perhaps they might even have been culpable had they acted otherwise, the more so as one is unable to read into the future, and that it is wise to make decisions according to the circumstances. M. Grignion for his part followed the lights given him by the Spirit of God, and the proof that it was this Spirit that was his sole guide, is that he accepted this blow with the greatest resignation, and that he saw his establishment dissolved almost before it was born, without saying anything that might manifest the slightest bitterness, or even the slightest alteration. Despite this, the storm was not quite over, and it was finally necessary that M. Grignion leave the hospital in Poitiers for a second time. In withdrawing, he recommended most highly, and even ordered the young woman to whom he had given the holy habit, not to leave it aside and to stay on at the hospital until such time as it might please the Lord to bring about the establishment of the Daughters of Wisdom.

Book Two

The town and suburbs of Poitiers profited by the loss of M. Grignon just suffered by the hospital. Being no longer attached to any particular place, he offered himself to the ecclesiastical authorities of the diocese to conduct missions and give retreats. His proposal was accepted with joy.

44 - His programme

He made his début, if I may put it this way, as an already consummate apostle. Devoured by the most ardent zeal for the glory of the Lord, and at the same time being infinitely above all human considerations, penetrated by the lowest opinion of himself, but equally sustained by the greatest confidence in God, with a vast reach in his projects, and being even more courageous in their execution, he dared to undertake everything. The correction of abuses, the extermination of scandals, working for the conversion of sinners and to guide the righteous to the heights of perfection, causing piety to bloom anew in all ages and states, in the sanctuary, in the cloister, and bringing it to birth in the most profane world, there was no good work that did not seem to him to be outside the scope of a missionary.

45 - The mission in Montbernage

It was with these dispositions that he opened the mission in Montbernage, one of the suburbs of Poitiers in the par-

ish of Sainte-Radegonde. He had not yet been seen in this town performing on such a great stage, and from the first moment he appeared, he drew all the people after him. He bound them to himself, and seemed to be seen as a master of minds and hearts. One felt that it was not the man who was speaking in him, but that it was the spirit of the heavenly Father who was speaking in the man.

It needed no more for the execution of a pious project than that it should be proposed. It was a question of getting the inhabitants of Montbernage to take on the expense of buying an abandoned barn, and of having it decorated as a sort of chapel. The holy missionary had no sooner suggested it than they got to work on it with a praiseworthy emulation. There he had erected on an altar a large image of the Blessed Virgin, under the protection of whom he placed all that he undertook. The devotion that he inspired for this venerable Mother of God had such great success that crowds of the faithful came every evening to say the Rosary in common before this image, and after the mission this practice was maintained with the greatest edification.

He showed himself to be a man wholly of God, wholly in God, always preaching, confessing, catechising, carrying lack of attention to, and lack of concern for himself to complete forgetfulness and to a disdain for all that might be most dear and most personal to him. In this lay a charm that he could not escape. But what touched people most was to see him, as he came out of the church, surrounded and followed by a prodigious crowd of poor people with whom he conversed as with his closest friends, and lived as with his dearest children. The house where he was lodging was less his own than that of

the poor. There, in his moments of relaxation, he washed their clothes, he shared out with them the alms he had collected, he served them at table, he embraced them, he kissed their feet, and if there were some who were too infirm to come and profit by the common care that he lavished on the wretched, he would go to seek them out himself, carry them on his shoulders, and bestow on them a care that was proportionate to their state of infirmity and wretchedness.

He was always anxious to have a poor person at the table where he himself would eat, and all his concern was for this poor person. He would serve him or her first, he would only drink from the same cup as him or her, and only after that person, and he gave this person all that was best. Often it was a case of horror and the most insupportable infection, and then he would be filled with joy and would seem to swim in delight.

46 - Call of Brother Mathurin

It was this that clearly touched, and that would afterwards confirm in his vocation, a young man that he associated with himself at this time, to get him to follow him and accompany him in his missions. This young man came to Poitiers with the idea of withdrawing from the world, and he had it in mind to embrace an austere rule of life. M. Grignon, seeing him in a church where he was praying with fervour, was struck by him. He called him, made enquiries about him, and asked him what his plans were. He replied with simplicity that he was looking for a retreat where he could take shelter from the contagion of the age, and do penance. The holy missionary, after the example of Jesus Christ when he called his apostles, said

nothing to him but these few words: Follow me; and he was immediately obeyed. At the same time he brought out an iron discipline which he gave to his new disciple to encourage the attraction he had for penance. This beginning must have seemed somewhat extraordinary to the young man, and it did in fact appear so. Nevertheless, the inspiration, which seemed to characterise his vocation, reassured him. But when he himself had witnessed the heroic acts of charity that M. Grignon practised daily, he was left in no more doubt that it was God who had been in a special manner behind all that had happened to him. It was he who, bearing the name of Brother Mathurin, taught catechism during the missions for fifty years, both with M. Grignon, and with those who succeeded him, until 1759, when he died in the house at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre.

The mission in Montbernage took place and ended without any remarkable setbacks, except for the opposition expressed to a plan that he had to build a chapel of the Holy Spirit.

47 - The Calvary Mission

The same cannot be said of the mission at the Calvaire, that is to say the mission he gave in the church of the Sisters of the first calvary in Poitiers. He did great work there, and its success corresponded perfectly to this. But God is normally pleased to counter-balance the splendid successes of his chosen ones with extraordinary contradictions and humiliations, and this is what M. Grignon experienced.

Having worked during the course of the mission to destroy the reign of sin in people's hearts, he also under-

took to destroy the external works of the devil, such as books contrary to religion and to good morals. As he could not fail to find many of these in such a great town, he believed he could do no better than to imitate what had been done at Ephesus by the apostle Saint Paul, who having had all the books of magic to be found in this idolatrous city brought out, burnt them publicly. The fruit he expected from this zealous action was to inspire an extreme horror of such dangerous books. His exhortations were heeded and everyone hastened to bring to his feet a prodigious number of these works of iniquity. He made a great mound of them in the form of a funeral pyre on the square in front of the Calvary church, with the intention of setting fire to them, in the presence of all the people, at the end of his sermon. But certain individuals, inspired with a zeal that was less regulated, and wanting to go further than the idea of the pious and wise missionary, to make it more striking, thought that it would be appropriate to burn, not just these works of darkness, but also an image of the devil who was their author. They decided therefore, without saying anything to M. Grignon, to make a sort of statue representing, as it were, a devil loaded with vain finery and the most worldly ornaments, so as to inspire at the same time horror for the world's vanities. They mounted this figure upon the great mound of books, without the knowledge of the missionary and while he was in the church, busy preaching. The people, impressed by this spectacle, instead of saying as before that they were going to burn the works of the devil, began saying that they were going to burn the devil himself. Often enough, it only takes an appearance of reasonableness to authorise hateful denunciations, but it is really sad to see these in the mouths of those in whom the holiness

of their ministry ought to inspire at least charity, even if it cannot bring them to emulate zeal. A priest, for whom M. Grignon's success caused umbrage, seized on this opportunity to ill-use him and bring upon him one of the greatest humiliations he ever experienced. So he went to tell one of the Vicars General what was still unknown to the missionary. He made him aware of all the noise of the populace. The only thing that he did not say was that he came to him without having, in all charity, warned the supposedly culpable one.

48 - The Vicar General's intervention

The Vicar General was easily persuaded that such a spectacle could give rise to a contempt for religion, and immediately went over to the scene of the crime. He had no sooner seen the sort of pyramid that they were going to burn, than, without paying any attention to what it contained, he had it pulled down. At the same time he went into the church where M. Grignon was preaching to an innumerable audience, and, having imposed silence on him, he served him with a severe reprimand over the supposed indiscretion of his zeal. The holy preacher sank to his knees, listened respectfully to all that it pleased his superior to say to him, and ended his sermon with this example of humility and patience, more persuasive and eloquent than the most beautiful of discourses.

Meanwhile, the people who had stayed outside, seeing the image of the devil and the piles of books pulled down, thought they had full liberty to grab whatever they could get their hands on and make it their own. They were the spoils that had been taken away from Satan and that he was now regaining. His triumph would have been

less complete if those books that had been condemned to be burnt had been returned to their first owners; They would not have failed to carry out the sentence in their own fireplaces. But those who carried them off, it would seem, had in mind quite different uses. This was what affected the holy missionary the most sensibly. He also had no doubt that the humiliating reproaches he had just suffered in the pulpit would be the cause of his losing the trust of the people that they had had in him until then. Troubled by these disturbing thoughts, and uncertain what path remained for him to take, he spent the whole night in praying before the Blessed Sacrament in the mission church. Jesus Christ answered his prayer and brought consolation to his soul.

At daybreak, hearing many people gathering at the door, he opened it and was agreeably surprised to see this great crowd of people making their way to the confessionals and asking to be reconciled before the communion they were due to receive that day, because, they said, they had been unable to keep from spreading rumours against the authors of his humiliation. The confessors gave in to their desires, and communion was received with the greatest edification.

It cannot be denied that there are spectacles of piety that religion approves and authorises, and of which many examples are found in both the Old and the New Testaments. If we were pure spirits, we would not need to be aided by external helps. But the laws of the union of body and soul are such that, while we remain here below, sensible objects are often necessary to cause certain impressions to be made on the soul. It would therefore be most inappropriate, and to the detriment of religion, that one

would want to condemn, or even to censure, a great number of practices whose only aim is to raise hearts and minds to God by means of things that speak to the senses. Such, for example, are processions, the erection of crosses, the ceremony of renewing the promises of baptism, and many other pious exercises which are used in missions and retreats.

On the other hand, we must have that respect for the holiness and majesty of religion, that we do not introduce into the extraordinary apparatus of external worship, anything that might be puerile or in the least way against decency. This image of the devil that had been, as it were, planted on the summit of that pile of bad books that were due to be sacrificed to the flames, was the work of an indiscreet zeal, and merited the correction of the ecclesiastical superiors, but M. Grignon had no part in this, though they tried to paint him as the sole architect of this bizarre design. It might have been hoped that efforts would have been made to delve a bit more deeply into this business before making the wise and virtuous missionary responsible for it. But God allowed it thus, both to strengthen more and more, through trials, the virtue of his servant, and to bring to light the patience, the gentleness, the obedience and the humility of this apostolic man.

49 - The Mission at Saint-Saturnin

Whatever prejudices may have been raised against him by this event in the hearts of a great number of people, especially the wise and prudent of the age, the mission in Saint-Saturnin, which he gave afterwards in a suburb of Poitiers, had no less success. I am speaking of those suc-

cesses that do not consist in vain fame, but rather in the conversion of souls and a sensible increase in the faith and piety of the people. Everything contributed to it: his immense and constantly maintained charity for the poor, his prolonged meditations during the silence of the night, his intimate and continual union with God during his daily occupations, the prodigious austerities by which he tried to avert the anger of God and draw down his graces on the most hardened sinners. Nor was he lacking in external talents: a penitent air, discourses that were solid, strong and moving, a voice both far-reaching and penetrating, tender and affectionate sentiments that clearly came from the bottom of his heart, decisions that were just and founded on reason and authority - all these were bound to create a lively impression. Whatever was singular in his way of acting or speaking, could cause offence only to the delicacy of those superficial men who can only esteem flowery language, that is often as sterile in reality as it is full of beautiful words, and who do not have a sufficiently penetrating vision to follow a man who rises above the ordinary sphere.

At the end of this mission, on 6th January 1706, he held a procession in which all the inhabitants of the suburb took part. He led them, two by two, to a place called 'La Goretrie', where there was a garden adorned with four huge statues, which for that reason was called the garden of four statues. The intention of the holy missionary was to make honourable amends to God for all the sins committed in this place. It was, in fact, the promenade and, as it were, the meeting place, of all the libertines of the town, who would gather there for a game of boules, which made this place quite infamous for all the swearing and all the excesses that games bring with them.

The holy man had begun by expiating them in his own person. Having worked all day long in the exercises of the mission, he would retire at night to this garden. There, recalling the penance that Jesus Christ performed for sinners in the Garden of Olives, he prostrated himself in prayer, and reviewed in the bitterness of his heart so many iniquities with which this place was soiled. He would fain have purified them by the abundance of his tears, and tried to wash them in his own blood which he drew from his veins with cruel disciplines.

Thus it was after having himself performed the prelude to the public reparation that he was proposing, that he set in motion everything for this touching ceremony. He gathered the people together for the general procession that he had announced. He directed the walk to the famous garden that was situated at the far end of the suburb. When they had arrived, he gave a moving exhortation, such as might be expected from a saint who bemoaned the iniquities of a multitude of the guilty and got them to make reparation for themselves. It was then that, having caused many tears to be shed, he wiped them away in some way, and spread consolation and joy in all hearts, assuring them in a prophetic tone "that this place would one day become a place of prayer and meditation, and that it would be served by religious Sisters."

Events confirmed the prophecy. It was in this same place that there was built in 1748 the Hospital for Incurables, through the pious and prodigious liberality of Brother Philippe l'Emery de Choysi, the Grand Prior of Aquitaine, who placed it under the protection of the Order of Malta, and obtained letters patent by virtue of which there are already 30 beds established, two by the

king himself. This hospital was at first governed by two lay-women. One having died, and the one who remained being taken up with other commitments, it was necessary to find new governors. There was no lack of candidates, but you could say that M. de Montfort had arranged matters long ago.

50 - The Daughters of Wisdom in Poitiers

There was too much satisfaction with the Daughters of Wisdom in the four establishments that they already had in Poitiers for this one not to be entrusted to them, and Sister Marie de Jésus, their first Mother and Superior, always full of confidence in the prophecy of the man of God, did not hesitate for a moment to insist that they were called to this work. They were given the responsibility, in fact, by an official decree dated 15 April 1758. Two of them went there, and today you can see what the holy missionary foretold fulfilled in every respect. The Hospital for Incurables occupies exactly the terrain of the place formerly called the Goretrie and the Garden of Four Statues. God is glorified in this place, and almost continually adored, the poor inmates passing the greater part of each day either in prayer or in listening to the meditations given daily by their pious and zealous chaplain, and the spiritual reading offered them by the Sisters, who finally are religious Sisters living in community, and consecrated to God by simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. To this same place where formerly people went only for dissipation and to offend God, they go today to be edified on seeing the order, the discipline and the profound silence that reigns there. The cleanliness that is maintained there leaves no fear of bad air, and one

can truly say that there you can breathe only the odour of piety.

Not only did the holy missionary predict the establishment as it is today, but you might say that he himself brought it to birth. In fact, as he was passing one day through this same suburb, he came across a poor abandoned man, suffering from incurable diseases. He took him up, carried him on his shoulders and, not knowing where he might find some form of shelter, he put him in a sort of room formed in a hole in the rock. He got a pious woman to take care of him, which this person kindly did. Afterwards he sent two or three others there, whom she cared for with the same charity. From this small beginning he formed a sort of hospice where, without any resources other than the charity of the public, some virtuous young ladies gathered as many of the poor suffering from ulcers that they were able to feed, with the help of alms that they collected in the town.

51 - Retreat at Saint Catherine's and Interdict

The mission at Saint-Saturnin was no sooner over than M. Grignon began a retreat for the Sisters of Saint Catherine in Poitiers. He had already given several exercises when he was given notice of an interdict, with an order to leave the diocese. This was not the only example of this nature that we shall have to examine in his life, and it is necessary to make clear once and for all a point that might scandalise the weak.

It would seem first of all that these frequent interdictions must give rise to an annoying prejudice against the

conduct of M. Grignon. For, in the end, it must be the fact that, either his proceedings were very irregular to say the least, or that we are forced to pass condemnation on a number of bishops who treated him in this way. This second option is all the less sustainable in that, apart from the presumption in favour of superiors in general, especially for those superiors endowed with a dignity as respectable and sacred as is the episcopate, we are dealing here with bishops endowed with a piety, regularity, zeal and merit that is unanimously and universally recognised. These are qualities that we cannot refuse to recognise in M. de la Poype de Vertrieu in particular, and he was the first one that believed he had to withdraw M. Grignon from the ministry.

However, if we wish to examine these things without hindrance, the virtue of the holy missionary will suffer no taint, and so many interdictions and the prelates who imposed them on him will not appear as to be condemned, nor less worthy of the respect and veneration that their merits ought to bring upon them. In fact, one might be surprised, and where are the people who have not been so sometimes? The government of a vast diocese entails so many details that it is impossible that one man can see to them all by himself. One is obliged on many occasions to pass them on to those that one has judged worthy of one's trust. But a thing can be viewed in different lights. What is admirable when considered from one point of view, ceases to be such and may even become subject to condemnation from another point of view. Those who examine more closely the people endowed with dignity and authority sometimes get hold of a thing by its unfavourable side, and their report is in line with their ideas. They are listened to, believed, and action is taken in conse-

quence. There is nothing in this that is not in accord with human customs and conformed to the laws of good governance. And there you have, in part, what was the cause of so many disgraces for M. Grignon. When he was interdicted for the first time by the Bishop of Poitiers, it was because of the scene that had taken place during the Calvary mission. The Bishop was himself absent at that moment. Since then, he has been presented with such a strong picture of the idiosyncrasies of the missionary and of the annoying consequences that they might engender that it was only wise to prevent them, and to withdraw from the ministry the person who had been deemed capable of occasioning them. M. Grignon was none the less irreproachable. And thus both sides were right. On those other occasions when he was subjected to a similar humiliation, it is easy to recognise that the principles involved were more or less the same. Prejudice, calumny, the malice of his enemies, the intrigues of hell that are always unleashed on good men and on God's works, often gave rise to these, but the intention of the prelates involved was always correct, and the proof of that is that, when they were better informed, they did him justice during his life and after his death in the most authentic way possible.

52 - How M. Grignon received the interdict

When he received news of his interdiction, he looked upon this event as a signal grace from the Lord and he blessed him, thanked him for it with all his heart, broke out in hymns of joy, and his satisfaction was all the greater as his humiliation was more complete. He did not

fall back on his innocence to make complaints, nor did he even listen to what a subtle and camouflaged self-love, under the appearance of zeal, might naturally suggest to him, namely that it was owed to the honour of the ministry to make an apologia for the minister, and that having the experience of the immense fruits that his missions had produced, he ought not to refuse to make a justification that might put him in a position to extend these fruits and perpetuate them. But, guided by a superior light, he judged that God wished to be glorified through his humiliation, and that, from then on, he could do no better than acquiesce in the dispositions of Providence and humbly give way, leaving to God alone the task of justifying him, when it might please him to do so and might judge it useful for his service and glory. Such were the sentiments which he made known to Father de La Tour, Jesuit, his confessor whom he went to consult regarding his journey to Rome; and he left that very day. However, he ordered the young man whom he had associated with himself in his missions to remain firm in his vocation, and he assured him that he would rejoin him on his return from Rome. This young man, far from being disconcerted by so many contradictions that his holy master had to undergo, became simply a greater admirer of his virtue, and he clung to him more strongly than ever.

53 - Letter to the Inhabitants of Montbernage and others

Before leaving Poitiers, he wrote a circular letter to all the inhabitants of the town parishes where he had given missions. The worldly-wise will perhaps not find in it a style to their taste, and it may seem to them that the holy

missionary enters into details that are too base, and that he employs expressions that are too popular; but those people who are seeking to be edified will recognise in this a man wholly penetrated by the spirit of God and by the most lively zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. So I do not hesitate to insert this letter in its entirety here, conformed to the copy that has been juridically compared with the original, which has been communicated to me.

God Alone!

Dear people of Montbernage, St. Saturnin, St. Simplicien, La Resurrection, and others who profited from the mission which Jesus Christ, my Master, has just given you, greetings in Jesus and Mary.

Not being able to speak to you personally, since holy obedience prevents me, I take the liberty of writing to you on my departure, as a father writing to his children, not to teach you anything new, but to confirm you in the truths I have already taught you. The Christian and fatherly love I bear you is so great that you will always have a place in my heart as long as I live and even into eternity. I would rather lose my right hand than forget you wherever I may be, whether at the altar, or far away at the end of the earth or even at death's door. You can be sure of my remembrance as long as you are faithful to what Jesus Christ has taught you through his missionaries and through my unworthy self, in spite of the devil, the world and the flesh.

Remember, then, my dear children, my joy, my glory and my crown, to have a great love for Jesus and to love him through Mary. Let your true devotion to your loving

Mother Mary be manifest everywhere and to everyone, so that you may spread everywhere the fragrance of Jesus and, carrying your cross steadfastly after our good Master, gain the crown and kingdom which is waiting for you. So, do not fail to fulfil your baptismal promises and all that they entail, say your Rosary every day either alone or in public and receive the sacraments at least once a month.

I beg my dear friends of Montbernage, who possess the statue of our Lady, my good Mother, and my heart, to continue praying even more fervently and not to allow into their district those who swear and blaspheme, sing ribald songs, and drunkards, without doing something about it. When I say, “without doing something about it,” I mean that if you can’t prevent them from sinning by reproving them zealously but kindly, at least let some godly man or woman undertake to do penance, even in public, be it only by saying a Hail Mary in the street where they say their prayers, or even to hold a lighted candle in their room or in the church. This is what you have to do and keep on doing and so with God’s help persevere in his service. I give this same advice to the other districts.

My dear children, you must be living examples to all Poitiers and district. Let no-one work on Sundays or Holydays. Let no-one lay out his wares or even half-open his shop, and so counter the general practice of bakers, butchers, second-hand dealers and other shopkeepers of Poitiers who rob God of his day and are sadly damning themselves in spite of the fine excuses they may offer. If, out of necessity, you must do otherwise, then receive the approval of your parish-priest. Do not work, then, in any

way on Holydays and God, I promise you, will bless you both in body and soul, and you will never be short of what you need.

I ask my dear women of St. Simplicien who sell fish and meat, and other shopkeepers and retailers, to continue giving good example to the whole town by living what they learned during the mission.

I ask you all, in general and individually, to follow me with your prayers on the pilgrimage which I am going to make for you and many others. I say, "for you," because I am undertaking this long and difficult journey in dependence on the Providence of God to obtain from him through the prayers of Mary, your perseverance. I say, "for many others," because I bear in my heart all the poor sinners of Poitou and elsewhere, who are sadly placing their salvation at risk. They are so dear to my God that he gave all his blood for them, and would I give nothing? He undertook such long and arduous journeys for them, and would I undertake none? He went so far as to risk his own life, and wouldn't I risk mine too? Only a pagan or a bad Christian could fail to be affected at the immense loss of the infinite treasure of souls which Jesus Christ redeemed. So pray for that intention, my dear friends, and pray also for me, that my sinfulness and unworthiness do not hinder what God and his holy Mother wish to accomplish through my ministry. I am seeking divine Wisdom; help me to find it. I am faced with many enemies. All those who love and esteem transitory and perishable things of this world treat me with contempt, mock and persecute me, and the powers of evil have conspired together to incite against me everywhere all those in authority. Surrounded by all this I am very weak, even

weakness personified; I am ignorant, even ignorance personified; and even worse besides which I do not dare to speak of. Alone and poor as I am, I would certainly perish were I not supported by our Lady and the prayers of good people, especially your own. These are obtaining for me from God the gift of speech or divine Wisdom, which will be the remedy for all my ills and a powerful weapon against all my enemies. With Mary it is easy. I place all confidence in her, despite the snarls of the devil and the world, and I say with St. Bernard, "In her I have placed unbounded confidence; she is the whole reason for my hope." Have these words explained to you for I would not have dared to propose them on my own authority. Through Mary I will seek and find Jesus; I will crush the serpent's head and overcome all my enemies as well as myself, for the greater glory of God.

Farewell but not goodbye, for if God spares me, I shall pass this way again, either to stay for a short while, subject to the obedience I owe to your good bishop who is so zealous for the salvation of men and so compassionate to us in our weakness, or while on my way to some other place; for since God is my Father, wherever he is offended by sinners, there is my dwelling-place.

"Let those who do good go on doing good. Let the unclean continue to be unclean. For some the smell of death leads to death, For others the sweet smell of life leads to life".

I am all yours,

Louis Marie de Montfort, Priest and unworthy slave of Jesus in Mary.

54 - The journey to Rome

The man of God had around two sols when he began his journey, and these he gave to the poor, so as to travel at the expense of Providence alone, as was his custom. Having even met up with a Spanish student at the start of his journey, who himself had no more than thirty sols, he asked him for them and shared them out also among the poor, assuring him that he would take care of him while they travelled together.

It is difficult to express how much he had to suffer during the course of his pilgrimage, with no money, no letters of credit, no protection, no acquaintances on the road nor at the end. But, being happier and more assured in his indigence than the richest of men with their great treasures, he set out on the road. Sometimes he was taken for a spy, and they mistrusted him as they would an enemy disguised in the dress of a priest. Sometimes he was taken for a vagabond who brought dishonour on his state by begging his bread, and they judged him unworthy of any assistance. Sometimes they did not even deign to listen to him, though he asked merely a piece of bread, or else they refused him any lodging and he was forced to sleep on the pavement and there to spend the night. It is true that he was from time to time compensated, and he himself tells us that, when he had endured some extraordinarily bad treatment, the following day he would find in abundance all that he needed.

Despite the length of the journey that he was making entirely on foot, he regularly fasted every day, and if sometimes he was forced to do so, he nevertheless did so by choice and in a spirit of penitence. Prayer sustained

him on his route and was his only relaxation just as it was his only occupation. His taste for the things of God absorbed him in such a way that he forgot everything else or he looked upon his fatigue as nothing. Everyone knows of the devotion displayed by pilgrims to the famous chapel of Our Lady of Loreto. Our holy traveller, who had only ecstatic feelings towards the Blessed Virgin, was not going to forget to visit a place so devoted to her worship. He spent two weeks there, during which he regularly said Mass at the altar of the holy chapel, which is the object of special veneration by the faithful. The extraordinary fervour with which he celebrated the sacred mysteries there greatly touched one of the inhabitants of the town of Loreto, and he was so edified that he begged the good priest to accept from him, during his stay there, his meals and lodging.

At length he arrived within sight of Rome, and as soon as he saw the dome of the church of Saint Peter, he prostrated himself out of respect, with his face to the ground, shed tears that the tenderness of his devotion caused to flow in abundance, took off his shoes, and made the rest of his journey barefoot.

Since, when writing a life, there is no question of working from imagination, I will not go into any details that he, in his humility, has hidden from us with regard to other events in his journey.

I will say only that the motive for his journey had nothing human about it, and that it was wholly supernatural. He did not engage in it out of curiosity to see the splendid basilicas of the capital of the Christian world, or the precious remains of the capital of the pagan world. We know, and we have already said this, that he left

Paris, after living there for several years, having seen nothing or at least nothing of those things that attract visitors from all parts of Europe. This spirit of mortification and this great reserve of his senses had only increased in him over the years.

What made him undertake the journey to Rome, was the profound veneration he had for the visible head of the Church and the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. He wanted to consult this great oracle of Christians and to gain knowledge of that portion of the Lord's vineyard to which he should dedicate the rest of his life. His great zeal had caused him to want the foreign missions, and for a long time he had been devoted to this without anyone believing they ought to turn him away from this desire.

However, having been shamefully dismissed from the diocese of Poitiers, he did not know whether his labours in France were conformed to the will of God. So he went to throw himself at the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff, to learn from him if he were one of those men through whom the work of salvation should be brought about in Israel, or if he should go to seek out foreign and barbarous nations to carry the flame of the Gospel to them.

55 - The audience with Clement XI

Clement XI occupied the Church's supreme see at that time. This holy Pope received him with a kindness worthy of the common Father of all the faithful, and having listened to him, gave him his mission and directed him to France, while recommending him to work in complete dependence on the bishops into whose dioceses he might be called. He enjoined on him above all to take it on himself to teach Christian doctrine well to the children and

the people, and to bring about a new flourishing of the Christian spirit through the renewal of Baptismal vows. He also allowed him to give different blessings that called for a special privilege. Finally he crowned all these graces by endowing an ivory crucifix, which the devout pilgrim presented to him, with a plenary indulgence for all those who, truly contrite, should kiss it at the hour of death while pronouncing the names of Jesus and Mary.

The holy traveller left his audience with the Sovereign Pontiff with a renewed determination to dedicate himself entirely and without reserve to the salvation of souls. When he went in, he had been struck and penetrated with a religious sentiment of extraordinary respect. It was not the majesty of the pontifical throne that inspired this, but the vision of faith that caused him to see in Clement XI, the successor of Saint Peter, Jesus Christ himself in the person of his Vicar. Reassured by the voice and the mission of this supreme pastor, his only thought now was to realise the career that he had opened up for him.

The excessive heat that is normal in the season when he left Rome, increased considerably the pain and fatigue of his return to France. Nevertheless he arrived happily on 25 August 1706 in Ligugé, an ancient priory depending on the Jesuit College in Poitiers, and to be recommended as having been formerly consecrated and sanctified by the sojourn there of Saint Martin, when he came to this place to find the great Saint Hilaire, his master.

Brother Mathurin (as the one whom he first associated with himself for his missions is called) was waiting for M. de Montfort in this place, but he had great diffi-

culty recognising him, so changed was he by sun-tan and fatigue.

M. Grignon, accompanied by his disciple, did not delay going to Poitiers; but no sooner had the news been passed to the bishop's residence than he was sent orders to withdraw within 24 hours. He obeyed, and that same evening he left to go to a place five leagues from there, to the house of a virtuous cleric, where he made an eight-day retreat, less to rest than to prepare himself for his apostolic labours.

56 - Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saumur and to Mont-Saint-Michel

His devotion to the Blessed Virgin brought him, immediately after his retreat, to make a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saumur. It was in this town that the virtuous Jeanne de la Noue, foundress of the house of Providence, consulted him to know whether she should give in to the demands of her sisters, who were pressing her strongly to change something in the extraordinarily austere way of life she was living. Having celebrated Mass, to obtain the grace of knowing the path that God wished to lead her along, he told her that she should persevere in her practices of penance. "God is asking this of you," he told her, "continue as you have begun. It is truly the spirit of God who is leading you and inspiring these austerities in your life; be assured that this is your vocation and the state of life he wants for you." The rest of her life verified these assurances.

On leaving Saumur, M. Grignon passed through Angers, where he did not stay longer than was needed to

visit the hospitals, and then he went on to Mont-Saint-Michel. What drew him there was the extreme confidence he had in the protection of the holy angels and his desire to deserve this. Whenever he passed through some town or village, it was his practice to greet the blessed protecting spirits of these places and the guardian angels of all their inhabitants.

No matter how little one is accustomed to reading the lives of the saints, one can easily see that all these great models of Christianity are always distinguished by their devotion to the holy angels. Apostolic men seem to have a more particular commitment to honour them, since by their state in life they are themselves like angels visible to the rest of mankind, so as to complement, with regard to their salvation, the invisible actions of the blessed angels.

It was on this journey to Mont-Saint-Michel that the humble pilgrim seized the opportunity to exercise, in more ways than one, his charity towards a poor man that he encountered on the road. This man was extremely fatigued by the journey and was carrying a very heavy baggage that impeded and slowed down his pace, making it ever more painful. M. Grignon begged him to give up his burden and give it to him to carry. The poor man refused for as long as he could, but at length he was obliged to give in to the repeated entreaties of his new travelling companion. He still had a long way to go, and the charitable traveller was far from having got over the fatigue of his pilgrimage to Rome. Despite this, he was never willing to allow either Brother Mathurin, who had not left him, nor the poor wretch whose burden he had taken up, to relieve him, at least by sharing, turn and turn about, the

pain of carrying so weighty a load. The day came to an end, and they had to stop. But M. Grignion, not content with what he had already done for the poor peasant that he had met, took him into an inn, sat him down at table with him, and had a good bed provided for him. The landlady was extremely shocked and complained bitterly that such a guest, for whom a barn would be more suitable than a good inn, should be brought in and treated in such a way. The man of God replied that he would meet all needs and pay all the expenses. The night passed and the following morning the landlady of the inn was still not happy. It was then that the zeal of the holy missionary burned within him, and on paying her he delivered a severe reprimand over her hardness for the poor, and he ended by saying the most beautiful and touching things to her concerning the charity that religion ought to inspire in all Christians.

I believe we should end this account by observing that M. Grignion, as a follow-up to his missions, established in several parishes a confraternity of men under the title of Soldiers of Saint Michael, for whom he prescribed more or less the same rules as for the White Penitents. This association lasted a long time with much fruit.

57 - Meeting with his family in Rennes

Having satisfied his devotion at Mont-Saint-Michel, he went to Rennes, where there still lived his father and mother and M. de la Viseule Robert, his maternal uncle, of whom we have already spoken and who was a priest and the sacristan in the parish of Saint-Sauveur. They were all able to give him a good welcome and offer him a decent and commodious lodging, but he preferred to go

and lodge in a poor house. He did not even want to announce his arrival to his relations, and it was only by chance that his uncle, after several days, was the first to hear of it.

As M. Grignon would go every day to the hospital to visit, help and exhort the poor people, there happened to be a person there who had formerly seen him in Rennes, while he was studying there, and who believed she remembered him. She told M. de la Viseule of her suspicions, and he had no other thought than to make enquiries in all quarters to try to find where there might be living an unknown priest who had arrived shortly before in the town. He did not delay to get this information, and immediately went off to look for his nephew, but he found only Brother Mathurin. The uncle made himself known for who he was, asked for news of his nephew, whom he loved tenderly, and charged Brother Mathurin with telling M. Grignon of his complaints concerning the indifference which he showed towards his parents, which went as far as hardness; then he went again the following day to seek out a fugitive who was avoiding his anxious enquiries.

Their first interview was a mixture of marks of tenderness and reproaches on the part of M. de la Viseule. He pointed out to him that, since his father and mother were in Rennes, it was strange that he had not been to pay them his respects; that, being himself also in the vicinity, he believed he had some right to some sign of remembrance and even of deference on his part; that religion as well as nature included among the most sacred duties the respect and devotion of children towards their parents, and that one's age and character, far from diminishing

their obligations in this regard, only made it more inexcusable when they neglected them; and that, finally, it was indecent and even lacking in honour for his family that he should stay in such a way, under the eyes of his parents, in a poor hovel where, to all appearances, he was lacking even what was necessary for life. He exhorted him to delay no longer in visiting his father and mother, and he pressed him hard to leave the place where he was and go to live with his family, at least for the period that he intended staying in Rennes.

Nothing is more specious or seductive than these kinds of argument, where is to be found the secret of bringing together the voices of religion and nature. But their illusion is quickly discovered when one has a mind and heart penetrated solely by the maxims of the Gospel, when one is fully convinced that he who does not hate his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, for Jesus Christ, is not worthy of him; when one is deeply persuaded that detachment from one's place of birth and from one's parents is the first requirement of the apostolate. These principles were so deeply engraved on the heart of M. Grignon that nothing could efface them. Already, as though to forget himself even as regards his family name, he scarcely ever called himself anything but 'Montfort', from the place of his birth, and it is thus that we shall henceforth refer to him often in the rest of his life. Hence, without losing any of the respect he owed to his uncle, he replied to him with a modest liberty: "That he had a Father in heaven to whom alone he was attached, that the love of his parents for him deserved and indeed called forth his entire recognition, but that he was none the less obliged to have a perfect detachment from them, that he remembered them before God, in whom

alone he could love them in a useful and legitimate way; that he begged him to accept that he did not conduct himself according to the principles of flesh and blood, but that in an abandonment of himself entirely to divine Providence, he looked to it alone to provide him with the support that he wished to offer.”

M. de la Viseule could not refrain from admiring such Christian and perfect sentiments, and from being extremely edified by them. Nevertheless he persisted in demanding that he go, at least once, to dine with his parents. Finally he consented, although with difficulty, and those of his family in Rennes came together and were united in sharing in the common joy.

The edifying manner in which the guest conducted himself gave the meal a lively and natural image of those *agapes* of the first Christians. On entering the room, he fell on his knees and said, as was his custom, the prayer *Visita quaesumus, etc....* After saying grace, he put together the poor people’s share, and sent them what was of the best. During the whole of the dinner, he spoke only of God and of the importance of salvation. When the meal was over, he thanked his parents and went back to his poor place of solitude, where, as long as he stayed in Rennes, he lived on milk and galettes alone in the manner of the poor people of that region.

He was asked to preach in Rennes, which he did; but he preached only a little, because rumours of what had happened in Poitiers at the Calvary mission had spread, and had alienated and prejudiced quite a number of people against him.

However, the directors of the seminary, where he gave a few exhortations, were so happy with these that they invited him to join them in giving missions in the countryside.

But the grace of M. de Montfort was wider than this, and he had to be like a flying cloud to carry fruitfulness to different parts of the Lord's inheritance.

58 - In Dinan, a meeting with his brother, a Dominican

So he left for Dinan, a town in the diocese of Saint-Malo. It appears that, in taking this route, he had no other aim than to seek work, but he was looking for it in such a way that it would evidently be the master of the harvest who was calling him to the work, so that in all his undertakings everything would be from God, and nothing from himself, except for his co-operation. His zeal for the Rosary, which was always his favourite devotion, brought him to go to say Mass at the church of the Reverend Fathers of the Order of Saint Dominic, who had a house there.

On entering the sacristy, he said to the religious in charge: "My dear brother, please give me vestments to say Mass at the altar of Blessed Alain de la Roche." What caused him to favour this particular altar was that the saint honoured there had been one of the great enthusiasts for the Rosary. The sacristan was highly offended that he was treated as a brother, and he made this clear by an answer that was quite brusque. However he went off to get vestments; but to make the strange priest more aware of his unhappiness, he chose the most worn and the least

clean ones, which he handed over also with a really bad grace, and he placed on the altar just two small stubs of candles. After the Mass M. de Montfort said to him: "My dear brother, please keep these vestments for me for tomorrow." And so the sacristan felt insulted yet again by the recurrence of being named a brother. He could put up with it no longer, and as soon as he saw the strange priest go back into the church to make his thanksgiving, he spoke to Brother Mathurin and opened up his heart to him. "So who," he said to him, "is this priest who comes to say Mass in our church? He is a man who does not know how to live, he does not know how to distinguish between a Father and a Brother. Ah, I beg you to tell me his name, so that I may recognise him and remember him." The good Father was not satisfied and Brother Mathurin did not think it right to satisfy his curiosity.

Our sacristan, having gone into the town in the evening and having met the companion of this man who "does not know how to distinguish between a Father and a Brother," made a new attempt to discover the secret that had been hidden from him in the morning. When he saw him afar off, he called him, attacked him and asked him afresh: "Tell me then, who is this man who said Mass in our church this morning?" Whether because the companion had been given permission to reveal the mystery, or because he had no wish to keep any longer in suspense a man who seemed to him to be as upset as he was shocked, he replied: "It is M. de Montfort." - "But I don't know anyone of that name," replied the religious, "does he not have another?" - "Yes, Father," replied Brother Mathurin (for he was too well aware that he was a priest to make any mistake), "he is also called M. Grignon." - "Where is he from?" asked the sacristan. - "He comes

from Montfort-la-Canne,” answered the disciple of the priest who was until then unknown. “Ah! It is my brother,” cried the religious, taken by surprise and joy.

The following day, M. de Montfort presented himself in the same sacristy as he had said he would, but the welcome he received was very different, and the phrase “my dear brother” no longer seemed shocking and out of place. The sacristan threw himself on the neck of his brother, embraced him tenderly, and expressed fraternal friendship to cause his mistrust to be forgotten. M. de Montfort contented himself with saying to him: “Well, are you not my brother both by nature and by grace?” There was no longer any question of old vestments; all the cleanest were brought out, and the most beautiful candles placed on the altar.

The somewhat too marked sensitivity of this good religious is proof that even the holiest of states sometimes leaves a man with some small weaknesses, but the detachment of M. de Montfort, which gave rise to this story, is in sharp and very edifying contrast, and shows us, besides, that his devotion had in no way deprived him of his easy and agreeable character.

A group of missionaries of Brittany were at that time giving a mission in this area: M. Grignon was invited to join them, and he preferred teaching the catechism to the children to all the other functions of the ministry. He had not forgotten the recommendation made to him on this subject by the Sovereign Pontiff, when he gave him his apostolic mission. Besides, in this work there is more difficulty and less splendour than in others, and nothing was more apt to satisfy his humility and his attraction for the most difficult works. Finally, he knew that everything

depends on the first principles given to the young, and that therein lies the most important object of a zeal that is genuinely evangelical.

His own zeal still inclined him particularly towards the poor, and to procuring for them all the necessities of life. There were always a great number of them following him; he fed them using only the funds provided by Providence, and himself performed prodigies of charity in their favour. One evening, passing through a street, he found there a poor leper covered in ulcers. He did not wait for this wretch to ask him; he spoke to him first, took him and placed him on his shoulders and thus went on up to the door of the house of the missionaries, which he found closed, since it was rather late. He knocked on the door, crying out several times: "Open the door to Jesus Christ, open the door to Jesus Christ." The one who came to open the door was extremely surprised to see him carrying this poor man. He went in with his precious burden, laid the poor man in his own bed, warmed him up as much as he could (for he was chilled to the bone), while he himself spent the rest of the night in prayer.

It was in this same spirit of charity that he engaged several pious people to form among themselves a society to relieve the poor, preparing and furnishing to them the necessities of life. This good work is still in existence and was made very much more effective by the care of the late Count de la Garaye. This noble lord, whose name will be ever blessed, having turned his chateau into a hospital, and having himself looked after the poor there for more than thirty years, founded in Dinan a house of charity with sufficient income to support four Daughters of Wisdom, who directed it, and the funds necessary to

distribute bread, soup, medicines, clothes and other helps to the poor of this town.

At the time that M. Grignon was exercising his zeal there, there were troops garrisoned there. The moment seemed favourable, and he took his opportunity with determination; he obtained the necessary powers to give them a mission. Soon he gained the confidence of the soldiers by the considerate exercise of his charity, and he touched their hearts by the strength and the vehemence of his discourses. One could see them breaking into tears at his sermons, and hastening afterwards to the confessional. The success of this good work went beyond all that could be hoped for.

He would leave a place with regrets if he had not left there some memorial to his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. So he had a large and beautiful picture made, before which there should be a candle continuously burning, and he positioned the image in a decent and fitting way, so that people could gather at its feet to recite the Rosary in common.

The reputation of the missionary began to spread and to make him wanted in a number of places. On leaving Dinan, he went to Saint-Suliac, two leagues from Saint-Malo, where he gave a mission, and from there went to Bécherel where he gave a retreat to more than two hundred people from the third order of St Dominic and that of St Francis.

59 - M. Grignon joins M. Leuduger

M. Leuduger, a scholastic of the Cathedral of Saint-Brieuc, invited him after this to the mission in La Chèze.

There he headed a large number of clerics who shared the work with him. While they were all extremely respectable by their piety, zeal and ability, M. de Montfort nevertheless distinguished himself, without wishing to do so, and attracted the esteem, the trust and the veneration of the people. Such is the privilege of a rare and unique virtue, to shine out the more as it seeks the more to bury itself. But before going into the details of the events that took place in this mission that concern him personally, I ought to say a word about his journey to Montfort-la-Canne, his own birth-place.

His route, on his way to La Chèze, brought him quite near. There he had an uncle, and he was not unaware of this; but he did not want to go and lodge with him. His poor wet-nurse lived a quarter of a league from the town, and it was in her house that he planned to ask for hospitality. However, to test her charity towards the poor, he sent Brother Mathurin to beg her to give a bed to a poor priest, whom he had orders not to name, and his companion. The proposal was very badly received, and she replied only with a refusal. Close by there, there lived a peasant from whom M. de Montfort himself begged a little straw for the love of Our Lord for himself and his companion, but this was also refused. He received the same treatment at the door of another house which he approached. Finally he asked which was the poorest in the village, and he was told that it was an old man who lived in the last house he would come across on continuing his journey. He went there and asked, as in all the others, for himself and his companion, a bed in the name of Our Lord.

The good man received him with joy and with open arms. "I have," he said, "only bread and water to give you, and a little straw for you to make your bed. If I had more," he continued, "I would offer it to you with all my heart; but anyway I will willingly share with you the little that I have." This was a happy meeting for M. Grignion; he entered the poor cottage of the good man with indescribable joy; his name was Pierre Belin, of the village of La Maconnaye. The Holy Spirit, who assures us that the names of men of mercy will live on from generation to generation (Eccli. XLIV, 14), no doubt does not wish that those should be deprived of this honour whose charity is still more praiseworthy as it is allied with poverty. This good man examined more carefully his new guest, and found that he closely resembled the son of M. Grignion de la Bacheleraie whom he had seen before, when as a schoolboy he used to come to spend his holidays with his father. The more he looked at him, the more he was confirmed in his idea. He sought enlightenment, and learnt with joy that he was not mistaken. The next morning he hastened to share this news with his neighbours and especially with the nurse. Then they all hurried from all over to go and see M. Grignion, and to make their excuses, everyone saying that if they had known it would have been a pleasure to have him in their homes. The good nurse especially was inconsolable. She went and threw herself at his feet, shed tears in torrents, asked a thousand pardons, and begged him not to refuse her the consolation of having him in her home. The man of God profited by this occasion to teach them all a salutary lesson regarding their hardness to the poor. "You would have welcomed me," he said, "for the love of M. de Montfort, if you had known my name; but I asked you for the love of Jesus

Christ, and you would not accept me.” Then he spoke to them of the excellence of charity, and exhorted them to practice it in the future with regard to all the poor people. However, not to sadden excessively his old nurse, he went to her house and ate a meal there. The good woman did her best, but M. de Montfort, less as a reproach than to awaken her charity, said to her: “Andrée, you have taken good care of me, but you are not charitable. Forget M. de Montfort; he is worth nothing; but rather think of Jesus Christ; he is everything, and it is he who is in all the poor people.” Having stayed for a few days with his charitable host, he began to think about choosing some place that would serve him as a retreat in the intervals between the missions he proposed giving in the surrounding places where he might be called.

60 - At Saint-Lazare

The priory house called Saint-Lazare, which is only a quarter of a league from Montfort, seemed to him to be suitable for his plans. This house, which adjoins the forest, was not inhabited at that time. He asked permission of the farmer general of this priory to retire there with his companion, Brother Mathurin, and he received this permission. So for almost two years he made this his ordinary residence. It was from there that, like another John the Baptist coming out of the desert, he went off to preach penance in the neighbourhood, and he did so with such great success that men coming from afar would have seemed less strange than he did to his fellow-citizens and in his own country.

Entering this sort of hermitage, he had the chapel, which had fallen into ruin, repaired, and decorated the

altar on which he placed a very beautiful image of Our Lady of Wisdom. In the middle of the chapel there was a very beautiful prie-Dieu which he had put there and to which he had attached with an iron chain a rosary whose beads made of a strange wood were the size of a thumb. This holy chapel is still frequented, and a great number of pilgrims come there to honour the Blessed Virgin and recite the Rosary on M. de Montfort's beads.

It was in this holy chapel that he renewed his vow to live only on alms. He kept this so scrupulously that he never asked anyone for anything for himself, but Providence supplied him with abundant helps. Every day, they brought more than was needed for himself, Brother Mathurin and Brother Jean, who had joined them. He shared this with a great number of poor people who were to be found mingling with this great crowd of people who came to him to listen to his instructions and to receive salutary advice from him.

However, God wished to test his trust and his perfect abandonment. It happened that one day in harvest-time, when everyone was busy with his work, nobody thought about our poor solitaries. Midday arrived, and M. de Montfort took himself off, as was his custom, with the two Brothers to the chapel to make the particular examen, as is the custom in the seminaries. If he imitated their exercises, he did not have all their comforts. When the examen was finished, they went into their little refectory. No-one had stayed behind to prepare the dishes. It would have been useless to do so, as nothing had been brought that day. M. de Montfort did not omit to do the reading that takes place at dinner, and when the reading was over, he said grace and returned to the chapel to say the *Ange-*

lus, still exhorting the Brothers to put their trust in Providence. When evening came, they again went to the refectory, which was no better provided than in the morning. The resignation of the man of God was in no way shaken. That of the two Brothers was not quite so perfect: they began murmuring and complaining that he was unwilling to allow them to make provision in the evening for the morrow's needs. For him, it did not take long to reap the fruits of his abandonment to Providence. The farmer of the tenanted farm at the Priory's gates, sitting down to supper with his day-workers, was inspired to ask his wife if she had seen anyone during the day going to find M. Grignon. When she replied that she had seen no-one, he said: "Perhaps this good man has had nothing to eat to-day," and immediately he took a portion of the coarse food that he was enjoying with his men, and he went to take it to the holy priest. The priest accepted his present with thanks, fell on his knees at the same time to thank God, and shared with his two companions the small provisions that heaven had sent them, delivering a gentle reprimand on the little trust they had shown in the care of Providence; and he himself was more and more strengthened in that lively faith with which he abandoned himself to Providence without reserve.

61 - The Mission at La Chèze

It was from this hermitage, as we have already indicated, that he took himself off to the neighbouring parishes to give missions there. We are going to take up again the one he gave at La Chèze, which we had begun to speak about. In this parish there was a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Our Lady of the Cross, a large and spacious chapel that had been abandoned for

several centuries. Saint Vincent Ferrer, in the course of his apostolic missions, preaching one day in the meadow of La Chèze, deplored the state of abandonment of this church, and having given witness to how he himself would have loved to remedy this misfortune, he assured his listeners “that this great undertaking was reserved by heaven for a man that Almighty God would cause to be born in far-off times, a man who would arrive as an unknown, who would be very much contradicted and scorned, yet a man who with the help of grace would bring to completion this holy enterprise.” These are the terms of a letter written in 1754 by the rector of La Chèze to the Bishop of Saint-Brieuc, Henri Nicolas Thépault de Breignon, a prelate who was truly worthy of the early days of the Church by his limitless charity, his tireless zeal, and his constant application to governing his diocese by himself, to maintaining therein the purity of the faith and to causing piety and good morals to flourish in all states of life. M. de Montfort, touched by the same sentiments that had excited the zeal of St. Vincent Ferrer, undertook to rebuild almost like new the chapel of Our Lady of the Cross. The project could not be executed without great expense, and not only did he have nothing, but he could see no human means of finding sufficient funds for such a great object. His perfect trust in Providence did not, however, allow him to hesitate. “It is true,” he said, “that I can see nothing certain for such a great enterprise; but God will help me.” With this conviction he set to work labourers of all kinds: masons, carpenters, roofers, joiners, locksmiths, painters and sculptors. The work advanced for all to see, and help came in proportion. The exterior of the chapel having been completed, he began to think about the decoration of the interior.

Having had it well whitewashed and suitably paved, he had a high altar constructed in the Roman style, protected by a beautiful, well-polished altar-rail, and decorated with eight life-sized statues. On this altar he placed, as we shall see later, a cross crowned with golden rays, and at the foot of the cross a figure of Our Lady of Pity. Everything he needed to fulfil his commitments to the workers and the merchants, came to him as though just at the right moment, and without upsetting anyone, so that in a short time the work was brought to perfection. The closeness of the parish of Plumieux, where he was called with the other missionaries, allowed him to watch over the works that he had started at La Chèze, and to see the perfect accomplishment of them.

However great this enterprise was, it did not seem to be a distraction for M. de Montfort capable of impeding him from attending to the other exercises of the mission in La Chèze.

62 - The Fair at La Chèze

In this parish there used to be a fair of some note that took place on Ascension Day. These kinds of gatherings, so useful and even necessary for the public good, are subject to many abuses, and these abuses are particularly opposed to the holiness of Sundays and feast days. The zealous missionary worked to have this fair moved to the Monday after the feast, and he succeeded. But it was not without opposition on the part even of those who, on account of the holiness of their state in life, ought to have favoured this idea instead of opposing it. They attempted to counter-balance by their own authority the authority given M. de Montfort by the people themselves, but for-

tunately they failed and had the disagreeable experience of hearing it said: "We believe rather what the good missionary tells us than we do you, and along with you those people who have an interest in the fair." There was only one man who insisted on selling and another on buying a cow that had been brought along. But the first lost, that very day, the money he had gained from the sale, and the second saw the beast he had bought die a short time later, and with it several others. He himself became paralysed in all his limbs, and was not cured until he had made honourable amends to the Blessed Virgin and asked pardon of the missionary.

The person who collected the fees for the fair, having spoken badly of him, suffered the same fate and was not perfectly cured without the same remedy. A priest, having also insulted him, was punished there and then with a most vicious pain that struck him in the foot. The surgeons, called to examine the sickness and to cure it, seeing neither tumour, nor contusion, nor any other sign of sickness in the afflicted member, went home without operating and without wishing to prescribe anything. The pains, however, continued to be felt with the same harshness, so that the cleric, deprived of all human help, began to suspect that his illness might be just punishment for the excesses he had uttered against M. de Montfort and his indecent ranting against his zeal, on the occasion of the fair and what had taken place at Our Lady of the Cross. So he made genuine reparation for this to the Blessed Virgin and to her humble servant, and at once the pains he had suffered until then ceased completely.

"Madame La Ville Thébaut," says the writer of the letter I have already quoted, "saw him perform a miracle,

and that in the presence of several people. The holy man gave her back her sick daughter in full health, assuring her that she would never again suffer from this sickness, which came about. He cured several feverish people by having them swallow some clear water in which he had dipped the name of Jesus. He multiplied bread every day for the poor people who were his beloved companions. I would never get to the end, Monseigneur, if I had to write down all the marvels that people worthy of credence recount of Monsieur Montfort. His bed was a stone and three bundles of firewood. His shirts stained with blood bore witness that he did not spare himself the discipline. One solitary apple served to feed him for a whole day and in the hardest work. Always cheerful in the midst of adversities, he seemed to be never happier than when heaped with abuse. He was religiously submissive to the orders of his superiors; otherwise he would be still at La Croix, where he wanted to die, and where he had already indicated the place of his burial. All the above, Monseigneur, is true and attested by people worthy of all credence.

François Jagu, rector of La Chèze.”

The mission in Plumieux continued, and M. de Montfort, although the junior, drew the attention of the whole people. He had chosen his lodging at the lower end of the town, in a little inn called ‘The Four Winds’. But in place of the bed that was made up there, he slept on the hard ground, accompanied by Brother Mathurin. This place soon became the meeting-place for all the poor, and the holy missionary there performed in their favour, as was his custom, all the most marvellous and most heroic things that zeal and charity could inspire.

Meanwhile the works at the chapel of Our Lady of the Cross were going ahead, and as M. de Montfort, while preaching to an almost unbelievable crowd on the heath of La Ferrière, had recalled the preaching by St Vincent Ferrer, the enthusiasm with which the work was being pursued, made it possible that it would be finished before he left Plumieux. This miracle of Providence aroused all his gratitude and he wanted to make it public. In this spirit he had bonfires lit, over nine days, to thank the Blessed Virgin for the graces she had obtained in favour of this place and the inhabitants of the region. He also organised a great and magnificent procession, which became a ravishing spectacle by the good order he imposed upon it, the silence that reigned during it, the variety of edifying, pious and symbolic personages he introduced into it and the modesty of all those who took part. They walked straight forward, five abreast, with eyes lowered, the rosary in their hands, and the silence was broken only by the praises, and acts of adoration and thanksgiving that resounded to the glory of the Lord. The procession departed from Plumieux to go to La Chèze, and all along the route from one place to the other, there was not the slightest trouble, nor the least disturbance, even though the number of people taking part, who had come from all parts, was enormous. The author of another account of what took place in this procession says that it seemed that the angels had come down from heaven to bring about such good order. It was at the end of this great ceremony that the figure of Our Lady of Pity, which had been carried in triumph during the procession, was placed on the altar of the newly rebuilt and redecorated chapel. This chapel is one of the most beautiful in the diocese of Saint-Brieuc, and since that time has

become the object of a devotion that is as durable as it is edifying. It was to help this devotion and to encourage it with sensible signs, that M. de Montfort had several crosses made, some large, others small, with which pilgrims, still to this day, make a procession on their knees, around the altar, carrying these crosses on their shoulders or between their arms to honour Our Lady of the Cross, and to beg, through her intercession, for the grace to carry with submission the crosses that heaven sends them.

To strengthen and perpetuate the good that he had done at La Chèze, he concluded by establishing in the same chapel the devotion of the Rosary. It was the first place where he established this devotion in all its breadth, getting pious people to go there three times a day, in the morning, afternoon and evening, to recite a chaplet at each of these different times, and so to recite every day the whole Rosary. This practice has been maintained ever since in this chapel, and is observed there today very regularly.

63 - Retreat in Saint-Brieuc

The episcopal town also wanted to have the advantage of seeing and possessing the new apostle. He was summoned there to give some retreats, in a community founded for this use, where they welcomed people from both town and countryside who wished to withdraw there to take part in the spiritual exercises for eight days. The Daughters of the Cross ran this house, as they still do with both edification and wisdom. This Congregation, so respectable and so useful wherever it is established, make profession to follow the first rule that Saint Francis de

Sales gave to the Religious of the Visitation, before this saint gave his consent for them to bind themselves to the rule of cloister. The bishops of Saint-Brieuc and of Tréguier entrusted them with retreats for women, as well as a number of other good works with which they are still occupied.

M. de Montfort knew only too well by his own experience the inestimable advantages of retreats for him not to contribute to them with the greatest zeal and affection. He knew that the dissipation of the world hardly ever allows one to be perfectly recollected and to accord thoughts of salvation all the time that this important, or rather this unique, affair demands and deserves. He was not ignorant of the fact that the sequence of the great truths of religion which are normally set forth therein with force and order, according to the method of Saint Ignatius, possesses a quite particular grace for producing the most fortunate effects on minds and hearts. He was convinced that there was no sinner, however hardened, who could resist and harden himself against an attentive and profound meditation on these different truths. He was no less convinced that, if spiritual retreats are powerful aids to the conversion of sinners, they are equally, for the righteous, effective means of being more and more purified, of receiving new lights, of persevering and making progress in the ways of perfection.

If I were not afraid of introducing too much of an interruption in the story of this life, I would set out to show how much these retreats ought to be recommended for all those of either sex who sincerely desire their salvation. Let it suffice to say that the Sovereign Pontiffs have approved them in the most authentic manner and have

heaped praise on them; that they have seemed so essential to all the bishops of the Church and all the superiors of Orders that the practice has become almost a rule in almost all ecclesiastical and religious communities; that Saint Régis, M. Michel de Nobletz and Father Maunoir, those great and famous missionaries, encouraged through their wishes the erection of these retreat houses, because they looked upon them both as a means of perpetuating and even increasing the fruits of their missions, and as places where, with the same exercises as those of the missions, there was less dissipation and more leisure to profit by them. It is there, in fact, that, far from the affairs and the tumultuous pleasures of the world, one can learn to think as a Christian and live as a penitent. It is there that one can dispose oneself well to make a choice of a way of life, that choice which is so decisive for time and eternity. It is there that a woman in charge of a household can train herself to sanctify her occupations; it is there that artisans, domestic servants, even country folk, can teach themselves to render meritorious for heaven the life of pain and work in which they find themselves, and to fulfil their respective duties with a fidelity and attention as glorious for religion as it is useful for society! Also you will nowhere find more piety and Christianity than in those places where the practice of retreats is held in honour, and where it becomes the rule to make one every year.

M. de Montfort therefore was at pains to respond to the people who called him for such a holy work, but first of all he wanted to test the charity of the house to which he came to exercise his zeal. He did this by one of those features which were quite normal for him, and the way in which he announced the retreat preacher was perhaps one

of the most useful exercises of the retreat. First of all he sent Brother Mathurin to ask at the door of the community, for the love of Jesus Christ, a morsel of bread to eat for a poor priest and for himself. The master having learnt that his companion had been refused, went there himself and was no better received! We should not condemn the Daughters of the Cross whose limitless charity, which they exercise continually, is sufficient apology. But you cannot meet every need, and there is an order in charity that means that sometimes one is convinced that one ought to prefer the local poor people to strangers. Besides, a community is not responsible for the inattention or the bad humour of a door-keeper.

Meanwhile the poor priest remained at the door. The one who had asked for him to give the retreat, being within the house, thought he heard the voice of M. de Montfort, and in fact saw him through the grill and recognised him. "So open the door," he said to the portress, "open up, Sister; it is M. de Montfort who has come to give the retreat in your house." "Not at all, Monsieur," she replied, "it is a poor priest who is begging alms." The whole affair was soon sorted out. The door was opened to the stranger with many excuses. They took him to a room that was very clean, and served him with a meal in which abundance was joined with delicacy. This was not at all what he was looking for, but he took the opportunity to recommend them to exercise charity with a little less reserve and without making distinction of persons. "I find everything here in abundance," he said, "because you know my name and because I have come to give your retreat. You are giving a good meal to M. de Montfort, and yet you refuse a morsel of bread asked of you in the

name of Jesus Christ; this is to be lacking in both faith and charity.”

It would be hard to say whether the confusion of this holy community was greater than the humility with which they received this correction from the apostolic man. What is certain is that, once they knew each other, they esteemed and honoured one another mutually from the heart. Virtue rendered justice to virtue - a reciprocal testimony that ever afterwards gave glory to M. de Montfort and to the Daughters of the Cross.

The reputation of the man of God had preceded him to Saint-Brieuc, and had painted a glowing picture of him. But when they came to know him and to see him at close quarters, and when he had spent some time there, they looked on him as a man powerful in works and in words, and above all as a prodigy of charity. Being ceaselessly occupied with the care of the poor, he regularly fed every day about two hundred of them, he waited on them, taught them catechism and said the Rosary with them.

One young lady, seeing that he was himself so poor, and that he was scarcely clothed (although on this point he always observed ecclesiastical decency), one day sent a tailor to measure him and make him a soutane. However real was his need of this, he replied: “That his body could go without a new soutane, but the members of Jesus Christ could not go without nourishment,” and he begged the charitable young lady to convert this alms into money to feed the poor.

The manner in which he treated his body offers many more surprises than the little care that he took to clothe it. M. Yso, his confessor while he was in Saint-

Brieuc, has affirmed that he surprised him in the act of inflicting on himself unheard-of cruelties, so that he felt obliged more than once to reprimand him severely on this subject, and even to use his authority to moderate his abstinence and his mortifications.

No matter how continual was his union with God, he still spent a considerable time in mental prayer both by day and by night. During the day he would choose for this exercise the most secluded places where nature might have more to suffer. The Daughters of the Cross, often found him on a very foul manure heap, where he would spend whole hours, lost in the most profound meditation. They asked him on one occasion to relax a little his meditation, so they could give an early send-off to those people who were due to leave the retreat that day and who had a long way to go to get home. "Leave me," he replied, "for if I am not good for myself, I will never be so for others." An admirable response, worthy of being engraved on the hearts of all those who are employed in this holy ministry.

It is not surprising that, preaching in this way by his own example and gaining all his strength from his union with God, he brought about such a great number of conversions in the various retreats that he gave in Saint-Brieuc during the three months he stayed there. He never went up into the pulpit but he drew tears from the eyes of his listeners. No-one could resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke through his mouth (Acts 6:10). Two young women experienced this in a very special way. They had an extreme aversion to the convent, and they could not even bear to think of it. They were so adamant on this point that they would not go to see a number of

their friends who had become religious, for fear that they might become envious of them. M. de Montfort, enlightened from on high, recommended them to follow the prayers of the retreat and said that they would be the conquest of Jesus and Mary. We are told also that he called both by their names, though he had never before seen them nor spoken to them. The prediction was verified. Both of them entered the Ursulines, where he himself led them and where they made their profession.

The religious of this monastery also had the advantage of hearing a number of discourses given by the holy missionary, and he singled out this community which he said was “very agreeable and very precious to Jesus.” It was he who engaged Reverend Mother de la Rivière to undertake the establishment of the Ursulines of Quintin, predicting that she would succeed, but that she would have many contradictions to endure.

The Sisters of the Cross of the Saint-Brieuc community, who were asked in 1727 to give some details of what they had seen and known of the apostolic man while he gave the retreats in their house, speak of him only as of a saint of the first order, and whose memory alone incites them to fervour. “His love for God,” they say in the memorial signed by the superior and her assistant, “was tender, affective and effective. He loved nothing except in God, for God and in relation to God, having always a new enthusiasm to make him known, loved and served by all his creatures, having exposed his life with a courage without equal in an encounter, to get rid of what was an occasion of sin for several people. We have such a perfect knowledge of this that you can count on the assurance that we give on this matter. While people do not

want to hear of miracles in our day, we would willingly say that he performed one to prevent him from perishing and being exterminated by a band of furious creatures that surrounded him, foaming with anger. That was the extent of his zeal for the glory of his master and the salvation of his brethren. He also had such a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin that we regarded her as he did, taking the position of the dominant passion. Also, when we wanted to obtain some grace from him, we would ask him for it in the name of and for the love of Mary, and then we never failed to get what we asked. His sentiments for the most humiliating states in life went as far as veneration, and he tried to communicate them with everyone. When he saw us in the practice of an exercise that was painful and humiliating in the world's eyes, he would say to us in his pleasant and serious way, as though it were Jesus who spoke to us: 'Is your situation horrible and lowly? Rejoice, my beloved! Your situation so like my own is a sign that I love you well!' Words which still today produce marvellous fruits among us, encouraging and sustaining those to whom he said them... We wish very much to see him placed by the Church, our good Mother, in the catalogue of the saints, so that we can invoke him publicly and make known to all the world the enormous confidence we have in his protection. While we await this happy time, we beg him secretly to obtain for us from the Father of Mercies the grace to share in a disposition that seemed to us habitual and continual in him, namely to fear nothing but God and sin."

It was, it would seem, either in the intervals between the retreats that he gave in Saint-Brieuc, or a short time after, that he returned to La Chèze to visit, he said, his good Mother, the Blessed Virgin, in the chapel of Our

Lady of the Cross, that he had had rebuilt. There he spent the three feasts of Pentecost, and he preached with such unction that everyone followed him and called him simply “the saint”.

“It is certain,” said Monsieur the rector of La Chèze, in 1727, “that the whole of this area, rectors, priests, justices, officers and others who knew him have a particular esteem for his sanctity. I certify this and assure that it is true.” It is said also that, during this journey, the zealous missionary was passing through La Trinité. It was eight o’clock in the evening when he arrived. On approaching the church, he heard the singing of the litanies of the Blessed Virgin, and immediately made his way there. It was in the porch of this church that the people were assembled before the image of Our Lady. At the end of the litany, he had Brother Mathurin sing a hymn in honour of the Mother of God, and when the hymn was finished he got up, gave a talk to the inhabitants, approved their devotion, exhorted them to continue, and gave to the image of the Blessed Virgin which was in the porch the title of Our Lady of Light. They did not delay to erect in the interior of the church, under this same title, a chapel before which they continue to say, every evening before the *Angelus*, the Rosary and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and a number of other prayers.

64 - The Mission in Moncontour

The mission announced for the town of Moncontour in the diocese of Saint-Brieuc brought M. de Montfort there after the other missionaries. He arrived on a Sunday, and on his arrival he discovered, by the sound of instruments, a public dance taking place in the square. This vision

aroused his zeal for the sanctification of days dedicated to the Lord. He rushed into the crowd, snatched the instruments from the hands of those playing them, fell on his knees in the midst of the dancers and said in a loud voice: "Let all those who are on God's side do as I have done, and let them prostrate themselves on the ground to appease the anger of God." A very large number of those taking part, seized with astonishment and religious fear, obeyed immediately and began crying, *Mercy*. Some who were less docile resisted longer; but in the end everyone gave in. The man of God was not satisfied with just that, and, in order to prevent a similar disorder in the future, went to the house of M. Veillet, the mayor of the town, to ask him to do all he could to entirely abolish a scandal against which complaints had been made for a long time but without success.

This remarkable feat caused M. de Montfort to be looked upon as an extraordinary man, but he performed another which, without being so resounding, seemed even more singular in its own way. After several days of the mission, having said Mass at the hospital, he took out the ivory crucifix that he had carried to Rome and that had been blessed by the Pope. He presented it to be kissed by all who were present. Everyone hastened to share in this grace. It was thought that no exceptions would be made and that no-one would be excluded. But they were mistaken. None of those people who came forward in worldly finery were admitted. The ladies of the hospital believed that at least this exclusion would not apply to them, being dressed according to all the rules of Christian simplicity. So their surprise was extreme when they saw that they were no more privileged than the most worldly people, and much less than the poor and the rest of the

people. The holy man's reason was that they were bringing up among them young girls who had a taste for the same finery. Some clerics from the region happened to be present at this ceremony. At first, they seemed unable to refrain from laughing at this singularity that was such a strong shock to the people involved. However, they were scarcely half way through this adoration than they changed their feelings. Having lent an ear to the words full of unction that the missionary spoke while he carried the crucifix from row to row to be kissed, they could not keep back their tears, and they shed them in abundance along with the rest of the assembly.

65 - M. Grignon incurs the displeasure of M. Leuduger

It would seem likely that it was during this mission that M. Grignon incurred the displeasure of M. Leuduger. This is how it came about. M. Leuduger had preached on praying for the dead, and had set forth in a striking and touching manner the motives for being attentive to their relief. The congregation was moved and seemed to be in the happiest of dispositions. M. de Montfort thought he ought to profit by this to procure for the faithful departed a great number of Masses, making a collection for this purpose. But as it was a rule among the missionaries never to ask for anything, and to be content with whatever might be sent them for their food during the time of the mission, this collection displeased them greatly and drew down on the one who had made it a severe reprimand on the part of their leader. He did not leave it there, but banished M. de Montfort from his company, declaring that he wished to work with him no more.

There is nothing more praiseworthy and even necessary than disinterestedness in the functions of the sacred ministry. M. de Montfort thought all the less of infringing on this, in that his normal custom was to take no stipend for his own Masses. Besides, either he was unaware of the rule established among the missionaries, or an extraordinary impulse of zeal for the relief of the souls in Purgatory did not allow him to think of it. Whatever may be the case, this was not a fault that ought to make them forget all the good he was doing. The eagerness of the people to follow him and listen to him, the sighs, the tears, the cries of sorrow and repentance of those who assisted at his sermons, the greater virtues carried to a heroic degree, all this should have caused them to overlook a momentary lapse in which the will played no other part than a little haste to take on a good work without having first agreed upon it with those to whom he owed deference. But it would seem that the indisposition of the mission leader towards the new missionary dated from further back, and that a disservice had been done in his hearing to an evangelical worker whose zeal and talents he did not cease to esteem. What confirms this conjecture, to say no more than that, is that some years later, this same M. Leuduger, believing that there was no-one better suited to succeed and replace him than M. de Montfort, wrote to him to ask him to come back to him. But the apostolic man had begun to give missions in his own way, and he believed he should hold on to what the Spirit of God had caused him to undertake. It seemed, in effect, that Providence had its own view and wished to have M. de Montfort enter into a career where he could exercise his functions with the holy liberty of the Gospel. Thus we will see him, for the rest of his missionary life,

by choice, but almost always alone, or at the head of those whom he himself had associated with himself.

Book Three

66 - Mission at Saint-Jean in Montfort

M. de Montfort, after separating from the missionaries with whom he had just been working, withdrew to his hermitage of Saint-Lazare. The reports that had been spreading of the success of his work encouraged the parish-priest of Saint-Jean in the town of Montfort to ask him to give a mission in that town, the birth-place of the holy missionary. The fear of not being able to be a prophet in his own country did not prevent him from agreeing to what was asked of him, and putting his hand to a work towards which flesh and blood could be neither an attraction nor an obstacle. His father and mother had no sooner heard the news than they came expressly from Rennes, where they were then living. Their idea was not just to have him lodge with them along with the other workers in the mission, but also to take on all the expenses of the mission. The man of God was touched by their zeal. However he was not willing to accept either their house, nor all the help they were offering him, saying that in his own country, as everywhere else, he would abandon himself entirely to the care of Providence. He knew from experience that Providence had never let him down, and would not let him down either, in a place where he preferred this to any other resource. In effect he had in abundance all that was necessary for himself and his colleagues. He even had enough to feed a great number of the poor, often without knowing where the provisions came from. Sometimes he seemed to rely on mira-

cles, and perhaps God performed them for him to recompense him for his perfect abandonment. One day, when more than sixty poor people were waiting for him in the courtyard of the priory, without having anything to offer them, he told the brother who was the cook, who was preparing dinner for the missionaries, to bring whatever he might have in the kitchen. He distributed this to everyone there, saying that God would provide for the needs of his workers. He was not mistaken, and their table was laid in abundance.

The fruits that his zeal produced in this mission were no less evident than in all the others. The inhabitants of the parish and the surrounding areas came in crowds to the exercises. He gave one to them in which without saying a word, he made an impression on them that the most touching discourse would not have made. The time for the sermon having arrived, he went up into the pulpit, made the sign of the Cross, drew out the crucifix he had brought from Rome, held it in his hands and instead of speaking to his audience, he was so strongly filled with the sentiments of sorrow and love that the sight of a God dying on the cross engendered in his heart, that he could no longer halt the flow of his tears, but could only shed them in abundance on the image of this crucified God. At this sight all the people broke out in sighs and sobbing, and all eyes were bathed in tears. The holy preacher, seeing his audience so moved, which was the only aim he had intended, came down from the pulpit without a single word and presented his crucifix to each of his congregation for them to kiss it. Tears flowed again, and the sentiments of compunction only increased. Everyone was touched, contrite, dismayed! The sermon had been short;

but it needs the whole of the life of a saint to prepare such a one.

67 - The project of a Calvary in Montfort fails

M. Grignon who would have loved to see devotion to and love of Jesus Christ engraved on the hearts of his fellow-countrymen, as they were on his own, had the idea of placing a cross with a figure of Christ seven feet high on a raised place very beautiful to see and that dominated the town and all the surrounding area.

He shared his plan with the principal inhabitants, and it was considered and accepted. He lost no time: he set to work. Everyone joined in with enthusiasm. The upper part of the mound had already been levelled in order to place the foot of the cross there with decency. Ditches had been dug around it to keep animals from entering. The chapel of the large and magnificent chateau was close by. It would be joined with several small oratories that M. de Montfort wished to have built to serve as stations. All this was in preparation for a glorious triumph for Jesus crucified. He, however, wanted another in the very heart of the one who was working so hard to honour his cross, and he was happier to make him experience a little of its bitterness. He allowed an undertaking that was so pious and edifying to fail; but the success of the enterprise would perhaps have brought with it less glory than did the perfect resignation with which the holy missionary accepted this misfortune.

There followed another rejection that he felt less because it concerned him personally and God caused it to

be quickly succeeded by consolation. Some of the rectors of the town thought to ingratiate themselves with their bishop by telling him of what they regarded as idiosyncrasies in M. de Montfort. It is true that it was something singular to see a priest alone, without a title, and without a place, get himself followed by an enormous crowd of people to whom he sometimes gave instruction in the market halls and the public squares, the churches not being spacious enough to hold the crowds, and feeding a great number of poor people without any goods, nor any revenues, as he himself lived on whatever charity was offered him. These idiosyncrasies were known, and it was not difficult to offer proof of them; but it was not so easy to turn them into counts of indictment. However a means was found to show them in a most unfavourable light. They said that M. Grignon gathered together only bands of vagabonds, that he encouraged the laziness of the poor, that he was a man who sought only to make himself stand out so as to make a name for himself in the world, and who in the end was nothing but a hypocrite.

68 - Faculties withdrawn from M. Grignon, then restored

It was in these colours that he was painted for the Bishop of Saint-Malo. The prelate, who was then in the town, had the accused missionary summoned, and he spoke to him in the presence of his accusers. He strongly reprimanded him, and reproached him with not behaving as he should in his diocese, and forbade him to preach there or hear confessions. M. Grignon received this reprimand standing behind the door of the room, not daring to advance any further out of respect for his bishop, while all

the other priests were seated at table with him. He modestly kept his eyes lowered in the posture of someone guilty, and he must have appeared so in the eyes of his Lordship, for he uttered not a single word in his defence. But God who had permitted this humiliation for the good of his servant took care to justify him immediately.

Monsieur Hindré, the rector of Bréal, a small town situated at two and a half leagues from Montfort, having heard that the bishop was there, now came along. Finding him at table and in company, he felt obliged to shorten what he had to say, and simply said to him: "Monseigneur, two reasons have brought me here. The first is to pay you my humble respects, and the second is to ask you for M. Grignon to give a mission to the young people of my parish." The bishop of Saint-Malo, knowing the superior merit of this worthy rector, understood in a moment that the witness that he was rendering indirectly to M. de Montfort must at least balance what the others had said against him. However he did not wish either to show his embarrassment nor confound the rector of Bréal with those to whom he had too lightly given his confidence, or perhaps rather the spirit of God dictated his response at that instant. "Willingly," he told him, without adding anything else. M. de Montfort, who had remained in the corner of the room, came forward immediately and said: "If some other people should approach me, will your Lordship grant me his faculties?" - "Yes," replied the bishop, "I grant you them." By this response the zealous missionary found himself restored to the exercise of his ministry, and all that remained for his enemies was the shame of having taken by surprise the trust of their bishop.

Never, perhaps, was any mission more fervent than that of Bréal. M. de Montfort began it towards All Saints in 1707. He brought about there miracles of conversion. The lowly and the great, the people, the soldiers who were in winter quarters there, were assiduous in their attendance, and profited by his exhortations that were ever more moving and touching. We have already remarked that he had, in effect, a special talent for touching and moving hearts. He felt it himself, and, far from claiming the glory, this was how he explained it one day to the rector of Bréal, his close friend, who could not be more surprised to find that he had only to listen to him to feel filled with love for God and sorrow for his sins. "My dear friend," he said, "I covered nearly two thousand leagues on pilgrimage to ask God for the grace to touch hearts, and he has answered my prayer." The soldiers who came assiduously to listen to him experienced this happy fact. He made of them such Christian heroes, and to maintain them in their good resolutions, he got them to commit themselves to a practice of devotion so much the more suited to attract them in that he presented it to them in a military guise: it was to enrol them in that confraternity of the Soldiers of St Michael, of which we have already spoken, so as to obtain through his intercession the grace of perseverance.

69 - M. Grignon in danger of being killed

One zealous action that he carried out during this mission might well have cost him his life. One evening as he was going from the church to the presbytery, he heard a great noise of people fighting in a house. He entered the house, to find that it was a man who was beating his wife. Just as he was going to remonstate with him, this man, finding

his axe near him, wielded it with all his might so as to cut off the head of the holy priest, who immediately fell on his knees to receive the blow that he thought inevitable. In fact it would have been had not the axe fallen, by some sort of miracle, from the hands of this wretch whose arms became numb, as it were. M. Dousseau, the rector of Pipriac and St Quenton, said: "I knew this unhappy man who, while he still lived, told me the story himself. He was a very wicked man and his house was a house of scandal. M. de Montfort, after several reprimands and charitable pieces of advice, foretold that he would die in poverty and wretchedness. I saw this prediction come true. This man, who commanded more than three hundred pounds in rent, lost all his goods, selling them piece by piece before he died. I gave him alms, and I have seen him during his latter years begging his bread from door to door. I gave him the last sacraments, and saw him die lying on a bit of straw in a borrowed house."

70 - Before leaving Saint-Lazare M. de Montfort appoints a guardian

After the mission in Bréal M. de Montfort spent some time in his dear hermitage of Saint-Lazare. It was there, in silence and prayer, that he was able to find new strength to work for the salvation of souls. This time seemed short enough to him, and in fact it was so, for he was sought out from all sides for missions and retreats.

The rector of Bréal wrote to ask him to go to his parish for the three days preceding Lent in the year 1708. Being unable to go because he was so busy, he contented himself with recommending his dear soldiers to him.

Here is his complete response, dated from Saint-Lazare on 17 February.

“My dear Father and friend,

I am very sorry that I cannot do what both you and I would desire. I am already booked for three different places on each of these three days and I must keep to my commitments. However, I will send Mathurin to you on Tuesday to say the Rosary in public and sing hymns and he will bring sixty little crosses of St. Michael for our soldiers. I trust you will have the kindness to distribute them after you have told them on Sunday to meet on Tuesday. This may help a great deal to restrain them from the excesses so frequent during these days. Please remember me to them on Sunday and tell them that I earnestly beg them to be faithful to their rule of life, especially next Monday. Tell them I shall come and see them on one of the Sundays of Lent.

Yours devotedly in Jesus and Mary,

L. Marie de Montfort, priest.”

In the month of April following, M. de Montfort preached a mission in Romillé, and afterwards returned to his retreat in Saint-Lazare. It was then that, while the Bishop of Saint-Malo was making a visitation of the three parishes in Montfort, the clergy of that town, still indisposed towards the holy missionary, made renewed efforts to destroy the good opinion that the bishop had formed of him. These gentlemen succeeded in part and he was forbidden to give any instruction except in the parish churches, not even in his chapel at Saint-Lazare. From that moment he began to think seriously of withdrawing from Montfort. However, before leaving this town he

gave a retreat to the women in the church of Saint-Jean, his own parish. At the end, having delivered an exhortation, he asked them which of them would offer herself to be the guardian of Our Lady of Wisdom at Saint-Lazare. Afterwards, having walked around the church, he said to one of them, whom he pointed out to the others: "It is you, my daughter, who will be the guardian of our good Mother at Saint-Lazare." This virtuous woman was called Guillemette Rouscel, of the Talensac parish. She belonged to the third order of St Francis, and might have been 45 years old. She insisted that M. Grignion did not know her, and that until then she had never spoken to him, but that the moment M. de Montfort spoke, she felt strongly inspired to obey him. So she installed herself immediately in a little room near the door of the chapel of Saint-Lazare, where she lived on alms brought to her, as she was almost always at prayer in this chapel, whose door she opened to all who came to honour the holy image, a task she performed constantly until she reached sixty years old.

71 - M. Grignion takes the road for Nantes

Meanwhile, M. Grignion, determined to leave the place of his birth, took the road for Nantes, having predicted and deplored the misfortunes that would come upon the town of Montfort-la-Canne, his native land, which at that time was very flourishing, whereas today in the town more than a third of the houses are in ruins or deserted. The noblest families having withdrawn to go to take up residence elsewhere, what remains and what the course of centuries can never efface, is the glory brought to the world by such a great man.

The diocese of Nantes, where, eight years earlier, he had made his first attempts, had pleasure in seeing him take up again there his apostolic functions.

72 - The mission in Saint-Similien

First of all he joined Father Joubert, a Jesuit, to give a mission in Saint-Similien, one of the biggest parishes in one of the suburbs of this town. He brought there, as elsewhere, that spirit of zeal that placed him above all human considerations. The force with which he declaimed, with no compromise, against the corruption of morals irritated some libertines, among whom there were some students of law. Their fury went so far as to dare to make an attempt on his life, and as he was going home one evening, they lay in wait for him on the way to get rid of him. As soon as he appeared they threw themselves upon him, but the people who were there at the time immediately armed themselves with stones and batons to chase away those villains. The sides were not equal and the students with the others ran the risk of being knocked senseless had not M. de Montfort taken upon himself their defence and placed himself in front of the heated crowd, whom he appeased with words full of gentleness and charity, saying: "My dear children, do them no harm, leave them in peace. They are more to be pitied than you and I." Meanwhile the furious students saw still more effectively to their safety by seeking their salvation in flight.

Another day, coming back from the community of St. Clément, he noticed in a big square called the Motte de St. Pierre, a huge crowd of people gathered. On approaching he heard the most execrable oaths and the most

frightful threats. Finally he saw that it was artisans who were picking a quarrel with some soldiers. From insults and threats, it had descended into blows.

The man of God pushed his way through the crowd, fell on his knees, said an *Ave Maria*, kissed the ground, and threw himself headlong into the midst of the combatants to separate them. The artisans had the advantage, but astonished at the intrepidity of the holy priest, and touched by his words, they quit the fight and left the field of battle to the soldiers. These, or at least their comrades, far from recognising such a great service, thought a moment later to take away his liberty and even his life.

Continuing on his way to go into the town he noticed one of those tables called the black and white game. Having asked what this meant, they told him that it was a game of chance which caused daily disorders such as he had just witnessed. On hearing this, his zeal was reignited; he turned over the table as the crowd stood around and broke it to pieces. The soldiers to whom this table belonged having been told of it, immediately went in pursuit of the author of this so-called disaster, caught him, and foaming with rage threw themselves upon him. Some took him by the hair, others ripped his cloak; several of them drew their swords and threatened to run him through if he did not immediately make good the damage he had just done and pay them the price of the gaming table. M. de Montfort, without any sign of emotion other than a zeal superior to all human fear, asked them what this table had cost. They replied that it had cost them fifty francs. "Ah! I would give willingly and with all my heart," he replied, "fifty thousand golden livres if I had them, and all the blood in my veins, to set fire to all the

games of chance similar to that which I have just broken.” The soldiers, more irritated and furious than ever, were going to massacre him when one of them said to the rest: “Don’t strike him, for it will only bring misfortune on us. Let us rather take him to the chateau. The King’s Lieutenant will give us justice.” They followed this advice and as a consequence set about leading him to the chateau. To get there, they had to cross the town. The man of God walked in front of them, his head uncovered, his rosary in his hand, reciting it aloud, with a smiling face and a heart filled with joy that he was considered worthy to suffer this disgrace for the sake of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile a large crowd followed him with loud shouts, and they had already reached the cathedral square when a respectable man, seeing him, took him out of the hands of the insolent soldiery.

For his own part, he was most annoyed at not having suffered prison, irons, greater insults and even death itself, for the sake of his divine Master, for that was his most ardent desire. That was how he explained it on that occasion to a priest who accompanied him for several years in his missions, and from whom I obtained the story of this event where it took place. “I am too great a sinner,” he told him, “to deserve such a great grace. I went to Rome with the express purpose of asking our Holy Father for permission to go to foreign countries to give missions among the barbarians and infidels, hoping to find there the opportunity to shed my blood for the glory of Jesus Christ, who shed all his for me. The Holy Father refused me this grace because I was not worthy of it, and he allowed me only to give missions in all Christian countries.”

We might find it difficult to get used to those grand gestures, spread throughout the life of the holy missionary, but they were a necessary part of the general plan of his conduct, which was to set against the false prudence of the age the holy folly of the cross, to do and say whatever was most apt to move the people and attract them, and it happened more than once that his words, which were fully in line with the holy enthusiasm of his actions, made the same impression on very enlightened people as they did on the people as a whole.

Monsieur l'Abbé Barin, who was at that time the Vicar General in Nantes, had a happy experience of this. This priest, of a superior and highly cultivated mind, wished to know for himself if the reputation of M. Grignon was well-founded. He took with him a Jesuit Father to go and listen to him. Both of them saw that clerics and several other persons whose tears must certainly count for something, could not stop themselves from shedding them. They felt at first very moved, but for fear of letting themselves be led into prejudice, they suspended these first movements and, in order to make a more tranquil judgement of the merit and force of the discourse, they were wary of sensitivity. Yet, the more they listened, the more moved they were. They thought they could at least prevent themselves from showing this exteriorly, but the unction was so strong that it showed itself externally. They could not stifle their sighs, they tried in vain to command their eyes, and found themselves constrained, like the others, to pay the holy and touching preacher the tribute of their tears.

Monsieur l'Abbé Barin, from that moment on, conceived such an exalted idea of the sanctity of M. de

Montfort that he protected him ever afterwards on all occasions. His veneration for him increased more after his death, and he wished to perpetuate it by composing an epitaph which he had engraved on a copper plaque, which can be seen today in the chapel where the man of God was buried, and to the bottom of which the author put his name, as a pledge, he said, of his tenderness.

This influence that he had on minds and hearts flowed from the ardent charity that burned within him for the salvation of souls. All souls were precious to him, for he saw in all of them the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. If he seemed to show any preference, it was for the poor, whom he regarded as the chosen portion of the heritage of the Lord. His care for them extended to temporal helps. He found the means, during this mission, to feed each day a very great number of them. It has even been claimed that when the provisions turned out to be insufficient to give each of them an equal portion, God supplied for it by filling up with little those who had not been supplied as abundantly as others.

Here is an incident that is well suited to confirm the truth of what I have just said, that we heard from the very person to whom it happened. Mademoiselle Guioneux, the superior of the hospital of St. Jean in Guérande, a woman of admirable candour and great sanctity, told us in the month of May 1766 that, having gone without any provisions to listen to M. de Montfort during the mission at St Similien, she found herself in the afternoon extremely exhausted and ready to fall down out of weakness due to a lack of food. She sat down on a stone outside the church, while waiting for the time of one of the exercises, without daring to tell anyone of her need, be-

cause she found herself surrounded by a great crowd. In her pressing need, she saw approaching her a woman dressed in a very modest fashion, her face majestic and very loveable, who presented her with a piece of bread saying: "Take and eat this bread, my daughter," and promptly disappeared from her sight. She assured us that she had never tasted bread so good.

73 - The mission in Valette

From Nantes, M. de Montfort went to give a mission in Valette, a parish five leagues from the episcopal town. There he found the same crowds of people and the same enthusiasm for listening to the holy missionary. There was only one single man who laughed at these holy exercises and preferred to stay at home rather than come to profit by them; but it was not long before he suffered the penalty of his indolence regarding his salvation and his impiety. One day when M. Grignon was preparing his hearers to receive the grace of absolution the next day, and as he exhorted them to have a true sorrow for their sins, having all of them kiss the crucifix that he had brought from Rome, a frightful storm blew up. The noise of the thunder and the flashes of lightning threw everyone into a state of consternation. This sentiment of fear being a help to the contrition to which he was exhorting them, everyone was deploring loudly the misfortune of having offended God. However it was not those sinners gathered in the church that God's justice chose to punish, but it was that hardened soul of whom we have just been speaking, who had stayed tranquilly at home. In fact a bolt of lightning fell on him and crushed him. A terrible chastisement by which God took revenge for the contempt of his word and the one who proclaimed it.

The recitation of the holy Rosary that M. de Montfort had established in this parish, for several years sustained the fruits of the mission. The inhabitants recited it with much fervour, but this practice having ended after six years, the holy man took an opportunity to testify to his sorrow about this. One day when he was returning to Nantes, coming back from the mission in Roussay, his shortest and easiest route was to go through Valette. But no matter how insistent were the inhabitants of Roussay who were accompanying him, he would in no way go there. Even when a woman from this parish, seeing the repugnance that the holy man displayed for passing through this town, fell on her knees to beg him, with tears in her eyes, not to mortify in this way the people of this place, preferring rather to take a longer way, he replied, urged on by holy indignation: “No, no, I will certainly not go through Valette: they have given up my Rosary.” He added several other words that emphasised how sensitive he was to the cessation of this holy exercise of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. And in fact he did not pass through this town.

The inhabitants having learnt of this attitude of M. de Montfort in their regard, were greatly saddened and took up again the pious practice of reciting the Rosary in public in the church, which they were still doing 15 years later when M. Mulot, M. de Montfort’s successor, was there to give a new mission in 1729.

74 - The mission of La Chevrolière

The mission at La Chevrolière, which immediately followed that at Roussay, had no less happy success, and

what contributed most to this was the heroic patience of the servant of God.

This poor parish of La Chevrolière was extremely neglected by its own pastor, who, not content with refusing it his vigilance and care, was not even willing that a mission be given there. It needed M. l'Abbé Barin and several other persons of influence to join together to get him to accept the services of M. de Montfort, whom the Vicar General would have liked to give as an apostle to all the parishes of the diocese. This one was small in terms of the number of inhabitants, but no matter how small a parish is, it is always a very difficult ground to clear when it has not been cultivated by the person to whom its care has been entrusted. The rector of La Chevrolière, who had only accepted the mission so as not to seem to be disobeying his superior, was not content with not seconding the efforts of the missionaries, but he took pains to put obstacles in their way in everything. Instead of exhorting his parishioners to come to the mission, he secretly turned them away from it, so that some never appeared at all, and others came along only very rarely. However the majority were assiduous in listening to the evangelical workers. Their assiduity and their perseverance was extremely displeasing to the rector, and he was so annoyed that one day, after the morning sermon, all the people being still in the church, he appeared in the middle of the high altar in surplice and stole, and having taken for his text those words of Jesus Christ in St Mark's Gospel, chapter 8: "*Misereor super turbam*, I have compassion on this people," he began as follows: "I find myself obliged, my dear parishioners, being your pastor, to warn you charitably that you are wasting your time coming to this mission. You will be taught here

mere bagatelles, and you would do much better to remain at home, working to gain your own living and that of your children. This is what I advise you with all my heart." All the rest of his discourse was in the same vein, and the most offensive terms for the missionaries were not spared.

During this time M. de Montfort, who had not descended from the pulpit, fell on his knees, with his hands joined and his eyes cast down. He did not get up until the rector had finished declaiming and hurling abuse. Then he bowed deeply to him and descended in silence. "Come," he said afterwards to a priest who was giving this mission with him, "let us say a *Te Deum*, my dear friend, to thank our good God for the charming cross he has been pleased to send us. It gives me such joy in it that I am unable to express it." Having said this, they sang together the act of thanksgiving before the Blessed Sacrament, and he concluded by saying: "This mission is well opposed; but it will be all the more fruitful." What he foresaw came about, and he brought about a great number of conversions there.

A few days after this deplorable scene, the determination of the rector, his curate and some other people, gave rise to another that caused an even greater scandal. At the end of the evening service, they attacked the holy man in the cemetery in front of all the people, heaping upon him the most atrocious insults, calling him an impostor, a robber, a charlatan and a disturber of the public peace, accusing him of giving missions only to enrich himself at the expense of the poor whom he was seducing by his spells, and finally uttering the most terrible threats, assuring him that they would persecute him wherever he

went; and that was the only true thing they said on that occasion.

For all that the people were scandalised by these monstrous excesses and these calumnies, they were all the more edified by the constancy, the calmness and the gentleness of the holy missionary, who contented himself with saying with a modest assurance, "I appeal, Messieurs, to the just Judge of the living and the dead concerning all you have imputed to me. For the rest, I pray the Lord that he will make you all saints. I ask your pardon for all the painful things that I have had the misfortune to cause you. Goodbye, Messieurs." He continued with the same peace and zeal the labours of the mission. They were so excessive that he fell ill, and his illness seemed at first to be very dangerous and even liable to lead to death. He suffered violent stomach pains and a continuous high fever. But despite this he did not interrupt at all the ordinary services. When he was seen going up into the pulpit trembling with fever and with a face drawn and suffering, one would have imagined that he would not be able to continue or have the strength to say a word. But by some kind of wonder, his zeal that was stronger than his illness, was like a remedy for the labours of the pulpit. His hearers were only the more moved and touched, and they shed copious tears at all his sermons. What was the most astonishing was that the sickness left him after a particular excess of fatigue that alone would have been capable of crushing the most robust people.

It was the matter of planting the cross at the end of the mission. The weather was very raw, and rain had flooded the roads. The place where the cross was to be

erected was a long way away. However, M. de Montfort proposed that it should be carried barefoot. To offer more effective persuasion, he matched his example to his words, and in a moment, more than two hundred people came forward barefoot to have the honour of carrying it with him. Though he was still suffering from fever, he bore a part of the burden right to the end. He performed the solemn blessing of the cross and preached with surprising force. Some of those who had carried the cross with him fell dangerously ill because of it, and he was perfectly cured.

The fruits of this mission had been too great not to arouse all the rage of hell, which had done everything to obstruct it. Not having been able to succeed, it tried to destroy the salutary effects by blackening the reputation of the one God had used to bring them about. It raised up a soul sold into iniquity to bring down the holy missionary in the minds of his ecclesiastical superiors and through this to take from him the confidence and esteem of the whole people. A false devotee, a true daughter of Belial, was bribed to bring the most atrocious accusations against him. She addressed herself to M. l'Abbé Barin who had obtained the mission. This choice showed first of all that the objection was less to the missionary than to the mission itself which had not been to the liking of everyone, but in the end they were willing to risk all, and M. de Montfort would have been left without recourse if they had succeeded in setting against him a man who honoured him with a special friendship and had placed all trust in him.

Fortunately this man was too enlightened, and the virtue of the holy priest was too well known to him. He

therefore dismissed with dishonour the impudent calumniator, who was no better received by the bishop, to whom she had gone to reel off the same fraudulent claims, but whom the Vicar General had warned of this detestable manoeuvre.

The Lord scarcely ever allows his faithful servants to suffer great contradictions without arranging at the same time some events that console and reanimate them. This was what M. de Montfort found at the end of the mission in La Chevrolière. One of the priests who had most opposed him begged his pardon, gave authentic testimony of his virtues, and begged him to take him as an associate to work in the missions. He even distinguished himself by an attitude of zeal for one of the devotions that M. de Montfort had most at heart, that of the holy Rosary. Having been charged during a mission that he was involved in with having it recited, one day he set about extolling its excellence in the presence of all the people who were willing to listen to the sermon, and at the same time, carried away by an extraordinary burst of zeal for this holy prayer, he made a vow aloud to recite it every day of his life. His subsequent behaviour corresponded with the first outbursts of his fervour; he produced great fruits in the exercise of his ministry, and persevered until death in fidelity to his obligations. It was a very glorious thing for M. de Montfort to know how to win over his persecutors, to the point of making them his disciples and co-operators in his apostolate.

75 - The mission in Vertou

From La Chevrolière, he was called to Vertou, a parish that is only two leagues distant from Nantes, and where

many rich and noble people of that town have houses. It was there that he judged it suitable to do at the end of the mission something similar to what he had done during the Calvary mission in Poitiers. But he went about it in a different way. Instead of piling up the bad books before setting fire to them, he began by lighting the pyre. He was the first to throw into it those books that had been put into his hands, after which each person came to burn those that he might possess. Everyone was very surprised when they saw coming forward a woman who, having no bad books at all to add to the fire, set it burning brightly by throwing onto it all the too fashionable clothes and worldly attire which she had until then idolised.

76 - The cure of Brother Pierre

We can judge the spiritual blessings that God poured out on this mission by a special favour that he accorded to the prayer of the one giving the mission and that was at the same time a recompense for the faith and perhaps also the obedience of a Brother whom he had in his service. "This poor Brother," says a priest who witnessed the event, "was so overcome with sickness that he could not turn himself over from one side to another; he could hardly speak. It was more than twelve days that he had been confined to bed. M. de Montfort and I went to see him one morning. I thought he was in such danger that I said to M. de Montfort that we were leaving it late to give him Extreme Unction. He said nothing to me in reply, but spoke in this way to the sick man:- 'Pierre, where is your pain?' - 'All over my body.' - 'Give me your hand.' - 'I cannot.' - 'Turn to face me.' - 'It is not possible for me.' - 'Do you have faith?' - 'Alas, dear Father, I would love to have more than I have.' - 'Are you willing to obey me?' -

‘With all my heart.’ He placed his hand on his head, saying: ‘I command you to get up in an hour from now, and come and serve us at table.’ We left him,” this priest added, “and went to the church for our normal employment. At half past eleven, as we were going to dinner, I found Brother Pierre on the steps leading up to the room where we took our meals. I asked him how he was, and he replied, smiling, that the Lord had cured him.”

77 - The mission in Saint-Fiacre

In the following December M. de Montfort began the mission in the parish of Saint-Fiacre, three leagues from Nantes. There he found ways to practice in his accustomed manner patience and charity. It was scarcely twelve days after the mission started, when three men who could no longer bear his speaking with such force against all disorders came to find him in the missionaries’ house. They were at table. As soon as he was told, he went to find out what was wanted of him. He greeted politely these three gentlemen who announced the purpose of their visit merely by insults interspersed with imprecations and execrable oaths, and followed by the most terrible threats. It is to be believed that they would have ended with blows if one of the missionaries had not come running at this noise. He found them making their way to the door, with their hats on, while the humble servant of God led them with his hat in his hand, asking their pardon a thousand times, and assuring them that he would pray to God for them all his life long.

The charity towards the poor that in M. de Montfort was no less evident than his patience, also found means of satisfaction. There came to the same house a poor man

who was completely crippled. He immediately welcomed him, made him stay for the whole of the mission in the Providence (that is what they called the place where the missionaries lodged, as is the case still today), and at the end of the mission, since the poor man told him he wanted to go to La Rochelle, he hired a horse and gave him a guide to bring him to his destination. For himself, he took the road to Nantes on foot, where he gave a retreat to the penitent women in the parish of Saint-Léonard, and accomplished this work of zeal with all the consolation that the return and perseverance of the sheep he has brought back to the sheepfold brings to the shepherd.

78 - The mission in Cambon

He had hardly finished this retreat when he went off to begin a new work in Cambon, one of the biggest parishes of the diocese of Nantes. There he attracted attention by a gesture of zeal which was very edifying for the house of God. The church was very large, but the vast extent of the building only made its lack of decency and its dirtiness more remarkable. There was hardly a floor-tile in place and only one that was not broken. The walls were so black that one could almost doubt that they had ever been whitewashed. This sight made such an impression on M. de Montfort that he thought it would not be sufficient to preach on such an important subject, but that it would be necessary to speak and act at the same time. The mission was scarcely half over when, after his morning sermon, he got all the women and girls to leave the church, and told the men to stay, telling them that he had something important to communicate with them. He was obeyed. The girls and the women went out, and as the men stayed

behind, he began to give them a concise but vehement discourse on the decoration of temples dedicated to the worship of the true God. Then, profiting by the good disposition he found them to be in, he asked them if they would not like, each according to his own resources, to contribute to the repair of their church. They all replied that they wanted it with all their heart. "Since that is the case," he told them, "eight of you stand by each tombstone, four by those that are less heavy, and two by each paving stone." This order was carried out in a moment. Then he said to them: "Take the stone by which you are standing and carry it out into the cemetery." Everyone immediately set to work, and within less than half an hour, the whole pavement of the church had been taken out. The following day after his sermon, he again made all the women go out. Then he exhorted the men not to fail to come the next day to pave the church, and to bring along for this purpose masons and stone-cutters, white-wash, sand and all the tools necessary. All was carried out to the letter, and with such order and enthusiasm that, in a day and a half, the work was all finished. Then he had the whole interior of the church rendered and white-washed. This last operation embarrassed him a little, because it could not be done completely and in a suitable manner without effacing the panel on which were painted the arms of M. de Coislin, the lord of that parish. But this consideration did not stop him, persuaded as he was that this lord, full of piety and religion, would not disapprove of his zeal for the beauty of God's house. His hopes were not mistaken. However the officers of the seigneurie thought they had an obligation to act against an undertaking that they regarded as contrary to the rights of a founding lord. In one sense it was, and they could not have

been held blameworthy if they had limited themselves to what concerned their office. But they were much lacking in what they owed to the character and deserts of the holy man, and accompanied their threats with most out-of-place words. He let them say what they wanted, and seemed in no way to repent of an action in which he had had no other motive than the glory of God. The church was repaired without any follow-up to the so-called crime.

Although it is not long ago that it began to be allowed to have mourning panels in churches, and although this practice was only established after coats of arms became hereditary in families, it cannot be denied that this is today one of the principal honorific rights due to lords who are patrons or founders, or to high judicial lords in the churches they have founded, or that belong to their seignury. But in exercising the full extent of their rights, lords who are somewhat religious ought to take great care not to offend against the piety of the faithful. Can we view without indignation in the house of God, coats of arms supported by most indecent figures? But what a nuisance for a parish-priest who could at little expense embellish his church simply by whitewashing it, to be unable to get his lord to have repainted at the same time a panel that, having almost faded away, presents no more than ugly placards on walls that are mildewed and completely filthy! What a scandal, greater again, if another, whose only concern is to preserve these marks of his nobility, leaves all the rest of the building in a state of dirtiness and disorder! However that may be, the right to paint one's coat of arms in our churches, does not authorise their placement even on the priestly vestments, showing us the priest dressed at one and the same time in the

cross of Jesus Christ and the bizarre symbols of the vanity of a great person, or their placement even on the tabernacles, or their being engraved on the sacred vessels. Is there no other way of perpetuating the memory of their generosity towards the church, or are they afraid that the sovereign giver of rewards will forget them? Please forgive these reflections of a missionary who has occasion everyday to sigh over such deplorable abuses.

The mission in Cambon was bound to produce very great fruits, for the enemy of salvation bore such a strange grudge against the one giving it. He got five villains to hatch a plot to take away his life. They were to lie in wait for him on the road leading from Cambon to Pontchâteau. But the detestable plan was discovered by a woman who warned a priest of it, who then spoke to M. de Montfort about it. The intrepid missionary at first did not take much notice of their warnings and treated their alarm as panicking terror. However, the good woman kept on saying: "I am sure of it; I heard it from their own mouths; they were near the door of my house and, not knowing I was there at that time, they were saying: 'We must be without fail tomorrow morning at four o'clock on the road he must take. Let us put fresh bullets in our pistols, so as not to miss him.'" She added other expressions they had used that we cannot report. The priest for his part told him that it would be rash to expose himself in these circumstances, and that prudence demanded at least that he take the safest course. M. de Montfort replied that they had only used such language like men who just wanted to strike fear. Nevertheless he took the course best suited to calm down his friend and the poor woman of Cambon, and stayed for a few days in Cambon. It was learnt later that these wretches had in fact lain in wait on

the road he should have taken, and that they waited there from five o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock in the evening. For himself, who perhaps owed the saving of his life to the prayers of more than two hundred poor people that he had fed during the mission, having finished it and prolonged his stay there for the reason we have just given, he left for Crossac which is no more than three leagues distant.

79 - The mission in Crossac

This parish had all the more need of help as it was at that time without a pastor. He worked there with all the ardour inspired in him by the actual state it was in, and the fruits corresponded with his labours. He extinguished enmities, sorted out lawsuits, caused restitutions to be made, and uprooted abuses. He managed above all in the end to get rid of one that was all the more difficult to destroy as it was general and ancient. The parishioners of any rank or condition whatsoever, nobles and commoners, poor and rich alike, had the custom from time immemorial of having themselves buried in the church. The parish-priests had made representations to them over this; the Bishop of Nantes in the course of his visitations had threatened to forbid them entry to their church; the Vicars General had made known to them on various occasions the inconveniences of such an abuse. But all this had been useless. The stubborn parishioners preferred to allow a lawsuit in civil justice to be brought against them rather than give in to charitable warnings. Perhaps they were convinced of finding protection in secular tribunals. In fact, the affair, taken to the parliament, was judged in their favour by a contradictory decree founded on their continuous possession.

M. de Montfort having been informed of this fact, preached with all his strength against a custom so little conformed to holy rules. He showed that in the primitive church, they only buried popes, bishops, emperors and kings in the cemeteries or at the most in the church porches; that churches should be destined only to enclose the body of Jesus Christ and those of the saints; that in former times, even the canonisation of saints was carried out by the transfer of their sacred remains from the cemeteries where they were buried into the churches where they would be exposed for public veneration; that the custom that he was speaking against was clearly an abuse, at least by its general use, and a kind of profanation by the state to which they could see it had reduced the holy place where they were gathered. God bestowed such blessings on his words that all his hearers shed bitter tears over the blindness that had been theirs until now. M. de Montfort profited by their good dispositions, and obliged them to promise him that henceforth they would not have themselves buried in their church, and after his sermon, the principal people among them gathered together with him in the sacristy, to which they summoned a notary who drew up an act of deliberation by which they renounced their right to make use of the decree that they had obtained, and all promised to choose the place of their burial in the cemetery. The act was signed, after which M. de Montfort set to work on the repairs to the church which was in an extremely sorrow state, the whole nave having the appearance more of a ploughed field than a place destined for divine service and ecclesiastical functions.

It seems that the man of God did not experience any contradiction during this mission. However, Providence

not wishing that he should remain without a cross, brought upon him one to which he seemed very sensitive. This was the sudden departure of a priest who had been working with him for a year, and the revolt of one of the Brothers who followed him in his missions. This latter, forgetting his obligations to him, revolted against him, speaking very harsh words, and going so far as to swear at him. But the holy man, who saw in all eventualities the accomplishment of God's will, profited by these events to put into practice the beautiful maxim that he had expressed so well in one of his hymns, where he included this couplet on the occasion we have been speaking about:

*A friend is unfaithful to me,
Blessed be God!
A servant rebels against me,
Blessed be God!
God does all, or else allows it,
That is why everything is satisfactory to me.*

Perhaps he never had more need of being deeply penetrated by these sentiments than in the event that we are going to recount concerning the mission in Pontchâteau, that followed this one.

80 - The mission and Calvary of Pontchâteau

Pontchâteau is a small town ten leagues from Nantes. Its inhabitants, who are polite and inclined to piety, saw with extreme satisfaction the man of God appearing in their parish. They knew about, and several of them had witnessed, the great benefits that his zeal had brought about

in Crossac. So he worked there for a month and surpassed the image that this good people had formed of him. It was during this mission that he believed the moment had come to put into execution the plan he had been nurturing for a long time of erecting a memorial to Jesus Christ crucified.

In a mission that he had given in the diocese of Saint-Brieuc with M. Leuduger, the missionaries had had made a big crucifix between seven and eight feet high. But as they could find no-one willing to pay the workman for it, M. Grignon, who was never lacking in resources, told him that if he were willing to give it to him for eighty francs, he could easily pay him. The deal being done, he made a collection from door to door, and by this means the crucifix remained his. Since that time, he had his plans, but not finding a suitable place he deferred their execution. At length he set them in motion in Pontchâteau, where, having already covered the whole of the surrounding area during his apostolic labours, he chose a large moor which was about a league and a half round, and which, being in the form of the surface of a mushroom, seemed to him suitable for a calvary. One day after his exhortation, he told the priests and the assembled people of his plan. He pointed out to them the great advantages that this calvary would produce. All of them recognised them and promised to work at it. As soon as his first free day came around, he took himself to this moor accompanied by a number of inhabitants, laid out the site and began by himself wielding the first stroke of the pick to create a ditch that would prevent the beasts approaching the cross that he wanted to plant there. That was apparently the limit of his ideas at that time. But God, who wished to bestow on him at the same time both

the merit of such a great undertaking and a very sensible disgrace, allowed the people of Pontchâteau and the neighbouring parishes to testify to such enthusiasm to accelerate this good work, that he raised his bid on his first plan, and gave it an extraordinary breadth and magnificence. He took a line and traced out a first ring four hundred feet around; the second ring had about fifty. The hill created from the soil taken out of the moat was a hundred and thirty-three feet wide. The width of the moat was fifteen feet. It would certainly need many people for such a work. But there were many who were there every day and especially on the rest days during the mission, when as many as four or five hundred would be gathered there. You would see some digging the soil, others carrying it in barrows to the ground that was to form the hill. Despite all their efforts and all these labours, the duration of the mission in Pontchâteau was not sufficient to complete the work.

81 - List of missions in the surrounding areas

Meanwhile M. de Montfort did not abandon his project during sixteen months that he spent working consecutively in the neighbourhood for the salvation of souls in the parishes of Landemon, Saint-Sauveur, La Boissière, La Remandière, Besné, Missillac, Herbignac, Camois, Assérac, Saint-Donatien and Bouguenais. The work at the Calvary in Pontchâteau continued all the time. M. de Montfort went there on the days that he had free in the course of his missions, and in the intervals between one and another. He gave his orders and made all arrangements to suit his project. His presence animated every-

one; they all worked with an incredible enthusiasm, small and great, rich and poor, men and women, men of standing, ladies, priests even, all of them seeing it as an exercise of religion to carry soil, and you would have said that this work, no matter how tiring, cost them little.

“I have seen,” says a cleric who witnessed it, “being dragged up from the bottom of the moat stones weighing up to two pipes⁹ of wine just with one or two ropes, and four men having great difficulty loading a stone on the barrow of a woman of 18 years, that she carried joyfully up the hill, and all this was done with such order that one would have said there were people giving the orders, singing hymns in such an agreeable manner that I seemed to be listening to a celestial harmony, among other things when standing at the top of the hill that was coming out of the ditches.”

M. Grignon was called away to go to give the mission in Saint-Donatien. This was in the great heat of the month of June of 1710. It was there that he had made fourteen banners of white satin six feet long and four feet wide to be used during his processions.

82 - The mission in Bouguenais

The mission he gave in Bouguenais, which followed, deserves to have a place in this account. This parish, three leagues from Nantes on the far side of the Loire, is one of the most important in the diocese, both for its revenue and the number of inhabitants. There was an astonishing number in the congregation throughout the mission; but

⁹ A pipe was an ancient measure of liquid equivalent to about 402 litres.

the closing procession drew more than ten thousand persons. It took place on a vast extent of meadows on the banks of the Loire, where M. de Montfort had had built a magnificent altar of repose for the placement of the Blessed Sacrament. They marched to it, two by two, singing hymns and canticles and reciting the Rosary. The 14 banners indicated the different divisions of the people who marched along. The cathedral music, the violins, fifes, drums and trumpets, produced a harmony that was ravishing. The procession having arrived at the altar of repose, M. de Montfort, though bathed in perspiration, gave a sermon and ended it with goodbyes that drew tears from his hearers. But the moment when spirits were uplifted was when the celebrant was about to give the blessing, and M. de Montfort stood up and gave the signal to all the instruments: "Come now," he cried, "let everything sound out and resound and ring out to the honour of the King of Heaven who is about to bless us." In fact the air rang immediately with all that this charming symphony could produce that was most touching. Those who sometimes witnessed these pious spectacles were not at all reluctant to give us the details of this.

83 - Description of the Calvary

Having finished this mission, the holy missionary returned to his calvary. The hill was finished. He had a wall built on the top, five feet high and eighty feet around. On this wall were placed wooden pillars on which there hung a Rosary that dominated all around and whose chained beads were the size of a bowl. The interior of this enclosure was the place destined for the erection of the three crosses. The cross of Our Lord was of prodigious size and was fifty feet high. It needed twelve pair of oxen to

drag it to the calvary. The holy man had prepared everything for the decoration of this place of devotion. All the statues were made: the Christ, Our Lady of Sorrows, St. John, Mary Magdalen, the good and the bad thief. They had been placed from the start of the work in a cave, where they could only be seen by the light of a lamp, which made the sight all the more moving. When everything was ready, M. de Montfort had them all taken out so that each could be placed in the spot destined for it. He had the three crosses placed on the summit. At the foot of the Saviour's cross were the figures of the Blessed Virgin, St John the Evangelist and St Mary Magdalen. In the space between the enclosure of eighty feet and that which immediately enclosed the calvary, there was constructed, to ascend it, a pathway in the form of a snail-shell. Other arrangements had been made to embellish this place with three chapels and three alleyways where the mysteries of the Rosary would be represented, each with their little garden. There had already been planted, around the wall which enclosed this four hundred foot enclosure, fir-trees and cypresses which formed a Rosary, with the decades indicated in such a way that you could recite the whole Rosary on these trees by making a tour of the plot. There was just one entrance, which was opposite the crucifix, on either side of which in the moat were two gardens, forty feet square, one called the Earthly Paradise, and the other the Garden of Olives.

This whole structure made a charming sight. The work was already the object of admiration all around the countryside. From the bottom of the ditches to the highest point of the cross, was about a hundred feet, so that the pious monument could be seen from seven to eight leagues around.

84 - The blessing of the Calvary cancelled

Everything having reached this stage, M. de Montfort thought that, to give greater brilliance to this great work and more honour to Jesus Christ, it would be necessary to have a solemn blessing of the Calvary. He had chosen for this ceremony the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 14th September. The eve of this feast had come, and everything was prepared. Four excellent preachers had been chosen to preach at the four corners of the mysterious hill. The processions had been planned out. All the small towns of the surrounding area would hardly suffice to lodge the pilgrims. Devotion penetrated all hearts and joy was universal, when about four o'clock in the evening M. de Montfort received from the Bishop of Nantes a prohibition of the blessing of the calvary. Rumours of this quickly spread and there was general consternation. The holy man who must have been most affected by this blow was the one who received it with the greatest calmness. However he made up his mind to leave that very evening for Nantes. He walked all night and arrived at six o'clock in the morning. He asked for the revocation of the prohibition, but found the prelate inexorable. So he departed immediately to go and rejoin the people who were awaiting him with sentiments that one can easily imagine, and who, torn between hope and fear, could only satisfy their devotion. This was in no way disturbed by the suppression of the holy ceremony for which they had been waiting. The presence and the enthusiasm of M. de Montfort re-awoke fervour in all hearts. The whole of this day was spent in exercises of the most tender and affectionate piety at the sight of the cross where there were gathered, with the people of the area, several

thousand pilgrims. Two of the designated preachers preached, and, apart from the blessing, all the rest was carried out as planned.

The following Sunday, the apostolic man opened the mission in St Molf, a parish four leagues from Pontchâteau. A disappointment even more humiliating than the one he had just suffered awaited him there. This was an interdict that was made know on the fourth day. M. Olivier, from whom M. de Montfort separated some time before, tells us that it was himself who was charged with carrying this sad news to him.

This was only the beginning of the way in which God wanted to try the constancy of his servant, in the face of a trial that made him truly a hero of the cross, and, in a very real sense, a victim of calvary. The calvary that he had just built at Pontchâteau had displeased one of those men risen from hell to prevent whatever might contribute to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This enemy of the cross had already tried, by letters to the lord of the duchy of La Bretèche, to get him to forbid the construction of this calvary in his fiefdom; but, not having succeeded in this, he wrote to M. the Maréchal de Château-Renault, who was then the commandant in Brittany, and pointed out to him: "That M. de Montfort and his missionaries got everyone to follow them; that, on the pretext of devotion, they had built a fortress surrounded by moats and underground workings; that enemies could take up position there in the event of an invasion..." The whole affair was carried with great haste to the court, and after some information sent by people who were either badly informed or badly intentioned, the absolute order for the demolition of the calvary was sent. The comman-

dant of the militia of the canton was charged with having this order executed, and to that end he called on a great number of workers from the neighbouring parishes, who must bring with them the necessary tools for the demolition. Care was taken to leave them in ignorance of the work they were to do, so that their surprise was extreme and their sadness without equal when they were told that they must demolish the calvary. Immediately the tools fell from their hands; but, forced to take them up again to go to work, they all fell on their knees before the cross, tears in their eyes and their hearts riven with sadness. Nevertheless they had to begin to work; but they no longer possessed the enthusiasm with which they had been moved to build this monument which now they were being made to destroy, and these same men who, a few months before, had seemed to have arms of iron to build the calvary, now had only arms of wool when it was a matter of knocking it down.

Two days had already gone by and nothing noticeable was happening, although there were nearly four or five hundred workers employed there each day. At last the officer thought up a means by which he might succeed. He ordered that the cross should be sawn through. Then all those good people, seeing that the Christ could not fail to be broken as it fell, offered to go up to bring it down, which was done. Nothing could have better represented the taking down from the cross as it features in pictures. While some performed the part of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, all the rest of the people were on their knees, expressing their sorrow by their tears and their sobbing. They brought down too the figures of the good and the bad thief. All the figures were deposited, first of all in a house in Pontchâteau, and a few years later

in a chapel in Nantes, from where they were eventually taken to be replaced on the calvary, as we shall see later. About half of the hill was demolished, and a part of the ditches having been filled in, the demolition was discontinued after three months.

86 - M. de Montfort on retreat at the Jesuits' house

M. de Montfort could not help being sensitive to an event that covered him with public confusion; but he accepted it with his ordinary gentleness and patience, and finding a cross on his calvary which he had not expected, his only thought was to let himself be fixed to it, just like his divine Master, happy to suffer and to be able to plant the cross in his heart, without allowing himself any murmuring or letting fall any complaint. A few days before the order to demolish the calvary had been sent, he had been given word of the blow that was contemplated. "God be ever blessed," he replied, "I did not seek my own glory in any way, but solely the glory of God. I hope to have the same reward for it as if I had succeeded." When he was notified of the order, he lost none of his ordinary peace and serenity, but withdrew to the house of the Jesuits in Nantes to make an eight-day retreat there and find his consolation in God. This is how Father de Préfontaine, who was at that time one of the directors of the retreat house, spoke about it: "M. de Montfort came in," he said, "and I received him without being able to see that he had suffered the least upset. He spoke with me in his ordinary way, and did not show me the slightest emotion in his words or in his face. As this order was known all over Nantes and in the neighbourhood, we were well aware of

it. I spoke of it with M. de Montfort. He confirmed the truth of what was being said, but without letting fall the least word of complaint or of discontent against those that he had reason to suspect had drawn down on him an order that was so positive and so unexpected. This peace and tranquillity, this equanimity of soul that never flagged for one moment during the eight days, surprised me. I admired him. What I had seen and what I had known of him up till now had made me look upon him as a great and good man, but this patience and submission to Providence in an affair as delicate as this, the serenity and even joy that showed in his face, despite a blow that was so heavy for him, made me regard him then as a saint, and inspired in me sentiments of respect and veneration for his virtue, that I have retained ever since and that I shall retain until death.”

The same witness is rendered in his memoirs by a priest who was at that time in Nantes, and who went to see him during his stay in the retreat house. “I did not fail,” he says, “to go and see him once a day. On my first visit to him, I set myself to do my utmost to console him, for I thought I would find him grief-stricken, but I was quite astonished when I saw him to be much more joyful and much happier than I. I said to him, laughing: ‘You are acting like a strong and generous man, provided there is nothing affected in it; well done!’ - ‘I am neither strong nor courageous,’ he replied, ‘but thanks be to God, I have neither pain nor grief. I am as happy as a man can be.’ - ‘You are quite at ease, then,’ I replied, ‘that they have destroyed your calvary?’ - ‘I am neither at ease nor annoyed,’ he said in reply. ‘The Lord allowed me to build it; today he allows it to be destroyed. May his holy Name be blessed! If the thing depended on me, it would last as

long as the world; but since it depends immediately on God, may his will be done, and not mine. A person who has any other will than his is very unhappy. I would rather, O my God, die a thousand deaths,' he cried, raising his hands and his eyes to heaven, 'than ever be opposed to your divine will.'"

What is even more indicative of the state of his heart is that, despite such deep humiliations, he was still willing, at the end of his retreat, to remain for several months in the town of Nantes, where he could not but appear in the most abject state, covered in the confusion that he had just endured, with the appearance merely of a priest judged unworthy to exercise the holy ministry and one that they thought they had to forbid in the very course of a mission.

He was not unaware of what they were saying about him; he knew perfectly well that, apart from a small number of good people, he was the object of mockery, mistrust and censure on the part of all the rest; but it was to taste at his leisure all the bitterness of his chalice that he was willing to prolong his stay.

87 - The Hospice in the Rue des Hauts-Pavés

A pious woman who knew well the advantage of being able to keep a man like M. de Montfort in this town, offered him a small hospice in the Rue des Hauts-Pavés. The holy man accepted it and made it his ordinary place of residence. He called it Providence, as it is still called today. Then he changed it into a chapel where he obtained permission to say Holy Mass. It is still said there

presently and, on Sundays and feast days, the Rosary is said there in public, which attracts a great crowd of people. It was there that, after four years, he put the statues from the Calvary, as we shall see below. It was also there that he drew up plans for an establishment for the incurable poor. Having noticed that there was no place in the town of Nantes set aside for them, and that there was an unwillingness to admit them to any of the hospitals, he rented a small house next to his Providence to house a number of those who were in no fit state to beg their own bread. He chose to direct this house two virtuous women who wanted very much to dedicate themselves to this work. He gave them a little rule and made them put on a grey habit, a little like that of the Daughters of Wisdom. They persevered until his death in their way of life, but being later deprived of the attention of their holy founder, they became disillusioned with, and abandoned their charitable functions and the way of life they had embraced. The establishment continued to exist. It was successively confided to the care of a number of people. It was transferred to different places, and today it shows promise that it will forever be a monument to the charity and zeal of the holy founder who brought it to birth.

At the same time as he was creating his establishment for the incurables, he was encouraging Mademoiselle Chappelain to work at what is called convalescence, predicting to her that this pious enterprise would come about, that she would suffer great difficulties, but that at length the establishment would continue to exist. The difficulties were overcome and the establishment continued to exist. There was no kind of good that the holy man did not himself imagine or contribute to its progress. There had recently been formed in France, in various

dioceses with the approval of the bishops, pious groupings that were called: *Associations of Friends of the Cross*. M. de Montfort who knew the fruits of salvation that they produced in souls, set himself to establish them with the agreement of the parish-priests of the parishes where he gave missions. He established one, among others, in Saint-Similien, to which he gave rules full of wisdom. He also wrote to all the associates a circular letter to strengthen them in their love of the cross.

88 - M. de Montfort becomes a member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic

In working for others, he did not forget himself. He was able to profit by the time he spent in Nantes to apply himself especially to the exercises of the interior life, and to taking care of his own perfection. He composed a number of spiritual canticles, and the zeal he showed for the devotion of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin, whose originator was Saint Dominic, made him want to belong to this great patriarch in a special way. He asked to be admitted to the Third Order and made his profession in the church of the religious of this Institute in Nantes. The formula he used is dated 10th November 1710.

It is in this way that men of solid and enlightened virtue willingly adopt for themselves the institutions that are authorised by the Church, and that they make it a duty for themselves to inspire in others by their example the respect and trust that these pious practices deserve. It is enough for them that they lead to God, and that they provide the faithful with new means of sanctification, for them to become recommendable from then on. Apart from the weaknesses and prejudices that cause these holy

associations to be often seen in very different lights, they have no other aim in view in embracing them than to serve our common Master. They love to see good wherever it is, and to applaud it wherever they find it.

89 - The flooding of the Loire

It was also during M. de Montfort's stay in Nantes at that time that he rendered to that town important services on the occasion of the famous flood that took place at the beginning of the year 1711. Those living close to the River Loire, being accustomed to its treachery, knew very well how little it could be trusted. This river, inconstant and as it were anxious in the bed that nature had provided for it, loves to get out of it and make its bed elsewhere to the great prejudice of those it thus goes to visit despite themselves. It is even more dangerous during those great floods by which it ravages the earth and sometimes buries whole villages in a common ruin.

It had just brought all these disasters on the countryside around Nantes at the time we are speaking about. It had even flooded several parts of the town and submerged one of its suburbs called Biesse. The poor inhabitants of this suburb, who had not taken precautions to move out in time, were only able to save themselves by going up into their attics. But this refuge, which ensured a little safety from being drowned, left them exposed to all the horrors of starvation. So it was necessary to take them something to eat. The provisions they may have had were either lost or already consumed. The biggest problem was not to gather food for them, but rather to take it to them at the risk of one's own life. No-one dared to undertake this, and these poor people would perhaps have

been lost without resources, if M. de Montfort had not been in Nantes. In effect it seems that Providence only allowed him to make his sojourn there at that time so that he might come to the aid of so many wretched people in such a frightful situation. He began by begging for bread and the other things necessary for their subsistence. All that he could supply of his own was to risk his life, and he did not hesitate to do so. He gathered the provisions he had collected, filled boats with them, and inspired and encouraged the boatmen, the most intrepid of whom at first refused to offer their services, but at length, persuaded by his exhortations but even more by his example, got into the boats. The whole town trembled for the pious fleet. However it finally reached, by force of oars and encouraged all the time by the presence of its holy commander, the houses in Biesse, which could only just be seen by their roofs and chimneys. The charitable missionary delivered, through the chimneys and through openings in the roofs, the necessary food to preserve the lives of men for whom he had sacrificed his own. We have learnt, while writing this in 1770, that the king, ever aware of generous actions, has just given a reward to two parish-priests, for a similar show of courage and charity. M. de Montfort had just recently received from the court and from a bishop, two very humiliating rebuffs, and he never sought any other recompense than that which we have every right to believe he now enjoys in heaven.

The whole town of Nantes witnessed this feat of charitable zeal. Yet M. de Montfort was persecuted in Nantes as elsewhere. The bishop, continually haunted by his enemies, persisted in his refusal to re-establish him in his ministry, even though he was persuaded of his merits and his great sanctity, to which he gave authentic testi-

mony three months later, by an attestation that he gave, the French translation from the original of which we are very happy to see.

90 - Testimony of the Bishop of Nantes in favour of M. de Montfort

“We, Gilles de Beauveau, by the grace of God and the favour of the Apostolic See Bishop of Nantes, Councillor of the King in all his councils, etc... certify that Messire Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, priest of the diocese of Saint-Malo, has exercised with our permission in several parishes of our diocese, the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, in a pious manner worthy of praise; that he is of good life and morals, of sound doctrine, and of a rare piety and modesty. In witness whereof we have given him this present testimony. Given in Nantes in our episcopal palace, this 10th of May 1713.”

Signed: Gilles, Bishop of Nantes,
and further down.....: Brulé, canon secretary.

Book Four

Never did any apostolic man have more opportunities than M. de Montfort of putting into practice what Jesus Christ prescribed for his disciples when he said: “If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next” (Matt 10:23).

91 - The mission in La Garnache

Having stayed for some time in Nantes without the essential service he had just rendered this town changing their minds in his regard, he was called to the diocese of Luçon to give a mission in La Garnache. It would be too much for us to dwell on accounts in which we can hardly follow him, as it would be for us to detail all he did to win souls for God, and to destroy the empire of sin. Catechism classes, conferences, sermons, family instructions, prayers and especially the holy Rosary, all tended to bring light to minds, to touch hearts and to appease divine justice. His charity for the poor showed him in a new light. Formerly his drawing them after him had been made out to be criminal; he took another way to help them. He persuaded all the burgers and the well-to-do people to each take one of them to their home and feed them during the whole time of the mission. He gave the first example and always had one of them at his table, choosing by preference the most filthy and disgusting ones. He would sit them at his right hand and serve them himself. He showered these unfortunate people with infi-

nately many other helps that he seemed to be able to draw forth even from the bosom of poverty.

One of the most effective means he used during this mission to ensure its success was the pious monument by which he displayed his tender devotion to the Mother of God. He created it at La Garnache in a most emphatic manner. At the entrance to the town there was an ancient chapel of Saint Leonard which was more or less abandoned. The holy priest undertook to rebuild it, decorate it and place in it a statue of the Blessed Virgin, under the title of Our Lady of Victory. He made his proposition known to the inhabitants, and all of them agreed to it. He got a skilled sculptor to come, gave him his plan for the altarpiece, the figure, the niche and the surroundings, and since the work could not be finished for the end of the mission, he arranged for the blessing to take place in the month of May 1712. We will see later that he did in fact come back to this town and himself performed this pious ceremony.

92 - The cancelled mission in Loulay

He had returned to Nantes when the parish-priest of Saint-Hilaire in Loulay, near Montaigu in the diocese of Luçon, having heard of the great fruits he had brought about at La Garnache, wanted to procure the same advantage for his parish and called him to give a mission there. Truth had spoken in his favour and the good work proposed should be the fruit of his great reputation. But calumny worked to destroy this reputation and caused the good work to fail. The liberty with which he had protested against the vices and abuses that reigned less in La Garnache than in the surrounding areas, had cut to the

quick certain people in the neighbourhood who did not like to be troubled in their disordered ways, and who united in discrediting a man whose zeal was insupportable to them. What increased their pique was the hope he gave in his last sermon to the good people of La Garnache that he would come back to see them. They resolved to oppose this, and therein lay the source of the various crosses that the holy man had to suffer in this diocese more than everywhere else.

First of all they tried to sow discord in the field where he had just been sowing the good seed, but the vigilance of the pastor rendered their efforts futile. M. Dirion sustained for more than thirty years after M. de Montfort's mission all the good he had done in his parish. Besides, the inhabitants of La Garnache, full of veneration for the holy missionary, did not suffer lightly the ridiculous tales told in his regard, so that his enemies were reduced to carrying elsewhere their indecent mockery, or rather their scandalous invective.

We know only too well in what manner is misrepresented in the world a zealous priest who, rising above the vain terrors of human respect, teaches people to combine the essential duties of Christianity with the exercise of a tender devotion that he practises himself. A priest that, it is believed, can be designated devout, is no longer what is known as a man of merit, and no matter how little his behaviour and his discourses go against the maxims of false wise men and especially the delicacy of the virtuous, there are no stories that they will not make up concerning him. A zealous action or a moralising gesture give rise to many comments. They will go so far as to lie in order to deliver a witty riposte. They will not blush

even to spread false rumours, saying: I have seen and heard him. The satire that is never more outraged than when dealing with holy things, then goes as far as impiety and blasphemy. The outward manifestations of religion are no longer anything but farce and trickery. It parodies in its own fashion the most moving discourses, and if the morals of a man who is devoted to the evangelical ministry are beyond its censure, it attacks his intentions, it attributes to him views that are most contrary to the holiness of his position, and would have people think, at the very least, that he is no more than a hypocrite or an imposter.

Such was the way of thinking and speaking concerning the holy missionary of La Garnache, throughout this section of the diocese bounded by Brittany on the one side and the sea on the other. The parish-priest of Saint-Hilaire in Loulay was one of those who let himself be most grossly misled. Full of esteem at first for M. Grignon, he had looked upon him as a man powerful in word and deed, who did good wherever he went. That was what determined him to ask him for a mission for the spring of 1711. He announced it himself in his announcements, indicated the day it was due to start, exhorted everyone to profit by it, and praised the mission and the missionary who was to give it.

This beginning, which M. de Montfort's enemies had not expected, annoyed them immensely. So they sought with all the means at their disposal to cause the good work to fail. One of them, with a character like the one St Paul reproached with the words: "*You utter fraud, you impostor, you son of the devil, you enemy of all uprightness, will you not stop twisting the straightforward ways*

of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10), gathered all that had been said and done against the holy man and had it brought to the ears of the pastor. This man, a good man in truth and filled with zeal, but more ready to let himself be turned aside than was fitting to his character and his position, all of a sudden changed the esteem and veneration that he had had for M. de Montfort, into the most extreme aversion to his person and his labours.

Meanwhile the evangelical worker, who did not know of such an extraordinary change, left Nantes to make his way to Saint-Hilaire, and thinking he would find M. le Curé in the same mind regarding himself as he had been a few days before, presented himself at his house with confidence. He was not left long in ignorance. Not only did the seduced pastor declare that he would certainly not be giving the mission, but he was not even willing to give him lodging; he chased him off shamefully without regard for his character, not even being sensitive to his pressing need, for he was very wet and very tired and night was approaching.

The holy priest received this humiliation, or rather this outrage, with a meekness and a modesty which you rarely find. He went out of the house as peacefully as he had entered it, and filled with happiness and that interior joy, the precious fruits that he always gathered at the birth of some new cross. All he was worried about, and the thing that affected him most sensibly, was the scandal that would be taken in relation to him, and the danger in which so many souls who had awaited him as an angel to plunge them into the pool would now remain. Being unable to find refuge with a man who had so solemnly invited him, he went to an inn in the village to ask for a

bed, but the landlord, whether from fear of displeasing his parish-priest, or because he realised that there was not much profit in lodging a poor priest on foot, also refused him. The man of God, anxious to share with Jesus Christ the opprobrium of Calvary, was charmed to be able to be associated also with his humiliations in Bethlehem. He even thought he was reduced to not finding a place to lie down, but a poor woman of the neighbourhood who saw him passing, having asked him where he was going so late, was told: "I am looking for someone who would be willing to take me in tonight for the love of God." Then she begged him to come into her house. "I am very poor," she added, "but I still have a little bread and some straw at your service." He accepted her offer, and while, according to the Gospel promise, she made herself worthy of the reward of a prophet in receiving a prophet, he for his part thought himself fortunate to have found an opportunity to imitate the abandonment and the poverty of his divine Master.

93 - Visit to some Nuns of Fontevrault

The next day he left for Montaigu, a small town of the Luçonnais where there was a community of religious of the order of Fontevrault. He went to visit them, less from motives of good fellowship than of religion. He celebrated the sacred mysteries in their church with that reverence and that touching devotion that attracted the veneration of all those who assisted at his Mass. The desire that the good religious had to hear preaching a man that seemed to them so respectable, and whom no doubt they knew by reputation, encouraged them to ask him to say a few words to them of God and of their state in life. He gave in to their request and the sermon he preached made

such an impression on all of them that it was to him afterwards that they spoke in private to open their internal lives to him and profit by his advice. That day was almost entirely spent in edifying this holy house, and the missionary rightly saw it as one of his apostolic functions to encourage the spouses of Jesus Christ to live in conformity with the holiness of their state in life, while they, on their side, profited enthusiastically from a visit that they regarded rather like the passing apparition of an angel of heaven sent to them.

On leaving this community M. de Montfort set out on his way towards Luçon. A humiliation awaited him on the way. He had with him Brother Mathurin. Before they arrived at a town called La Couture, he told him to go on a few steps and ask the parish-priest if he was willing to give him something to eat for the love of God. The parish-priest sent him a small piece of bread such as is given to the poor. M. de Montfort, seeing that there was not enough for his companion and himself, went himself to the presbytery to beg an alms of the parish-priest. He went into the room where he found him at table with a lot of others, and having greeted him, he fell on his knees, as he was wont to do, and said a *Hail Mary* and the prayer *Visita quaesumus*. The parish-priest, taking him for a madman, made him go into his kitchen and gave the order for him to be given something to eat with his servants. They served him coarse bread and bad wine. If this was not what he had expected, it was at least what he wanted and it was normal enough for him to be regaled in this way. Having eaten this meal, he went to thank the parish-priest for his charity. It would no doubt have been greater and more honest if, before deciding on the way to receive his guest, he had been willing for a few moments

to step aside from his other guests to converse with him. He would certainly have seen that he had more than good sense. He would have understood him by the reply that he made to a question that was quite impolite. Having asked him “why he did not ride a horse” (as though it was so rare to come across priests who travelled on foot, either by choice or from necessity), the poor missionary replied “that the Apostles certainly were not in the habit of going on horseback, and that that was all well and good for people in the world.” After that, he bade him farewell and continued on his way to Luçon by the same means of travel.

94 - M. de Montfort in Luçon

On his arrival he first of all went straight to the seminary to make a retreat there, for it was his custom to prepare, by means of this holy exercise, for his evangelical labours, not only so as to draw down the blessings of the Lord on what he was undertaking, but more to pray that he would show him in what place he wished him to proclaim the Gospel.

In fact, it happened many times that he began a journey without having a determined object. A feeling that served him as inspiration would make him decide afterwards, and he would go on his way without telling anyone where it would lead, having noticed that, when his plans were known, the demons seemed to take the initiative to set hearts and minds against him.

95 - In ecstasy while celebrating his Mass

It was during this retreat that it happened one day that he remained as though in ecstasy at the altar. A young cleric

who was serving his Mass, astonished to see him immediately after the Consecration stand stock still with his hands joined, without going on to the rest of the sacrifice, did not know to what to attribute this inaction and such a long wait. Having waited for a full quarter of an hour, and not daring to go up and get him to continue, he went and stood at the corner of the altar so that he might notice him and so come out of this sort of ravishment. But the pious celebrant saw only God, and seemed to be deprived of the use of all his senses, and remained as though dead. The young man watched him like this for another quarter of an hour, and being unable to hold out for so extraordinary a length of time, and not being, besides, sufficiently instructed to know that the holy priest would not have delayed the sacrifice for so long had he been free to continue, took the decision to leave. Everybody was in the refectory and would soon be saying grace. The superior, surprised to see him enter so late, took him aside and asked if M. de Montfort had just finished his Mass. Far from its having been said, he replied, it is well over half an hour since he came to the Consecration, and since then I do not know if he is dead or alive. Immediately a theology student was sent who reported after the Mass that he had in effect found M. de Montfort in the situation in which the first had left him, and that he had been obliged to pull hard on his chasuble to make him come out of his ecstasy, for that was how he expressed it. This event confirmed the whole seminary in the idea that they had formed of his holiness, and caused them to see the truth of what the Jesuit Fathers had said as soon as he came in: "A saint has come into this house."

He did not go out except to go to the house of the Capuchins who wanted to have him in their turn and so to

share with the seminary the pleasure of possessing him for a few days while he stayed in Luçon. A pious exchange of charity and deference, in which there could only be much to be gained for everyone concerned. It was at the Capuchins' house that he composed his beautiful hymn on human respect.

96 - The sermon at the cathedral

He did not fail to go and pay his respects to the Bishop, who graciously made him most welcome, and acting on the favourable testimony that one of the dignitaries gave of him that same day, engaged him to preach in the cathedral church the following day, which was the fifth Sunday after Easter. Having given a succinct explanation of the Gospel of the day, which speaks of prayer in general, he expanded on prayer to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, and spoke particularly on the devotion of the Holy Rosary. We know that whenever he spoke on this subject he surpassed himself. The bishop himself seemed very satisfied, and he did not seem to be disturbed by a certain point that the preacher might have insisted on less had he paid a little more attention, or had he known the person before whom he was speaking. As his subject gave him the opportunity to speak about what Saint Dominic had done to establish the Rosary, and of all the wonderful things he had brought about through this holy prayer, he did not fail to cite, for example, the conversion of more than a hundred thousand Albigensian heretics, and he dwelt long on the dreadful ravages that this heresy had caused in the Church. He noticed at this point that two canons were looking at one another with a smile, and casting a glance at the Bishop. This caused him a little pain, but he continued nevertheless with the

same assurance. When the sermon was over, he still felt a little anxious, fearing that in the ardour of his zeal he might have let fall something inappropriate or something that could be interpreted badly. He made known his anxiety to the church dignitary who was a friend of his, who replied that he had said nothing that was not very good and very true; “however,” he added, a moment later, “as the Bishop himself is from Albi, and since you have enemies here who could poison in his mind the stance you took on the Albigensians, let us go straight away to see him and let him see your slight embarrassment.” So, in fact, they went there. M. Grignon insisted on his good intentions, and his great veneration for his Lordship. The prelate was charmed by this candour, and reassured him, saying with a smile: “M. de Montfort, sometimes good shoots spring from a bad stock.”

97 - Arrival in La Rochelle

The following day, the eleventh of May 1711, he left for La Rochelle. As it was a little late when he arrived, and being tired from the journey that he had made on foot as was his custom, he looked for a hostelry where he could rest and take a little food. A respectable man on foot, even if he is a priest, is rarely well received in those sort of places where guests are never welcomed by reason of hospitality. M. de Montfort had experienced this before. Yet he was not asking to be taken in out of charity, but, since he did not promise much profit, the first inn he approached was unable to accommodate him. He thought he would suffer the same fate at the second; however, there they took him in. In the evening, while he was taking a very frugal meal, his companion said to him: “Father, you have no money; who will pay for us tomorrow?” - “Don’t

worry about it, my child," he replied, "Providence will see to it." The next day, he had the inn-keeper come up to his room to present his account. The statement of account was soon calculated, and his expenses amounted to just twelve or fourteen sols. "I have no money," said the saintly traveller; "but take my staff - it will serve as payment until I send you the amount owed." As the value of this object was more than was owed, the pledge was accepted, but some pious people got it back quite soon, and it was not long before the good missionary who had come to La Rochelle with all the poverty of an apostolic man was exercising in the diocese the functions of his ministry.

98 - First preaching engagements

He had no sooner presented himself to M. de Champflour, one of the holiest and wisest bishops of his day, than the prelate, who knew him by reputation, was happy to grant him faculties and employ a man rendered the more dear and estimable by the persecutions he had endured. He went straight away, as was his custom and his inclination, to the dwelling-place of the poor. But the church at the hospital, though very large, not being big enough to accommodate the enormous crowd of people who came to listen to him, he was obliged to preach in the great courtyard. His first labours were marked out by contradictions, a good omen for the fruits of grace and salvation that they would bring about. Worldly people protested against his morality that did not suit them at all. Those who did not dare to blame him, because of the sanctity of their state in life and their ministry, tried at least to discredit him, attacking him for his talents and his discretion. Despite all the contradictions that awaited him

and that seemed to follow him everywhere, he had the consolation of having called many souls onto the heavenly path, and these new trials only served to confirm him in the thought that God wanted to purify his motives and revive his zeal through this.

99 - Mission in L'Houmeau and three others in the town

The mission at the hospital was followed by the one in L'Houmeau, a parish about half a league from La Rochelle, which did not enjoy any less success, then he went back to the town where he gave three others, one for the men and boys, another for the women and girls, and the third for the soldiers. The eagerness with which people were anxious to hear him at the hospital made him want a larger church to carry out the exercises of the missions. The church of the Dominicans seemed to him most suitable. The choice he made of this in preference to all others, flattered them very much, and the special esteem they had for him was a powerful motive for them to work together, as far as they were able, for the success of his labours.

As it was known that he had a perfect grasp of the science of controversy and that he had produced on this subject a clear and very appropriate method for convincing and teaching heretics, a number of people distinguished as much by their merits as by their knowledge would have liked him, from time to time, to give some talks on this subject so as to try to bring in the Protestants, whose numbers were so great in this town. But the wise missionary thought he should pursue a different path.

Filled with the same zeal that drove Saint Dominic for the conversion of heretics in his day, he proposed to take him as his model. This holy apostle of the Languedoc, having undertaken to work to destroy the heresy of the Albigensians, had believed that first of all he had to confer with them on the points that separated them from the Catholic Church. But soon he realised that this way, which might be sufficient to convince them, was far from being enough to convert them, that the source of their obstinacy was in their hearts, and that to bring them to abjure their heresy, he had to begin by getting them to hate sin. So he thought to find a remedy for the corruption of their morals. It needed nothing less than a miracle of grace. And he thought he could obtain this through the intercession of the Mother of grace and mercy, and so he substituted the devotion of the Rosary in place of disputes, as he had received the order to do so from heaven, and by recourse to this holy prayer he converted more heretics in a single day than he had done thus far by several years' work.

100 - M. de Montfort prefers the Rosary to controversy

M. de Montfort, the apostle of the Rosary after the manner of Saint Dominic, made advantageous use of this heavenly devotion to convert sectarians who had borrowed part of their false beliefs from the Albigensian heresy. He left controversy to those whom the Bishop wished to make responsible for this part of the ministry. He took it upon himself to inspire the devotion of the Holy Rosary and to explain the mysteries whose memory is recalled at the beginning of each decade. The church

where he was preaching was consecrated by this pious practice, and perhaps this was one of the motives that moved him to choose it to conduct the mission. He spoke on this subject with so much enlightenment and grace that people never tired of listening to him. He did not forget the great maxims of morality and the most striking truths of holy religion. These were always the basis and the main point of all his discourses. He treated of them with a force and a vehemence that touched the most hardened of hearts. More than once he was interrupted by the groaning and sobbing of his hearers, and then, not being able to make himself heard, he was obliged to stop and say to them: "My children, do not cry; you are stopping me from speaking. Yet it is as necessary to instruct you and enlighten your minds as it is to touch your hearts." He succeeded equally in both these points, which was the unique aim that any evangelical orator should have. The whole town of La Rochelle was touched, moved, almost completely changed. The most hardened sinners came, at the end of the sermon, to throw themselves at the feet of the holy preacher. The other confessors, secular and religious priests, were scarcely enough to hear the general confessions. It is inconceivable how many restitutions and reconciliations he caused to be brought about. His reputation for sanctity alone, and the way in which he spoke of holiness, were like a continual sermon which was repeated over and over again in all families. The Protestants themselves were struck by it. What was told them of the preacher got them to come and listen to him. His words made deep impressions on them; several abjured their errors and came back sincerely to the bosom of the Church. The change in those who first

opened their eyes to the light of faith was like a signal that drew forth a great many others.

101 - The conversion of Madame de Mailly

But nothing caused such a great sensation nor upset the Huguenot sect so much as the striking conversion of Madame de Mailly. She was a well-to-do person with lots of spirit. She had been to England, from where she returned to France to take up residence in Paris. Some business had obliged her to stay a while in La Rochelle. It was during this time that she made the acquaintance of M. de Montfort. Charmed by the wonders told her concerning this zealous priest, she conceived a great desire to see him and converse with him. She spoke about this with a Catholic lady who spoke about her to the man of God. He made his way to the place agreed upon for the meeting. The woman was first of all struck by his air of sanctity, his restraint, and his modest simplicity. She enjoyed very much the unusual talent he had for conversing about the things of God in a manner that was both easy and persuasive, and that rendered virtue as lovable in his mouth as it was austere in his behaviour. He answered her questions with such precision and insights, and expressed Catholic truths in such a beautiful light that, from their first meeting, she found herself almost completely changed. Her own reflections having managed to convince her, she asked M. de Montfort to be good enough to act as her guide and to bring his work to a conclusion. This conversion, becoming public knowledge, caused the greatest of sensations and several Protestants who were already weakened hesitated no longer in making open profession of their submission to the Roman Church.

The pious controversialist, who relied so strongly on the devotion of the Rosary to convert heretics, did not fail to propose it to his fervent neophyte, as the best means to ensure her perseverance. She committed herself to it with great sentiments of piety and was so faithful in saying this holy prayer that, when she realised at night that she had omitted it, she would get up again instantly to recite it. She persevered in this religious practice right up to her death, which took place about 1749 in Paris, where, after her conversion, she still lived in the parish of Saint-Sulpice, which she never ceased to edify by a holy life, and where she left Mademoiselle her daughter a worthy heir of her own virtue. This virtuous woman could not speak of M. de Montfort without shedding tears and without proclaiming her sentiments of deep gratitude.

102 - In danger of his life

He worked to uproot all vices, but the one against which his zeal resounded most of all was the shameful vice of impurity. On more than one occasion, at the risk of his life, he dragged from their infamous lairs the unfortunate victims of sexual immorality. At that moment he saw no other danger than that of allowing souls to perish that themselves were causing so many others to perish. You need angels to carry out the orders of God in the dwellings of abomination. One Saint Francis Regis did it with success. M. de Montfort thought he could follow in his footsteps. And he did it with the same risks and the same heroic firmness. We hasten here to turn away our gaze, but we can scarcely restrain our tears on seeing the holy priest at the feet of a villain who has him by the hair with one hand while with the other he draws his sword with which he threatens to run him through. “Ah! very will-

ingly, Monsieur,” the servant of God says to him, “do I consent that you take my life, provided you promise to be converted, for I love the salvation of your soul a thousand times more than ten thousand lives like mine.” These words were like a thunderclap that stopped the assassin. He was so struck by them that he went off all in a tremble. All the rest had already dispersed. All that remained was one of those poor unfortunate women, who, as soon as M. de Montfort had entered, had fallen to her knees like him and had not got up again. “She was more than half dead just like myself,” says the one who accompanied the holy man without knowing where he was taking him. “M. de Montfort took her with us, and delivered her into the care of a very pious lady who instructed her so well that in a short time she became a perfect model of repentance, proclaiming right up to her death the inestimable favour she owed to the heroic zeal of the one whom she always looked upon as a guardian angel that God had sent her to draw her out of the abyss of sin and set her on the way of salvation.” It was in this way that he dealt with a great number of others whose innocence he saved or whose conversion he brought about.

103 - Calumny and justification

The mission that he had conducted at the hospital had made him enemies. The one he was then giving in the town centre earned him many more again. First of all they set out to blacken him in the minds of the people. To achieve this they had to use the most gross insults and speak the language of the market-place. Nothing was spared. This strange priest who was preaching in the Dominican church was nothing more than a womaniser, an adventurer, a buffoon, a hypocrite; he was even an

enchanter, a person possessed, a sorcerer, an antichrist. Fortunately the good people were too well taken in his favour for anyone to be able to delude them, and such a marked passion acted to the prejudice of those alone who acted and spoke out of it. So it became necessary to take a less odious path and to spread abroad other less insulting reproaches. Not being able to seduce the flock, they went to catch the ear of the shepherd. So as to prejudice the Bishop against the missionary, they represented him before him as a man of bizarre and extravagant zeal, an impetuous spirit, muddled and indiscrete, meddling in everything, who interfered in the secrets of families and disturbed their peace, who attacked everybody, not sparing even the most honest of people of whom he painted dreadful pictures. They said that his sermons were less Christian discourses than continual satire and cruel abuse from which no-one was spared, and that it was vital to curb the excesses of such unmitigated zeal, and that the best thing would be to withdraw his faculties.

The bishop, as full of wisdom as of piety, easily saw through the intentions of those who plied him with such complaints, and far from allowing himself to be prejudiced against a man whose merits he knew, he thought of the best means to bring down so many calumnious suggestions. So he acted as though he had in fact some regard for the reports just made to him. He called three canons of his cathedral, made them aware of all that had been said to him, and ordered them to watch closely the conduct of the missionary, to follow him in his sermons, to assist at his services, to verify the facts that occasioned complaints, and to make a faithful report to him of everything, within a certain time fixed by him. These three gentlemen, chosen from among the most enlightened and

most judicious in the chapter, carried out their task exactly and all three agreed on presenting the most favourable and most glorious testimony to M. de Montfort.

“We listened to him,” they said, “and found him to be an indefatigable labourer, who breathes only the glory of God. He combats vice with the zeal of an apostle. If he pursues sin zealously, he deals with the sinner with the greatest possible charity. He makes war on scandal with a holy liberty, unrestrained by any consideration. This alone is what has stirred up a number of scandalous sinners against him.”

Such was the report of those commissioned by the Bishop, who was charmed to see him so in line with the favourable idea he had always had of the servant of God. From that moment he proclaimed himself his protector and came strongly to his defence. He had him come to see him, publicly gave him marks of his esteem and benevolence, and exhorted him to combat vice with the same firmness that he had always shown.

The wise conduct of M. de Champflour stifled iniquity, and placed the man of God in a position to fulfil his functions without having to fear those calumnious denunciations against which ecclesiastical superiors cannot be too much on their guard. Happy those who can give their trust to men who love the truth, who are clever enough to unveil impostures, sufficiently enlightened to uncover the merits that are obscured or hidden away, truly worthy of having the ear of the bishop and being the trustees of his authority.

That nothing should be lacking in the justification of M. de Montfort, God willed that some of those who had

sought the most to humiliate him should be the first to heap the greatest praises on him. One of them, a man of high standing who had publicly expressed unfavourable views as to his behaviour and his sermons, one day felt, while hearing him preach, such lively and pressing remorse that the following day, at daybreak, he sought him out, offered him his apologies and declared that he had been unable to sleep all night, his conscience having reproached him so much regarding what he had said about him. The holy man received him with the respect due to his condition, spoke to him with kindness, succeeded in winning him for God, and subsequently found in him one of his most zealous defenders. Another person who had gone so far as to utter impious and scandalous mocking remarks on what the touching preacher was saying in the pulpit, a short time later fell dangerously ill. He got someone to beg him to come and see him, asked his pardon for all his excesses in front of all those of his family who were at home, even offered to retract by a public disavowal what he had falsely suggested about him, and, when the humble priest, far from agreeing to this, expressly forbade it, he did it in a still more persuasive way, asking him to be pleased to hear his confession. He made a general confession of the whole of his life to him and died a holy death in his arms.

104 - A murder plot

However, M. de Montfort's enemies were not content with attacking him with their tongues; some of them prepared something more dangerous for him. Three villains decided to make an attempt on his life, and "to rid the earth," as they said, "of a man who was so contrary and such a burden to the public." One of them, having learnt

that he was to go one evening to visit M. Adam, his sculptor, ran off immediately to inform the other two. "His route," he said, "will take him by this little street that is very dark and little frequented. That is where we must lie in wait and rid ourselves of this enemy of the human race." The servant of God, who knew nothing of the plot being hatched against him, went out calmly with his companion to go to visit M. Adam. When they reached the street where the assassins were waiting for him, he was going to take it when, all of a sudden, he felt a trembling throughout his whole body. He took this as an interior warning not to go any further, and he turned back. "We are going the wrong way, Monsieur," said his companion. But he spoke in vain, because they had to go back and walk as far as they had already done to avoid this street. The conspirators becoming annoyed at not seeing their victim arrive, one of them left to approach the entrance to the street. He was so enraged that he was sufficiently ill-advised to ask someone that he found at the junction if he had not seen M. de Montfort pass by a short while ago. They answered that he had just come along, had gone as far as the entrance to the street from which the man was coming, but had immediately retraced his steps and taken another route. This furious fellow, swearing like a demon, then said out loud: "This man is a sorcerer, a soothsayer, for only the devil himself could have told him that we were here to lie in wait for him. He is lucky, for if he had come this way, he would now be at the mercy of all the devils." It would be quite difficult to say who on this occasion ran the greater risk: M. de Montfort for whom a few steps more would have placed him at the mercy of these monsters; or this wretch whose

words that he had just let fall would have led him to the gallows, if they had been followed up.

The servant of God went on his way under the wings of Providence. Some distance from the place where they had turned aside, his companion asked him why he had not wanted to go down that street, since it was the shortest way. "I do not know," he replied, "but when we were right there, my heart felt as cold as ice, and I could not go on."

This mystery, which was hidden from M. de Montfort and his companion at that time, was, some time later, made clear to the latter in a very clear way. As he was returning from Nantes to La Rochelle, he met on the road seven horsemen who were following the messenger. "There was no dinner nor going to bed but they would put M. de Montfort on the carpet and say of him things that would be fitting only for the greatest villains, and if he had committed the most unheard of crimes, they could not have treated him more unworthily. The last evening which was at Poiré, seven leagues from La Rochelle," (it is still the same traveller who is speaking), "they did not go to bed at all because they had to go aboard at midnight to go over to Marans. However these gentlemen withdrew to an upstairs chamber, and I withdrew to a lower chamber immediately beneath them, where I easily heard all they were saying. Again they took M. de Montfort as the topic of their conversation. There were no insults they did not spew forth against. 'If I should meet him in a place apart,' said one of them, 'I would pass my sword right through his body.' On this point another told how he and two of his friends had sought a hundred times to meet him face to face alone... 'We learnt one day,' he

added, ‘that he was to go one Sunday evening to visit Adam, a sculptor, and that he would have to go down this little Rue de la Rochelle. We were there from seven o’clock in the evening, but he did not come at all.’ One of the company asked him what he would have done, had he come. ‘We would have broken his head,’ he replied.”

Such a formal admission lets us see well that the sudden chill felt by the servant of God, in the unknown danger that he found himself in, was a miracle.

105 - An attempt at poisoning

But if the war that he was waging against sexual immorality might have caused his death by murderous arms, his zeal in combating heresy exposed him even more to the danger of perishing from the effects of poison. The Calvinists of La Rochelle, enraged that every day he was lifting spoils from their sect, conspired among themselves to get rid of him by one of those hidden ways that the evil spirit of error, that clever and venomous serpent, alone might inspire in them. They poisoned a broth that was given him one day after he had been preaching. He had no sooner taken it than the effects became evident. He had recourse to remedies that saved his life for the time being, but they were not effective enough to completely prevent the aftermath of the sickness. He suffered from this for the rest of his days. It was he himself who told this story to M. Blain when he went to see him in Rouen in 1714. His friend scarcely recognised him.

“I found that he had changed very much: he looked exhausted ... and I was convinced that his death was not far off, although he was only 40 or 41 at the time. ... The reason which he gave me for this great loss of strength

was that ... the Huguenots had wanted to poison him, and that since that time he always felt exhausted and failing.”

106 - The Mission to the soldiers

This tragic event, however, did not prevent him undertaking a new mission for the soldiers of the barracks in La Rochelle, and you will perhaps never see what a preacher animated by the spirit of Jesus Christ can do better than on this occasion. Throughout almost all his sermons, you could hear these poor soldiers uttering loud cries. You could see them at the end of each exhortation prostrating themselves on the ground calling for mercy. When they came to throw themselves at his feet to make their confession, they sprinkled his surplice with their tears. One day he was even obliged to give his own handkerchief to one of them to wipe his own. Throughout the town the only topic of conversation was the conversions that had been brought about in this mission. M. de Chamilly, the governor of La Rochelle, conceived such esteem for the servant of God, that he wanted him, for the rest of the mission, to eat at no other table than his own. M. de Montfort excused himself politely by reason of all he had to do, and dined there only rarely. And he made his own body pay very dearly, with cruel austerities, for the meals he had taken at such a well-served table.

It was a very touching spectacle to see him in the streets of La Rochelle always surrounded by officers and soldiers, and, when they came to the house to seek his advice, he would offer them only these few words: “Be content with your pay. Do no-one any wrong. Remain faithful to God and the King. Obey your commanders. In a word, be Christian soldiers.” As a number of them

could not read, he composed a special and beautiful hymn that they could easily learn by heart as they heard their comrades singing it, and that would serve them for a rule of life to preserve the fruits of the mission.

A procession of soldiers could not but be a most edifying spectacle; the one he had them walk in was one that brought tears to the eyes of all the spectators, and these men, whom a drum-beat would have turned into lions for the enemy, walked to the harmony of sacred hymns, like very anchorites. At their head went an officer, barefoot, carrying a flag or banner of the cross. All the soldiers followed him, barefoot also, holding a crucifix in one hand and a Rosary in the other. Cantors, spaced out all along, intoned these words: *Holy Virgin, obtain for us...* and the choir responded: *the holy love of God*. And this response was made in such a touching way, each having his eyes lowered towards his crucifix, that it struck the fire of divine charity in the hearts of all who witnessed this religious ceremony, truly worthy of the admiration of angels and men.

107 - The crosses in the air

The end of all these missions was marked by an event that seemed to proclaim that heaven itself guaranteed their success. When the cross that was to be erected at the Porte Dauphine had been carried there, M. de Montfort, as was his custom, delivered a discourse on this edifying ceremony. He had scarcely begun than an astonishing noise was heard in the midst of the audience, made up not only of the inhabitants of the town, but also those of the neighbouring parishes, who had gathered for this religious spectacle. There was heard a multitude of voices

crying out: “A miracle! A miracle! We can see crosses in the air.” It is scarcely possible that such a great number of people could be suffering from illusions, believing they were seeing what they did not in fact see. If the phenomenon was not visible to everyone, it was perhaps because God is sometimes happy to mix a little obscurity with the miracles that he performs according to the needs of those for whose benefit he performs them and the views of grace and mercy that he proposes for them. The luminous cross that appeared to the eyes of the Emperor Constantine and his army, was not only to foretell to him the victory that he was going to win over Maxentius, after substituting the standard of the cross for the banners of the empire, but also to bring him to embrace the religion of Jesus Christ. We might refer to a similar cause the apparition of air-borne crosses that we have just been speaking about. No doubt God wished, on the one hand, to complete the victory that the missions had wrought over the tyrant of souls and the enemy of salvation, and, on the other hand, to authorise the worship of the cross in the presence of a large number of Protestants who, it would appear, were mingling with the Catholic population.

108 - A journey to the Ile d’Yeu and the mission there

M. de Montfort, having spread the fruits of salvation in La Rochelle and the neighbouring areas, was called to the diocese of Luçon. The bishop already knew him, but, learning from the public reports of the numerous benefits produced by his missions, he wrote to him that he had made himself a promise to use his zeal for the sanctifica-

tion of the people entrusted to his care, but that there was one special section of his diocese that, deprived of help by the position that the sea placed it in, had greater need than all others. This was the Ile d'Yeu, situated at seven leagues from the land. We cannot tell how great was the joy of the holy missionary on this occasion, and with what enthusiasm he prepared to enter upon this new venture. His only thought was to hasten his journey and he made up his mind to go by sea with the three other missionaries. This news was soon carried to La Rochelle. The Calvinists, who could neither forget nor come to terms with the conquests he had had over them, saw a favourable occasion to finally rid themselves of a man whose loss they had plotted for a long time.

France was then at war with England, and the privateers of Guernsey were infesting the coasts of Brittany, the Aunis and Poitou. Their friends the Protestants made a plan with one of them to seize M. de Montfort during the crossing and free them of him. Their game was well planned. Those reformers, ever as much the enemies of the state as of the Church, had taken all measures to deliver priests who were subjects of the king to the English. They had trusted only discrete persons of their sect, but apparently they had not passed on the information under the seal of the confessional, and their secret was discovered. M. Clémenson, with whom the missionaries were then staying, warned them that he knew for certain that they had been sold into the hands of the Guernsey men. They told M. de Montfort. He was not in the habit of being afraid, and took no notice of this warning. However, the others did not think in the same way, and they persisted strongly in saying that they should not expose themselves to the danger. He, remaining firm, tried to

reassure them, rather laughed at their fear, and then adopting a more serious tone, told them that there was no semblance of truth in this; that the enemies of God and of the salvation of souls had invented this deceit to frighten them and prevent them from working for the conversion of those poor islanders. He added: "If the martyrs had been as cowardly as us, they would not have the crown of glory in which they rejoice. For myself, far from being stopped by all these vain terrors, I will always go wherever the glory of God and the salvation of souls calls." One of the missionaries who knew that sometimes it was the right moment to oppose the ardour of his zeal, replied that he did not have the courage of the martyrs, nor his own courage; but that he was grateful for having been timid on one occasion when he thought he should perish with him. "You can," he added, "go aboard whenever you like; for myself, I will not follow you, and I am going to take another route to join you later."

The man of God, though firm in his sentiments, yet knew how to sacrifice them to the duties of a holy friendship and a charitable readiness to oblige; and then his humility came in a marvellous way to the aid of the dispositions of his heart. So he gave in to all they were urging, and decided to take another route to go to the Ile d'Yeu. Their departure was delayed for several days. "And this was," says the same missionary who reports this fact, "a great blessing for us, for we learnt soon after that the ship that should have carried us, having left at two o'clock in the morning, had been captured that same day by a privateer from Guernsey, who was very surprised not to find us, for he first asked the captain of the ship of which he had become the master, where the priests were who were due to go over to the Ile d'Yeu.

When he answered that they had stayed in La Rochelle, the privateer replied: ‘Too bad for you, then! I would have been content to capture them, and would have released you with your crew; but, since you do not have them, you will lose your ship and your cargo.’” M. de Montfort was advised to take the land route and to go to Les Sables, where they would find a quicker and safer passage. He took this advice and set off on the road.

On arrival in Les Sables, he enquired in the town whether he might hope to cross over to the Ile d’Yeu, but he could find no sailor who was willing to try the crossing. The neighbouring coasts were too well guarded by the enemies over the past two weeks. He was told to go on to Saint-Gilles, a small sea-port that was only three leagues away, and that there he might find a more favourable answer, the crossing being shorter and less risky. But there, just as in Les Sables, the sailors refused to take him. This made him extremely dejected. However, ever superior to all obstacles, he made a last attempt, went to look for a ship’s captain, begged him with such insistence, and assured him with such firmness that no accident would befall them, and that the Blessed Virgin would keep them safe, that he agreed to put to sea. But they had gone scarcely three leagues when they spied two Guernsey vessels advancing on them, all sails set. Adding to their misfortune, the wind was against them and the ship could only make headway by the use of oars. The sailors all shouted out: “We are taken!” and these poor people raised lamentable cries. M. de Montfort reassured them, saying: “Have no fear; do you not remember that I promised you that our good Mother would prevent our being captured?” And saying this he took out a picture of the Blessed Virgin, placed it on the deck of the

ship, and began to sing hymns in her honour and invited all the rest to do the same.

Fear is hardly a disposition favourable to singing, even when the song is a prayer. No-one responded. So he said to them: "Well, my friends, let us then recite the Rosary." They recited it with him, and you may suppose that their prayer was fervent. Having finished the Rosary, he said to them: "My dear friends, once again have no fear; our good Mother, the Blessed Virgin, has heard us. We are out of danger." Yet the privateers' ships were following them so closely that they were within range of the canon, which caused one of the sailors to say: "What? How come we are out of danger? The enemy is upon us, and close to sinking our ship; we should prepare ourselves rather for the voyage to England." "Have faith, my children," replied the holy man, "the wind is about to change." He had hardly finished speaking when a fog appeared that hid their ship from the pirates. These, with no more hope of seizing their prey, turned back, and calm returned to the mission boat. Soon they spied the land of the Ile d'Yeu. And it was then that they sang the *Magnificat* with a good heart, in thanksgiving for such singular protection from her whom the Church calls the Star of the Sea.

M. de Montfort was welcomed to the island with demonstrations of joy that it would be difficult to describe. The clergy and the people came to meet him right down to the shore. The parish-priest, who was himself a saint, offered him testimonies of the deepest gratitude. There was only one man who did not appear to be taking part in the public joy; this was the governor, who in fact viewed the arrival of the pious missionary on the island

with extreme regret, and who went against him throughout the course of the mission.

They were lodged, he and his confreres, in a house near the church that belonged to the church council. As was their custom, they called it "Providence", and it still bears that name today.

The mission had hardly begun when the fruits of conversion began to appear through sensible signs. The ground was well prepared. The inhabitants of the island knew of all the good that the mission in La Garnache had produced; they had before their eyes the sort of miracle by which the apostolic man had just been snatched from pirates, and they could not fail to be converted at the preaching of a prophet who, far from wanting to shy away from the orders of his Lord, had exposed himself with such courage to the perils of the sea in order to come and preach repentance to them. Everything would have succeeded to the satisfaction of the servant of God had the governor only been willing to follow the example of the crowd. His obstinacy in not profiting like the rest from his labours and his zeal was the sole cross that he suffered in this place, even for him who was so accustomed to see them arise wherever he went. It is true that subsequently he found him more tractable, and that he was seen even to show some marks of benevolence towards the Gospel workers. That was all he did for them, while for himself he profited nothing.

M. de Montfort did not forget the poor, who were always the dearest object of his care. As well as one or two that he always invited to his table, each day he gathered them all together to give them what they needed for subsistence. This was the plan he adopted for success in

this, and that he followed exactly. He gathered the women and girls of the parish and gave them a little discourse on the merit of good works and especially almsgiving. He told them that his custom was that the poor of the area should be fed during the mission, so that they could all be gathered together and put in a position to be instructed in the duties of Christianity, of which most of them were ignorant. He exhorted them to lend a hand in this good work. Then he looked for a house in the vicinity where a daily pot-full could be cooked for all the poor. Everyone was invited to contribute, each according to his or her means. The meal was prepared by those pious persons who were put in charge of it. The man of mercy himself was to be found there everyday to give the Blessing, and he would himself give a reading, say grace, and, before letting the poor go, he would speak to them of the obligation to combine holiness with poverty, otherwise they would be unhappy in both this world and the next. He would send them to the catechism, or else he would himself do it with them so that they might be disposed to benefit by the mission.

When the mission was over, they separated, as much edified by the tender charity of the holy priest as they were convinced of the great truths that they had heard, and blessing God for having deprived them of earthly riches to enable them to acquire more surely heavenly riches. We would only be repeating ourselves if we were to go into detail on all the good produced by this mission. In any case, it is not at all the success of M. de Montfort that we want to bring to the attention of Gospel labourers; it might seem to them too much beyond their own efforts. We are principally concerned with the means he used to

achieve success, so that each of us can take them for a model.

The thing that he believed to be the most suited to bringing about solid and lasting conversions, was the establishment of the Rosary devotion. So he did not fail to establish it on the Ile d'Yeu, where, since that time, it has always continued to be said in three chapels dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, one called Our Lady of Good News in La Meule, the second in the field of Saint Hilaire, and the third, under the title of Our Lady of Good Help, at the port.

On leaving the Ile d'Yeu, M. de Montfort took the road for Nantes, and as his route took him by La Garnache, he had the pleasure of seeing once again the good people of that town, and the worthy and holy Pastor who was their leader, and whom he kept always in his heart. He arranged with him a retreat that he gave in fact after his journey to Nantes in the chapel of Our Lady of Victories, which he blessed, and in which he placed the image of the Blessed Virgin over the altar in the niche that he had had made with exquisite taste and workmanship. Since that time, there has been a constant and extraordinary stream of pilgrims to this chapel, and the offerings made there are so generous that the parish has been obliged to appoint a treasurer to collect them and keep an account of them. The devotion of the faithful is recompensed by an infinite number of cures, and when I went there in 1763, a good old man from the time of M. de Montfort assured me that he had seen more than sixty people who had left their crutches there, finding themselves suddenly cured and in a position to leave. The

tears he shed in telling me this gave me sufficient proof of the truth and sincerity of his words.

109 - The mission in Salertaine

The parish-priest of Salertaine, who had already arranged with the man of God for a mission for his parish, having known him in La Garnache, came to look for him. The plan for this good work was no sooner drawn up than a thousand conspiracies were set in motion to prevent its execution. All the old stories that had been churned out were resurrected. People of all sorts and conditions were incited against the missionaries. The most important and distinguished people in the parish having been influenced, they drew the whole people with them, and the pious pastor had to harden himself against his flock so as to obtain for them one of the greatest advantages that it might expect from his zeal. However, he was not at all discouraged. Having informed M. de Montfort and the parish-priest of La Garnache of all the obstacles raised against his plan, he agreed with them on an expedient that was equally likely to make an impression on the minds of the people and to cover the enemies of God and their works with confusion. So they decided that on Ascension Day, immediately after Vespers, the two parish-priests would leave in procession, the parish-priest of La Garnache going, accompanied by M. de Montfort, towards Salertaine, while the parish-priest of Salertaine would come to meet them half-way along the road. It was there that, the two processions having joined together, they would move on together to the place where the mission was to begin. The first procession was very numerous, comprising the clergy of the town and a thousand or eleven hundred people. The second brought out only a

small number of parishioners following the parish-priest. However, it was to announce to these people days of salvation and mercy, that this religious arrangement had been made. In fact it had something very touching and edifying about it; but, as the pious procession was advancing as though in triumph towards the church, the most notable people of the place, the bourgeois and all those who wished to oppose the mission were in their houses, several of them in the bars or in public gaming places, from where they only issued forth in order to shout and boo, so insulting not only the missionaries, but religion itself, in such a way as to draw upon themselves the full censure of the laws passed against the impious and sacrileges, if the Gospel ministers, who had come to save them and not to condemn them, had not dealt with them with a gentleness and a charity worthy of those sent by Jesus Christ.

M. de Montfort especially, who was personally targeted, showed all the constancy and firmness of a saint. Having learnt that, on top of outrages, they had had the doors of the church closed since the parish-priest had left with his procession, he stopped at a stone cross which stood in the middle of the town, and there gave an exhortation, and after thanking the parish-priest of La Garnache and his clergy, bade farewell to the parishioners who were breaking into tears, and said to them among other things: "My little children, I carry you all in my heart. You would like to follow me everywhere, but what could you expect from a poor priest who has neither hearth nor home, and who waits on Providence each day for his needs?" However, a number of the inhabitants of Salertaine who were standing at their windows or on the walls, were listening to him only to laugh at what he said.

There were even some who threw stones at him. The scandal was at its height. But God had marked this moment down to dissipate the storm. In fact, the man of God had hardly finished speaking when they came to tell the parish-priest that the doors of the church had just been opened, though they could not say by whom or how. The rebellious ones, when they heard this, thought it was the sacristan who had opened them. They went to him and maltreated him with fists and blows. The poor unfortunate told them that they were wrong to take it out on him, since they themselves had forced him to take the keys to the one in charge of the fabric, and that he had taken them there in their presence. It does not appear that they took the trouble to explain this fact. They got away with the shame of seeing their manoeuvring discovered and overturned.

Near the spot where M. de Montfort had just been speaking to the people, there was a house belonging to a rich bourgeois, who had a numerous family. This man was one of those most opposed to the mission, and he had protested whenever he met with others that he would never go to it, adding that M. de Montfort was a fool and a thousand other impertinent remarks.

The wise missionary who wanted to begin by winning over his enemies and drawing them in first, asked them to bring him the holy water stoup, and told the one who brought it to come and show him into this house. On arriving there he sprinkled the entrance hall where the master of the house was gathered with his whole family, who were all mightily astonished at such a ceremony. The sprinkling done, he took out his crucifix and that statue of the Blessed Virgin that he always carried with

him, and placed it on the chimney piece. Then, having fallen to his knees and said his prayer, he got up and said: "Well, Monsieur, you think that I come here of my own accord. No, it is Jesus and Mary who are sending me. I am their ambassador. Will you not receive me on their behalf?" The bourgeois replied: "Yes, willingly. Welcome." The holy missionary then replied: "Then come with me to the church straight away." "Yes," he said again. Then M. de Montfort invited the whole family to follow him, and they all did follow him. All this took place in a very short time, and the people who were outside were much astonished to see M. de Montfort come out of this house accompanied by a family which, a few moments before, had been so opposed to him. They went into the church together and the holy man went up into the pulpit to announce the mission services. This first success seemed to him a favourable portent that the future would match. In fact, he had no longer anything but praise from the inhabitants of Salertaine, and after going among them like a lamb among wolves, he saw these wolves changed later on into lambs.

Starting the following morning, he began the mission services. The church was full of people, and everyone went out with tears in their eyes. No mission was perhaps ever more fruitful than this one, no doubt because none was ever more opposed. The work was painful, but the harvest was only the more abundant. The most inveterate hatreds and enmities, the calumnies, the revenges, the quarrels, law-suits, drunkenness and other disorders no less scandalous, made him see at first that the parish-priest had not been exaggerating in the horrible picture he had painted of the state that he had found his parish in when first he went there.

M. de Montfort had no sooner begun the exercise of his ministry than the whole thing took on another face. He became the arbiter of all the differences. Each day he spent an hour and often two hours bringing to an end the law-suits. He settled more than fifty of them. He brought about an even greater number of reconciliations, and of considerable restitutions. Finally a prodigious multitude of spectacular conversions were seen to crown the holy work, that a less constant and courageous zeal would have abandoned at the first obstacles, which all promised a complete impossibility of being overcome.

What added to the efficacy of his words was the austerity and sanctity of his life. One could not fail to be persuaded when one listened to a man all of whose actions were such examples of virtue, and who practiced a form of penitence infinitely more austere than what he preached. It was known in Salertaine that in the house that he occupied with the missionaries, he had chosen for himself only a little cubbyhole where he spread a little straw to sleep on, with just a stone for a bedside table, where he went to bed at eleven o'clock in the evening, only to get up again at two o'clock in the morning, interrupting even this short sleep to tear his body with cruel disciplines. He was seen, completely exhausted as he was by his vigils and his mortifications, carrying out the services of the mission with indefatigable zeal, preaching two sermons a day and a conference lasting an hour, available without rest or distinction for all who came to consult him, giving them special instructions on the virtues proper to their state in life, and teaching them to find in the exact accomplishment of the duties of their profession the surest and most solid devotion. One could not have sufficient admiration for the fact that, in the midst of

so many occupations that were so varied and so capable of distracting anyone, he seemed to be always recollected, always in union with God, always aware of his presence. One would have been less surprised if one had been aware that he acted as though God was the sole witness of what he undertook for his glory. And he would let nothing slip that would procure that glory. Devoured by the zeal of his holy house, he never gave a mission without having the church repaired or decorated. From the first day when he began the mission in Salertaine, he noticed an old chapel where holy Mass had formerly been said. He asked the Bishop's permission to erect an altar there under the title of Our Lady of Good Help, and this was granted. He did not waste time. He immediately had this chapel taken over, and he made it fit to be able to celebrate the sacred mysteries there. Since then, it has always been much frequented, and several people attest to having received particular graces there.

Near the town there was an old cemetery which was very high up and where burials no longer took place. He had the idea of building a beautiful calvary there. He suggested this to the inhabitants, who willingly agreed to it and committed themselves to obtaining all the necessary faculties to build it. He drew a circle of twenty to twenty-four metres in circumference. In the lower enclosure there was a round chamber which had been given the name of "the sepulchre" and in which the plan was to place the various people who were present at the tomb of the Saviour. Above, a vaulted chapel had been built with a beautiful altar on which there was to be placed a big statue of Saint Michael. The vault was pierced by a lantern made of sizable stones and well glazed, in which a torch or lamp was set up. It was at the level of this chapel

and behind it that M. de Montfort erected the mission cross, whose three branches carried a large chained Rosary that went around the figure of Christ. On each side were placed the crosses of the good and the bad thief. Around this calvary and outside it there was a sort of walkway wide enough for two persons to walk side by side, and enclosed by a balustrade. It was tiled, sloping a little to let the rain run off. The whole compound of this little work which rather represented the image of a globe, was enclosed by an elbow-height wall, beyond which was left an earthen verge for growing flowers. From the bottom up to the chapel there was a spiral stairway of sizable stones and about thirty steps, which one could climb three abreast. All that remained was to consecrate the monument with a solemn blessing. M. de Montfort obtained permission for this, and to celebrate holy Mass in the chapel. He announced the day and time of the erection of the cross and its blessing. He drew up the ceremony for this, and recommended that each and everyone should carry in their hands a little cross or crucifix, a Rosary, and the commitments made at their baptism printed on vellum and signed by their own hand or by his. The procession to go to the calvary having formed up, he told all the men and boys to go barefoot, following his example, and to place their shoes beside the road in the place where they were then, assuring them that on their return they would find them in the same position. They all obeyed him immediately: priests, gentlemen, bourgeois, common folk; and all of them made their way thus barefoot to the calvary. When the blessing was finished they returned to the church in procession and everyone found their shoes where they had left them, without any confusion, which seemed quite extraordinary in such a numer-

ous gathering. In fact it would be only military bodies that would be able to furnish examples of such good order, or only a holy priest cherished and respected by a whole people that would be able bring about such policing. The following day he celebrated holy Mass in the calvary chapel, and since that day all the priests of the neighbouring parishes would come to say Mass there on all occasions when their duties might permit this.

Everything succeeded in Salertaine to the satisfaction of M. de Montfort. Spirits were reunited, hearts were changed, the Blessed Virgin was honoured, Jesus was glorified and his cross exalted. There was only one thing lacking to our apostle to complete God's work. He found this and his joy was complete. Before the procession which was to serve as the closure of the mission, a young lady of the highest quality came to the church and was behaving in a very indecent manner. Our holy priest believed that his ministry obliged him to give her some advice. His remonstrances were very badly received, and she took them as an insult. Going home, she made her complaints to her mother, telling her story with all the exaggeration that spite, pride and resentment inspired in her. The woman, whose true character was depicted in that of her daughter, resolved to take a spectacular revenge for the supposed insult, and set out immediately to go to the town. She was walking into the square when she saw the man of God passing by. She attacked him, insulted him, and without any delay between her threats and their being put into effect, she struck him five or six times with a cane that she had in her hand. A woman should be quite clumsy in this kind of fencing, but we can believe that this was not her first attempt, and that she had practiced it more than once on her servants. What-

ever the case may be, the holy man, who had seen without flinching elsewhere, a murderous weapon about to pierce him, did not lose anything of his calm here. He only started laughing at a scene he had not expected, and said with complete composure: "Madame, I did my duty; it was up to your daughter to do hers." All the people who happened to be present could not view without trembling a priest so unworthily outraged; but what caused them even more concern was that, knowing the character of the woman and her reputation, they had no doubt that she would provoke some troublesome affair for M. de Montfort, and that her tongue, which was more to be feared than her hands, would seek to disgrace and destroy him. However, she did nothing against him. It is believed only that she had a great part to play in the destruction of his calvary in Salertaine which happened quite soon afterwards. He finished the mission, as usual, with a general procession. This was all the more edifying as, apart from the number of people who took part, numbering more than fifteen thousand, it was carried out with an admirable order that was not disturbed by the heavy rain that fell. The man of God had forecast it when the weather seemed less problematic.

"My dear brothers and sisters," he had said before they set off, "here we have a beautiful day and the weather is very clear, but before our procession is half over, we will have heavy rain. I beg you not to relax your devotion because of that." The prediction came true and the order was carried out as required.

The inhabitants of Salertaine were anxious to make amends at the end of the mission for what had occurred at its start. Not only did they all turn up, but they wanted to

accompany their apostle in procession to the town of Saint-Christophe-du-Ligneron, which was three leagues away, where he was to perform the same services. When they were nearing the half-way point of their journey, they saw the parish-priest coming at the head of his own parish, all coming also in procession towards the one from Salertaine. The two processions united and walked on together. Their route was to take them through the middle of the town of Challans, and M. de Montfort was planning to give an exhortation to all the people in the church. But the parish-priest did not think it right to allow him to do this. So he contented himself with saying a prayer at the gate of the cemetery in front of an image of the Blessed Virgin, and continued on his way as far as the market. There he gave a talk, in which above all he exhorted the inhabitants of Challans who had not attended the mission in Salertaine to come to the one in Saint-Christophe. Just at the time that he was preaching, several merchants were passing by on their way to a fair. Seeing all these people around the preacher, some of them said to one another: "It's that fool from Montfort who is there." Those in his audience who heard these words, wanted to immediately avenge the affront offered to their dear missionary, the effects of which fell upon themselves. Their zeal was no doubt not scientific, and it might well have had fatal consequences. It would only have taken two or three hot-heads to carry the crowd with them, and they would have settled accounts with the merchants. Fortunately for them, the priest that they took for a fool treated them with wisdom and stopped the threats; and using the most apt expedient to create a prompt diversion, he ordered the singing of the hymn that begins: *Blessed be God, blessed be God*. They took the meaning

of the hymn and the spirit of its author. The passers-by continued on their way, very happy apparently at not having had to pay a good word that would have been more expensive than their commodities.

The exhortation being finished, they continued their walk to bring them to Saint-Christophe. The servant of God on leaving had told those who accompanied him: "We will be attacked on the way." However they came to the end of their journey without suffering anything more than a few words. An insolent man took this opportunity to fulfil the prophecy on the prophet himself, and dealt him a blow in the middle of the crowd. They saw this and wanted to arrest him. "No, no," said the apostolic man, "my little children, we deserve it." In fact, not long afterwards, this wretch, ashamed and repenting of his crime, came to throw himself at his feet, bursting into tears, and confessed his sins, and in doing so made reparation that was more worthy of being accepted by him, and more consoling than anything to which the people might have condemned him.

110 - The mission in Le Lignerou

Apart from the prodigies of zeal and charity that he performed in this mission, as indeed in all his missions, it can be said that he performed some of another kind. Here at least are some facts in which something marvellous is manifested. There was in this parish a rich man, whose fortune, too quickly made, gave rise to gossip. This man and his wife, who had no intention of attending the mission, publicly spread about insulting comments against the missionary. He was warned about this, but took little notice, hoping to win them over by patience and gentle-

ness. The husband, having been touched by the mission services, went to consult M. de Montfort on certain contracts that he had made and that, to everyone's knowledge, were usurious contracts. The pious and wise expert told him this in front of a number of people, and said that, in order to repair the scandal that he had given, he would have to burn all these papers in the presence of witnesses. The man promised he would do so. M. de Montfort said: "I will go with you." And in fact he did go, followed by a crowd of people. Having entered the house, he knelt down and said to the man and his wife that he asked their pardon if he had offended them. The usurer, in the presence of all these people, went to his safe and took out his papers, and he had already returned to the middle of the room to throw them on the fire when his wife said to him: "Why do you want to burn these papers, husband? We could well make good use of them." The man immediately stopped. "What now?" M. de Montfort said to him, "is the voice of a woman capable of preventing you from obeying your own conscience?" The woman replied: "Well, well, Monsieur, we are not about to waste these contracts again," and added several other things that were quite unfitting. This displeased the servant of God so much that, turning to the husband, obstinately enslaved to his feelings for his wife, he told him: "You are attached to earthly goods, and you have contempt for those of heaven. Your children will never succeed, and will leave no posterity. You will be miserable, and you will not even have the wherewithal to pay for your burial." The woman, speaking up, replied: "Well, we will still have thirty sols to pay for the bells." "And I am telling you," said M. de Montfort, "that you will not even be honoured by the ringing of the bells at your burial." This prediction

was proved true in every respect. These two spouses died weighed down by debt. They left only two children, a boy and a girl, who, though both married, had no children themselves. They lived a poor and wretched life, owing more than they possessed, constantly pursued and persecuted by their creditors. Their father and mother did not have the honour of the ringing of the bells at their burial, since they both died on Holy Thursday, the mother in 1730 and the father in 1738, and were buried the following day, Good Friday, the very day when the bells are never rung. All these facts were attested to by the inhabitants of the parish, the lord of the place and the parish-priest at their head, who signed the document.

Perhaps, regarding the bells, the man of God had intended to make a threat rather than a prediction. In fact he wanted to humiliate those guilty ones, and it is not in any way a humiliation to be deprived of the sound of the bells when one is buried on a day when the Church forbids their ringing. So we might well believe that he simply wanted to say to these people that their dishonesty might draw down on them the fate of those unfortunate victims of human justice, who are deprived of burial only to be exposed on the highways or at least are buried without any funeral ceremonies. Whatever the case, the event and the words he spoke seem very surprising.

We will not name this family. It is well enough known throughout the whole district, without the necessity of making it known wherever this book might be read.

Being much happier when he did some good rather than when he proclaimed chastisements, the holy man caused another family to experience what he could do

before God in favour of the poor. Here are the facts, as told to me by the people themselves to whom this happened, when I gave a mission in Challans in 1763.

M. de Montfort, during the mission in Saint-Christophe, sometimes went to visit the sacristan, called Jean Cantin, a good and God-fearing man. One day he found one of his daughters busy baking for the house where they were staying in large numbers and in a degree of poverty. The merciful man said to her: "My daughter, did you pray well to God before setting to work?" She replied: "Sometimes I pray, and sometimes I fail to do so." "You must never fail to do so," he replied. And he himself knelt down close to the vat, prayed there for some time, and, getting up, made the sign of the cross over it, then left the house. When the dough was ready, the mother told her daughter to bring it to her to be made into loaves, and to put it in the oven, which she did. When the oven was full, the mother asked if there was any left over. "You are right," the girl answered, "there is still half of it remaining." This woman thought she was joking, knowing well enough that the flour they had used could not make more than one oven-full, more or less, and that the vat could scarcely contain more. She was very surprised to find, when she went to have a look for herself, that there was still enough to make almost twice the amount of bread. The father took one of these loaves to the Providence (which was the name given everywhere to the house where the missionaries stayed). M. de Montfort, on seeing this man, said to him: "Well, master Cantin, so you have brought some; that is how you should do it. Give, and things will be given you. Since God is so generous towards you, you must be the same towards the poor."

We should not be surprised that, with such resources, the man of God constantly gave so abundantly by way of alms. But is it possible not to take sensible pleasure in seeing, after all his humiliations, these wonderful events that are so fit to honour his ministry? Here is another one that took place during the same mission, and attested to by the parish-priest, the curate, the lord and the one in charge of the fabric of the parish.

One day when he was saying Mass, at which he had to give Communion to many people, a small bell sitting alone at the corner of the altar rang of its own accord. In the first moment of surprise among those attending, the holy priest took the opportunity to tell them that the Communion they were about to receive would be pleasing to the Lord. Their astonishment and joy was increased still more when the bell rang a second time without any outside impulse. The angels were assisting invisibly at the adorable sacrifice. Were they not here clearly performing the office of those who respond to it? The holy man, it seems, opened his mouth only to speak of God and to foretell the future. When, at the end of the mission, it was time to erect a cross, several people told him that the one that had been prepared was very weak. Nevertheless, he had it erected, and he preached at its foot as was his custom, and said at the end of his exhortation: "No, no, do not be afraid that this cross will fall; it will last until another mission is given in this parish. Then it will fall down and give way to the one that will be erected then." A mission took place in Saint-Christophe in 1735, that is more than thirty years after the one we are speaking about. They were looking for a place to erect the new cross, not wanting, out of respect for the quite recent memory of M. de Montfort, to take away the

one he had erected, when all of a sudden it was blown down and broken by a whirlwind, and so seemed to have given up its place to make good the prediction of the man of God. "I did not hear what M. de Montfort said," said M. de Marconnay, "but the people tell me about it unceasingly, and I witnessed the extraordinary fall of the old cross."

While God was preparing future glorious events in memory of his servant, men were seeking to bring on him humiliations. The cross that he erected at that time was not to fall until thirty years later and its fall was to be the pure effect of God's will. Another, that he had erected quite recently, had just been overturned by the malice of men. In fact, he had been at Saint-Christophe only three weeks when they came to tell him about the destruction of his calvary in Salertaine. He still had enemies who thought that the best way to afflict him was by overturning what he did for the glory of God. They remembered what had happened, no more than eighteen months before, in Pontchâteau. They attracted to their cause the woman who had publicly insulted him. They used the same pretexts that had already had such success, and brought to the ears of the governor that he should not allow near the coast an edifice that might, they said, furnish a refuge for enemies.

Hearing this, and without any checking of the facts, he sent a number of soldiers and fifty gunners with tools to overturn the supposed fort of Salertaine. The troop was very surprised when they saw that it was a question of a small oratory where a priest was at that moment saying Mass, and an earthen mound with steps to go up it. If their military obedience had been less exact and literal, it

would seem that they would have returned to the governor to let him know what was the important object of their expedition. But accustomed to carrying out orders that allowed no delay, they thought only of obeying, and in less than a quarter of an hour the redoubtable fortress was pulled down. The holy man consoled himself at the feet of Jesus Christ, and thought himself fortunate to be able to say that he was often crucified on his Cross.

On leaving Saint-Christophe, he went back to La Garnache to give a retreat there, such as he was accustomed to give in the places where he had given a mission, and whose exercises revolved only around preparation for death. This was the last time he would exercise his zeal in the diocese of Luçon; for he did not return there anymore. He was called to evangelise other people, to strengthen some of those that he had already instructed, and to train for the ministry of the Gospel the virtuous priest who, having been for some time his work companion, was to become his successor in conducting the work of the missions and the governance of his foundations.

Book Five

111 - M. de Montfort returns to La Rochelle

It was only his desire to procure the glory of God and the salvation of souls that had caused M. de Montfort to go from the diocese of La Rochelle into that of Luçon. The same motive now caused him to go back to a prelate whose esteem and trust might better aid his labours. M. de la Rochelle beheld with great pleasure his dear Missionary returning to the town. Until then he had had no home of his own where he could withdraw in the intervals between his evangelical journeys. A pious person was minded to get one for him for the rest of his life.

It was a house with a small walled garden, situated almost at the gates of the town in the district of Saint-Eloi, which was called from that time on while he was living, the little hermitage of Saint-Eloi. A number of individuals offered themselves willingly to obtain for him suitable and fitting furniture; but he never wanted anything other than that of the prophet, that is to say, a table, a chair and a candlestick, looking upon all the rest as superfluous. What gave him most pleasure was to learn that, since his departure, God had not ceased to shower his blessings on the missions he had given in the previous year. He found hearts and minds in admirable dispositions. The seeds of repentance that he had sown had germinated and borne fruit a hundredfold. Their influence lived on in all their liveliness. It was to strengthen them more and more that, having agreed to give a retreat for

the hospital Sisters, he wanted everyone to be allowed to come. No sooner had he appeared in the pulpit than people came from all the districts of the town with extraordinary eagerness and in extraordinary numbers. Apart from the discourses on all moral topics that he gave in public, he gave special exhortations to the religious, in which, after showing that salvation and perfection were inseparable things for them, he explained to them the advantages and the sublime nature of their vocation as hospital Sisters. The poor sick people had no less a share in the activity of his zeal. He was assiduous in going to visit those who could not attend his sermons, and taught them to suffer as penitents and to die as saints.

112 - Mademoiselle Pagé's challenge

But while the word of God issued from his mouth like a sweet dew on the parches of earth well disposed to receive it, it was also capable, like thunder, of leaving proud souls aghast and breaking hardened hearts. A young lady who, well before this, had been engaged in the amusements and vanities of the world, finding herself part of a pleasure-seeking crowd of ladies and officers, plotted with her companions to go and listen to M. de Montfort for the purpose of laughing at the good missionary, and even with the intention of causing some distractions calculated to make him lose the thread of his discourse. To this end she dressed herself in as worldly a manner as she could, and took her place in the middle of the church under the eyes of the preacher. Everyone expected that he would go and give her a lesson. She expected as much herself, but he said not a word to her. It was only noticed that he cast a look of compassion on this worldly young woman. Afterwards, turning to the

Blessed Sacrament, he said his prayer and began his sermon. He preached with such force and unction that he brought his whole audience to tears. Tears were seen to fall also from the eyes of Mademoiselle Pagé, for we can name her in this place where her repentance began, that would render her memory immortal. After the blessing she remained in the church. The crowd she had brought with her went looking for her; she let them become impatient at the door and did not stir from her place. When everyone had left she went out with a girl who was in her service, and asked her where M. de Montfort lived, and told her to accompany her there. She had a conversation with him that lasted a good two hours, after which she went back home. The plan she had dreamt up demanded prompt execution. She set out immediately to arrange her affairs. She spent the whole night on this, and as soon as day broke she went to the Poor Clare Sisters to ask to be admitted as a boarder. She entered there that same day.

M. de Montfort had her make a general confession. She took eight hours to do this; after which she asked the abbess to receive her as one of the religious. The abbess, quite astonished, having offered the suggestions she thought suitable, she answered her: “Madame, my mind if made up, but I have two favours to ask of you. The first is never to be in a position of authority; the second is never to have to go to the parlour except in a case of urgent necessity.” She was promised what could be promised, and the postulant was admitted. It would be difficult to say what a storm such an unexpected outcome caused. They did everything possible to make it fail. They even threatened to set fire to the monastery. M. de Montfort came in for a good part of the persecution, but his virtuous penitent, known later as Sister Saint Louis, remained

firm in her vocation, fulfilled all its duties with a remarkable fervour corresponding to the prodigy of grace that had called her, and died in the odour of sanctity in the place of her sacrifice. If her conversion gave rise to talk and rumours, it was no less of a source of edification for the whole town. Several young ladies followed her example and became religious in various monasteries. The only talk in La Rochelle was of Mademoiselle Pagé and her holy director. He saw a great number of people of both sexes putting themselves under his guidance. Only to confess to him proclaimed a complete reform. A short exhortation, a simple word coming from his mouth achieved what his public discourses and an exalted sense of his virtue had begun.

113 - Association of the Sisters of the Cross

While working with such success on the conversion of sinners, he did not neglect the care of a number of people who were already leading in the midst of the world's corruption a regulated and edifying life. He cultivated their holy dispositions; he connected with their ideas and made his own suggestions for everything that might contribute to their growth in virtue. It was in this spirit that he had already established in a number of places, with the consent and under the authority of the bishops, various associations in honour of the Cross, such as Friends of the Cross, Confreres and Sisters of the Cross. He gave them rules and very wise practices that he had approved by the ordinaries. He would then get the parish-priest or some other cleric, with their consent, to watch over them. The Association he established in La Rochelle, under the title of Sisters of the Cross, is still in existence with much edification, and has never relaxed its primitive fervour that

its holy founder inspired. But what he had most at heart was to work for the salvation of the poor country-dwellers. He was thinking even of prolonging the effects of his zeal and his charity for them. He recalled with what predilection Jesus Christ was keen to preach his Gospel to them; that, from the moment he was born, he had called them to himself to be his first worshippers; that in the course of his active life he showed himself only occasionally in Jerusalem, and that he was almost uniquely seen to travel round the hamlets and villages of Judea; that if the ministers of the Gospel had to do twice the work when it was a case of destroying the ignorance and uprooting the vices of a coarse people, they at least had the consolation of knowing that they were building on the foundation of faith, and that they did not need to prove the truth of Christianity so as to get them to put into practice its maxims and moral teaching.

114 - Reason for the foundation of the Company of Mary

The holy man often cast his eyes on this portion of the flock of Jesus Christ, the most numerous and the most neglected. Not content with begging the Father of the family to send labourers into a harvest that was so abundant, he busied himself with a plan to form them himself. Others had conceived this idea and put it into execution before him, and the blessings that God had showered on them gave him even more confidence to promise himself that success would crown his enterprise. He drew up his plans based on the knowledge he possessed of the customs, the character and the tastes of the country people. He himself used this knowledge for the preparation of the

majority of his sermons, in the composition of his hymns, in his way of living and conversing in the midst of the good people, in the religious spectacles that made, and continue to make today, such a striking mark. All that was lacking was to find a number of worthy priests that he could get to adopt his ideas and share his labours. He gathered a few and so gave birth to the Society of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary, of whom the first members, having learnt from himself the surest and most effective method of fulfilling with fruit this apostolic task, passed it on to their successors.

115 - The Holy Spirit Seminary in Paris

To better strengthen his new Congregation, he believed he must ensure the intimate and holy relationship he had had for some time with the men of the Community of the Holy Spirit in Paris. We will not therefore be wandering from our subject in speaking here about this celebrated house and its respectable founder, with whom M. de Montfort was intimately united. Besides we owe as much to both friendship and gratitude.

Monsieur Claude-François Poullart des Places, to whom the Holy Spirit Seminary owes its foundation, was a member of a very ancient family of Brittany, in the Diocese of Saint-Brieuc. He was born in Rennes on 27 February 1679 in the parish of Saint-Pierre en Saint-Georges, and was baptised the same day. His mother first consecrated him to the Blessed Virgin, and had him wear white in her honour until he was seven years old. He studied humanities and philosophy in the College in Rennes. It was there that he formed a close relationship with M. de Montfort. Together they strove to form, with sev-

eral of their schoolmates, a little association to honour in a special way the Blessed Virgin. They gathered together on certain days in a room that a pious person had lent them. There they created a sort of oratory in which to carry out their exercises, and contributed to the shared expense of what was needed to decorate it. They had their rules for prayer, silence and mortification, that sometimes went as far as taking the discipline. This holy gathering continued for some time even after the departure of M. Grignon for Paris, through the zeal and the care of the young Desplaces, to whom he had commended it and who was to remain its sole soul and support. However, as his family's expectations of him demanded that he make a name for himself in the world, he gave himself to this, perhaps a little too much. His dominant passion was to shine in the world, and it must be admitted that he had all that might be desired to make a distinctive mark there. His father was determined to make him a councillor in the Parliament of Brittany, and Madame Desplaces had so few doubts regarding the dispositions of her son that she had already paid for a lawyer's gown to be made for him. The moment he decided to try it on was the very moment at which he became disgusted with the magistracy. He approached a large mirror, and as he saw himself clothed in the garb of *Thémis*, apparently he thought that the main thing was to maintain a balance, that he must not appear in the courts with the purpose of parading the purple, that he should not be what he saw in the mirror—a representative magistrate—, and that clothing himself in the qualities of a judge was not as easy as putting on the judge's robes. Whatever it was, God enlightened him with the realisation that he was not calling him to this state in life. He took off the gown and declared

loudly that he would never again put it on. At the same time he asked his father for permission to go and study at the Sorbonne and enter the clerical state. This came as a thunderbolt to this respectable officer, who had only this one son to perpetuate his name and take over his role. He made every effort to turn him away from his plan; but the young man remained inflexible and his family gave no more opposition to such a strongly-felt vocation.

On his arrival in Paris, he entered the Clermont College and commenced by a retreat the new plan of life that he was about to make for himself. He meditated on it at his leisure and afterwards strengthened his resolve through the assiduous practice of mental prayer and the frequentation of the Sacraments. Reading the life of M. Le Nobletz, a missionary priest who died in the odour of sanctity in Brittany, was not a little help to him in despising the world and setting himself above human respect in everything. His fervour was always equal to his resolutions. His mortifications, above all, were so austere that his confessor was often obliged to moderate the pious excess with which he performed them. From that time on he dedicated his savings and a part of what was necessary for himself to furnishing some poor students with the means of pursuing their studies, to the point where he was giving every day half his own portion to one of them who was staying at the door of the college. Thus it was that he created something of a prelude to what he was going to do with a zeal whose fruits persist even to the present day. The close union that was created between himself and M. Grignon in Rennes, far from weakening with the lapse of time, each day received new growth, and we might say that the conformity of their sentiments and their life already proclaimed that heaven had spe-

cially chosen them to work together for the conquest of souls. They shared mutually with one another their views and their plans, but they found it very hard to decide on the means to realising their full extent. One of them, it seemed, was born with a dominating attraction for the tasks of the apostolic life; while the other felt himself drawn to a more sedentary life, even to complete solitude. Both of them had nothing else in mind than God alone and his greatest glory. They never ceased asking him to make known to them his will. Prayers, communions, fasts, mortifications, alms: all these were carried out with the intention of obtaining light from heaven. And this was granted them.

M. Desplaces felt that God wished to make use of him to populate his sanctuary and to train teachers and guides for his people. Again he understood that, to succeed in this, he could do no better than to continue to help poor students to live and put them in a position to be able to continue their studies. He did not confine his efforts to these temporal aids. He conceived the idea of gathering them together in a room where he would go from time to time to give them some instructions, and to watch over them as far as their stay in the college would allow him to do this. He told his confessor of this plan, who approved it. The principal of the college did something more, by promising to support him in this good work, and granting a part of what was served up on the table of those in the college, to help the subsistence of the poor students.

At this same period, M. de Montfort was also turning over another project worthy of his big heart. This was to seek out clerics animated with this same spirit and getting them to join him to form a Company of apostolic men.

He entertained no sweeter thought than that of considering himself as serving God and sanctifying himself along with them by working for the salvation of souls in the missions, and though he did not yet know when, nor where, nor how this might come about, it seemed to him that this was all God was asking of him. M. Desplaces was the one on whom he cast his eyes for the execution of his project. Having gone to see him, he suggested this to him, and invited him to unite with him in the foundation of this good work. M. Desplaces answered him in the candour of his soul: "I do not feel the slightest attraction for the missions; but I know only too well the good that can come from them for me not to devote all my strength to helping in this and to being indissolubly joined with you. You know that for some time I have been distributing all that is at my disposal to help poor students to pursue their studies. I know a number of them who would have admirable dispositions and who, for want of help, cannot make them obvious and are obliged to bury talents that would be very useful to the Church if they were cultivated. This is what I would like to apply myself to, by bringing them together in the one house. It seems to me that this is what God is asking of me, and I have been confirmed in this thought by enlightened people, one of whom has given me cause to hope that he will help me to provide for their upkeep. If God gives me the grace to succeed, you can count on missionaries. I will prepare them for you, and you will set them to work. In this way you will be satisfied, and so shall I."

Such was the result of their conversation and the beginning of that union and relationship that has always subsisted between the mission of M. de Montfort and the Community of M. Desplaces. The matter having been

arranged, their only thought, on one side and the other, was to arrive at its execution and the fulfilment of that part of it that each had taken responsibility for. M. Desplaces began by renting a room in the Rue des Cordiers, close to the college, and gathering together there those poor students that he was already assisting, whose good dispositions were known to him. The progress made by these first disciples of his was too remarkable not to attract other excellent subjects. So he thought of renting a house to give them more room. There, in a short time he formed a community of clerics, to whom he gave rules full of wisdom, that he arranged to be examined and approved by people of great experience. He was the first to put into practice what he recommended for others. He was not content with often giving them instructions, but he was anxious also to have retreats given them by the best masters in this area. He even profited by every occasion that presented to provide them with support for their piety. He brought along to his community those of his friends who came to see him, in whom he recognised a talent for speaking. You might suppose that his most intimate confidant was not forgotten in this. I know from the man who was the superior of this house after M. Desplaces, who had been his pupil, that one day M. Grignon preached to them on the subject of wisdom, and offered them a very beautiful paraphrase of the book of Scripture that bears this title.

“I am not speaking,” he told them, “of that wisdom or prudence of the children of this age..., but I am speaking about that supernatural and divine wisdom that Solomon desired with such ardour, that he pleaded for with such insistence, and that was granted to him in such great measure. *Optavi et venit in me spiritus sapientiae* (Wis

7:7). I am speaking of that wisdom of the Gospel that consists in impoverishing oneself, mortifying oneself, hiding oneself, diminishing oneself and humiliating oneself to please God... Of that wisdom which Jesus Christ has taught us by his words and actions, and which consist in preferring above all and in everything poverty to riches, the cross and suffering to pleasures, joys or satisfaction in life, humiliations and insults to glory, greatness and high-standing. A wisdom so beautiful that it alone deserves our love and our heart; so delicious that it strips us abundantly of all the pleasures of the senses; so honourable that it suffices to make us esteemed and respected by men; so rich and precious that, in the judgement of the Holy Spirit, it is worth more than all the most precious of goods: *melior est sapientia cunctis pretiosissimis* (Prov 8:11).

“A wisdom, nevertheless, so little known by, and even less to the taste of, worldly people, because they cannot conceive that there might be true happiness even in this life, and that you can taste ineffable joy and delight in impoverishing yourself, mortifying yourself, diminishing yourself and humiliating yourself to please God. That is why they despise it, hate it, disparage it and treat it as foolishness or extravagance... Here is the mystery that human wisdom cannot penetrate and that has been revealed only to the little ones and the humble of heart: *abscondisti hæc a sapientibus et revelasti ea parvulis* (Matt 11:25).” “He made us all kneel down,” M. Bouïc added in speaking with me, “to pray to God, asking him for this divine wisdom of which he had been speaking, and he did it in such lively terms, with such animated gestures and such sublime thoughts that it seemed we were hearing an angel speak.”

But while M. Desplaces was devoting himself wholly to the cares demanded by his nascent community, and exhausting himself with austerities, he was afflicted by a pleurisy combined with a continual fever and violent rectal cramp that caused him extreme pain for four days. But these pains could not drag a single word of complaint from his mouth, much less an impatient word. The only way that you could tell his sufferings were getting worse was by the acts of resignation that they caused him to make. The very failure of nature seemed to lend him new strength to repeat often those words of holy King David: *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum, concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini* ('How lovely are your dwelling-places, Yahweh Sabaoth. My whole being yearns and pines for Yahweh's courts, My heart and my body cry out for joy to the living God.') (Psalm 84:1-2).

As soon as it became known in Paris that his sickness was a serious one, a great number of people distinguished by their piety or their position came to see him: the directors of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet and of Saint-François de Sales. The holy man, M. Jourdan, who was a close friend of his, also sent someone to visit on his behalf. They gave him the last sacraments in good time, and having received them with full knowledge and liberty of spirit, he died peacefully at about 5 o'clock in the evening on 2 October 1709, aged 30 years and 7 months. Such was the holy and celebrated M. Desplaces, founder of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris. The friendship created between M. de Montfort and himself by their sharing of opinions, of character and of feelings, has persisted always between the successors of these two great men and their disciples.

We know what is the destiny of those young clerics brought together at the Seminary of the Holy Spirit. Trained in all the functions of the sacred ministry and in all the priestly virtues by the care, and even more by the example, of their wise directors, they possess to a sovereign degree the spirit of detachment, of zeal and of obedience. They devote themselves to the service and the needs of the Church with no other desire than to serve and to be useful to her. They can be seen in the hands of their superiors and at the first sign of their will (always at the beck and call of the bishops), forming, as it were, a body of auxiliary troops, ready to go anywhere where there is work to be done for the salvation of souls, devoting themselves by preference to the work of the missions, both foreign and home, offering themselves to go to the poorest and most abandoned of places, for which it is so much more difficult to find people. Whether it is necessary to be sent off to the depths of the countryside, or be buried in a corner of a hospital, to teach in a college, or in a seminary or be the director in a poor community, to go off to the extremities of the Kingdom and there keep going in an austere residence, or even cross the seas to the ends of the earth to gain a soul for Jesus Christ, their motto is: here we are, ready to do your will: *ecce ego, mitte me* (Is 6:8). Finally this house is like a blessed earth from which every year there are picked young plants which are going to produce excellent fruit in the lands for which they are destined. It has often provided for our establishment in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre excellent subjects in whom we have found all those qualities suitable for forming zealous missionaries, and they themselves can bear witness that they have seen nothing in the rule of M. de Montfort but what is perfectly in conformity with the

principles according to which everyone acts in the community of the Holy Spirit.

116 - The “Burning” Prayer for Missionaries

The servant of God, whose life we are continuing to relate, was so pre-occupied with this great work that he made it the subject of a long succession of holy aspirations, or rather of a sort of soliloquy that we still possess today and of which we give here some extracts. After beginning with the words: “*Memento Congregationis tuæ quem possedisti ab initio*. Remember, Lord this Congregation which you have possessed from all eternity... when your mind dwelt on it,” he gives a small paraphrase of this, saying among other things: “*Memento*: Ever keep this Congregation in mind, Almighty God, and, by the power of your right arm which has lost nothing of its strength, make it a living reality and lead it to perfection. *Innova signa, immuta mirabilia*. (Eccles 36:6)” Then he gives free rein to his thoughts and the movements of his heart, and, repeating from time to time the first word of his prayer, he says: “Lord Jesus, *memento congregationis tuæ*: be mindful of your Congregation. Give your mother this new company so that you may renew all things through her and bring the era of grace to a close through Mary just as you began it through her... What, then, am I asking for? It is no personal favour that I ask, but something which concerns your glory alone... men after your own heart who, without taint or impediment of self-love, will carry out your will to the full and, like David of old, lay low all your enemies, with the Cross for their staff and the Rosary for their sling... men as free as the clouds

that sail high above the earth, filled with the dew of heaven, and moving, without let or hindrance, according to the inspiration of the Spirit... *qui sunt isti qui sicut nubes volant?* (Is 40:8)... Were it not for the hope that I have that, sooner or later, the interests of your glory will prevail and that you will hear this poor sinner's prayer... *iste pauper clamavit et Dominus exaudivit eum* (Ps 33:7), I would make mine the ultimate plea of your prophet: *tolle animam meam* (3 Kg 19:4). Yet, my trust in you is so great that I am inspired to cry out like another of your prophets: *non moriar sed vivam et narrabo opera Domini*, ... until the time comes when I can say with Simeon: *nunc dimittis servum tuum in pace, quia viderunt oculi mei, etc.* (Lk 2:29,30). *Memento Congregationis tuæ*... it is you alone who must, by your grace, make it a living reality. If man is the first to put his hand to the work, nothing will come of it. If he contributes anything of his own to what you are doing, the entire undertaking will be warped and come down in ruins... *Congregationis tuæ*: it is your work, great God."

Not content with offering his prayers and the adorable sacrifice for the realization of this work, so great and so holy, he carried out fasts for this intention and made pilgrimages, to which he joined the voice of his tears in his meditations, and even that of his blood in his cruel mortifications. Finally it was during a retreat that he decided to form without any further delay his new society, and to give it a rule that would enable it to unite assiduous and deeply researched study of priestly perfection with the labours of an apostolic zeal.

Whatever means he used to come to a knowledge of the will of God, there was still one more sure way not to

be mistaken. This was the way of obedience. He proposed to follow this way, and began by submitting his project to the judgement and the decision of the Bishop in the diocese where he was living. This was the Bishop of La Rochelle, a prelate who was as enlightened in the discernment of spirits as he was inclined to support and favour everything that seemed to him to be dictated by the spirit of God. He entered perfectly into the views of M. de Montfort, approved his project and promised to do all in his power to facilitate the enterprise and ensure its success.

The new founder, strengthened more than ever by the decision of the Bishop, which he regarded as an oracle from heaven, believed that he should, as soon as possible, draw up plans for the work and write the rule that he wanted to give to his disciples. But first he wanted to instruct them for some further time yet, by his own example, in the art of giving missions, and he put off his work until the end of the missions he was about to commence.

117 - Re-commencement of the missions

They produced fruit that surpassed all his hopes.¹⁰ The reports of the striking conversions of which we have spoken had so prepared minds in his favour that, the moment it was known he was in some parish, people flocked there to listen to him. It was a very moving thing to see, even

¹⁰ This sentence in the first text replaces a list of the names of parishes, in which the following names are still legible: *Esnandes, Courson, La Séguinière, Angoulin, La Jarrie, Saint-Christophe, Verrines, Saint-Médard, L'Ile d'Olé* (ron).

in the depths of winter, the inhabitants of the villages most distant from the church leaving their homes, with scarcely a few children left behind to guard the cattle, and even forgetting their food to have the consolation of listening to some of his sermons. It was like having processions along the roads, and the gathering of people was so great that, the churches being unable to contain the crowds, a part of them were obliged to stay outside; yet they were, for all that, not deprived of the fruit of the divine Word, either through the efforts that the holy preacher made to be heard, or because those to whom his voice could not reach found themselves equally touched and moved on seeing the external signs of compunction and sorrow experienced by those who were in a position to hear him. Often, after the example of those apostolic men who proclaim the Gospel in places where there are no temples yet erected to the true God, he would preach in the open countryside. The people of a poor parish were not the only ones who made up his audience. The crowd was swelled by a great number of persons of distinction who had their seat in the place, or in the neighbouring parishes. You would see them, at the end of the services, taking their place where he was hearing confessions, approaching him in their turn, relying on no other title than that of sinners, and desiring no other privilege than that of being able to share the precious moments of a priest whose own tastes and attraction would have been to prefer the poor, if his zeal and charity had not made him all things to all people.

This was where he recognised most clearly the effects of his public instructions. Sinners for whom the longest delay since their last confession might seem to make them forget a great part of their faults, accused

themselves of them with all the exactitude and delicacy of conscience of the most scrupulous souls. Their sighs and sobs would interrupt their recital, and the paper they carried to aid their memories would often be quite wet with their tears. Such a lively and heart-felt repentance hardly ever failed to be persevering. The wise words of advice of the holy director, and the pious practices he prescribed, especially the recitation of the holy Rosary, were powerful aids against falling back again. Just the odour of sanctity that he left in the parishes where he had worked seemed to produce continually the fruits of salvation that he had brought to birth, and you could even say that the reputation he had acquired there preceded him and was foremost in preparing the way for new conquests that he was going to make for grace in the other missions for which he was summoned.

118 - The mission in Esnandes

The first one where we are going to follow him was the one he gave in Esnandes, which he began as winter approached. This parish is situated on the sea-coast, two leagues from La Rochelle. A large part of the inhabitants are involved in fishing, with quite a large trade in fish in La Rochelle and the neighbouring towns.

This town was very flourishing and the majority of families there lived at their ease. One of these, by a just divine punishment, came to the end of their prosperity there, content if they might profit from their chastisement to make satisfaction to divine justice and ensure their salvation. Their decadence at least became a striking example of the severity with which God punishes the impious, especially when the impiety is joined with the abuse of

such a special grace as was a mission. This is what happened, as much to the glory of the memory of M. de Montfort, as it was a disgrace to the memory of the one who refused to profit by his moving remonstrances.

The holy missionary had announced the erection of the cross for Christmas Eve, a vigil dedicated to fasting and penance. This ceremony drew a lot of people to Esnandes. Some sailors from the neighbouring towns, such as Charon and Saint-Michel-en-Lerme, made their way there by boat. It seemed at first that they were not come to be edified, still less to edify others, and the first stop of the newly disembarked men was at the biggest inn in the place. This was situated opposite the port where the cross was due to be erected. You would have said that their only thought in settling there was to disrupt the ceremony. They gave themselves up riotously to wine and debauchery, to the sound of fiddles and other instruments, as though it were a carnival day. They pushed their irreligious spirit to the point of transgressing the command of abstinence and causing the spit to be fired up. M. de Montfort, when informed of this scandal, went to put a stop to the proceedings if that were possible; but his exhortations only served to irritate the culprits, who heaped abuse on him and uttered the most atrocious insults against him. Seeing that he could not get the better of them, he addressed himself to the landlord and brought to his notice how wrong he was to lend his house for such scandalous excess. He was no more listened to or better received by him than by the first. He only responded to his charitable advice with curses. Then the holy man, full of sorrow, had no further thought than to address himself to God, and he said to all those present: "My brothers, let us kneel down to ask pardon for this wretch." So he said

his prayer; but far from obtaining grace for the guilty one, he knew by an internal light that God wanted to strengthen his hand over him and all his race, and to make use of him to pronounce the sentence. So he stood up and said to him in a menacing tone: "Go, you wretch, you will perish with all your family." This oracle could not issue from his mouth without great cost to his heart.

He did not cease for the rest of the mission from begging God to revoke the sentence he had passed on this hardened sinner, of which he had been the mouthpiece, and he had prayers said for him; but it was all useless. Instead of coming to his senses and profiting by the grace offered to him, that was intended to bring him back through fear, he despised the threats of the servant of God, and deserved, by this, to suffer their terrible effects.

A few days after the closure of the mission, he fell down paralysed and trembling on all his limbs. This trembling persisted for the rest of his life, without the doctors, who exhausted all their knowledge in the attempt, being able to bring him any relaxation; and as though the people wished to add to his just punishment reproaches and opprobrium, the only distinction they made between him and those of his family with the same name was the nickname *trembler*... He was no less punished in his goods than in his body. He was seen to become poorer year by year. He had some beautiful houses that were all sold. Having been classed as a good bourgeois, he found himself reduced to lacking the necessities of life. Finally he died in Esnandes in the direst poverty, despised by everyone and *trembling* until death. His wife, who shared in his irreligious spirit, was punished for it just like him. She survived him by only a few years,

complaining the more as she prolonged her shame and misery. Accustomed as she had been in the days of their prosperity to eat only the choicest portions and drink the finest wines, she kept up, to the point of begging, this criminal penchant for the pleasures of the table, and it is well known that, when she presented herself at the doors of the inhabitants dressed in rags, the children would run to find wine in the house to give to her, so as to have the fun of seeing her drunk. She died in a humble cottage on a handful of straw. The posterity of these two blameworthy spouses, were also involved in the curse of God that had been pronounced over them; they felt it, and it endures to this day. Of their children, some perished at sea, and the others did not live long. The only one left was a daughter, but she fell into such a state of imbecility that she needed to be taken in out of charity into the home of one of her relations. Such was the fate of this family, which we have not wished to name out of consideration for people who might belong to it, even though all that we have just written is public knowledge in the area. Happy indeed will be those unfortunate victims of Heaven's vengeance if they have known how to profit by this, and if they have made use for their own sanctification of what should be for so many others a most salutary lesson.

After this mission, M. de Montfort retired to his hermitage in St Eloi to give himself more at his leisure to the exercises of the interior life,¹¹ or rather to give him-

¹¹ The first text says here: "It was during this interval of holy repose that, rendering his soul to the pleasures of contemplation, he spent in this nearly all the hours of the day and the night. But if God allowed him in this way to experience the sensible taste and the ravishing de-

self up without reserve to the delights of contemplation, to which he devoted almost all the hours of the day and the night. But finally he had to leave such a holy and tranquil repose, and sacrifice the charms of solitude to the carrying out of the apostolate.

119 - Mission in a parish that is not named

He left his repose to go into a parish that had extreme need of all his zeal. The demon of discord was reigning there in full flood. Not only were the parishioners up in arms against one another, but the pastor himself, taking part in this scandalous division, found himself the butt of the hatred of nearly all the flock, and in his turn treated as enemies those to whom he should have been a father. On all sides there was nothing but malicious gossip, calumny, insults and curses. The evil had reached such a

lights of holy love, it was only after having him purchase them by the most cruel crosses. He loved to recall the memory of these so as to reiterate the offering of them. He spoke about them with a kind of transport in a letter that he wrote at that time to his sister, a religious of the convent of Perpetual Adoration in Rambervilliers, in Lorraine. It is dated 1 January 1713.”

Immediately after this ‘1713’, a first text had: “God,” then in a new paragraph, “God takes pleasure, my dear sister, in seeing us both struggle and in making us both victorious, you in secret and I in public. Your struggles take place within you and are not seen outside your community, whereas mine ring out . . . , as I fight against the demons of hell or make war on the world and the worldly, the enemies of truth. You would be surprised if you knew all the details of the precious cross which has been sent to me from heaven at the intercession of our good Mother. Please thank my good Lord Jesus and ask your dear community, to whom I send my greetings, to obtain from Jesus the grace for me to carry the roughest and heaviest crosses as I would the light-as-straw ones and to resist with unyielding courage the powers of hell.”

pitch that the holy missionary avowed that he had never seen its like. The mind of the parish-priest above all was so sickened that he vented his resentment at every turn and did not cease to curse the day that he had set foot in the parish. M. de Montfort, seeing that his first discourses made no impression whatsoever on his hearers, had recourse to his usual weapons: prayer, fasting, mortifications and bloody disciplines. Nevertheless he announced a sermon on a topic of great importance, and exhorted everyone to come along as much as possible. We can well understand that it was on the forgiveness of injuries and the necessity of reconciliation that he was to preach. He did it in his usual way, that is to say, with that force and that unction which it is difficult to resist. He had not come to the end when the parish-priest interrupted him, and having spoken for a few moments, loudly asked pardon of his people for the bad example he had given by his behaviour that was so contrary to gentleness, patience and charity. The reparation was too edifying and the circumstances too favourable for the preacher to fail to take advantage of it. He knew only too well how to profit by this to get all his hearers to enter into the same sentiments and to manifest them immediately in a way that was as striking as it was exemplary.

So he spoke to them more or less in these terms: “Well now, brethren, there is your pastor who, to extinguish all enmity between you and him, has anticipated you, and begs your pardon, and you, having so often been lacking in what you owe to his person and his character, do you not wish to be reconciled with him? ... Do you not...”; he did not have time to finish. There arose from all corners of the church a thousand confused voices asking pardon of the pastor. Tears flowed in abundance. The

old enmity had given place to sentiments of regret, of confusion, of attachment, of esteem; and they were expressed so much more by sighs and sobbing than they could ever be by words, and this language, so touching, was a very positive response to the request of the Christian orator. Yet half the work still remained to be done. The parishioners were no less divided among themselves as they were enemies to the parish-priest. The pacifying missionary took advantage of the happy disposition he saw them in to bring them to be reconciled among themselves. So he took up again his discourse and finished by telling the men to give each other immediately the kiss of peace. Then he told the women to do the same to one another. So it was that, thanks to the confidence they had in him, and by a unique privilege, he was able to act with his hearers like a father with his children, or rather it was thus that he was able to preach as a saint and an apostle.

After this touching reconciliation, consecrated by the holiness of the place and the presence, even, of Jesus Christ, he asked that they should agree to take him as the arbitrator of the differences they might have, and that each one should come to seek him out to set forth their grievances and confide their concerns to him. They understood that they could not do better than that. Everything was therefore submitted to his judgement; and the thing we cannot admire too much is that, among all the people between whom he had to pronounce, not one proved to be resistant. The angel of peace had spoken. No more murmuring, no more complaints. Even if the judgement was not favourable, it was seen as a grace. A wise accommodation was capable of sharing with a doubtful right, a decisive judgement confirmed a certain right. Charity offered up in sacrifice legitimate claims.

People left the tribunal as though from a religious service in which the ministry of the Lord himself had presided, and he had the consolation of seeing, before the end of the mission, unity and tranquillity re-established in a parish where he had found on his arrival an image only too like that of a civil war. The parish-priest himself, as docile towards his counsels as the least of his parishioners, continued with edification the first move he had made to give an example, attracted their trust, and never ceased for the rest of his life to edify them by his gentleness, his moderation, his piety, his zeal and vigilance.

This mission was followed by that in Courson. We can judge the fruits it produced no better than by the sentiments of attachment and veneration that the priest who called him for the salvation of his flock and his own sanctification, still manifests for M. de Montfort. He put his trust in him, and profited so well from the guidance of this great master, that he has never strayed from the path that he laid down for him. He used to speak often of him, and spoke only with heartfelt effusion and a joy that showed in his face. He could not stop saying that he owed so many thanks to God for having known him, for having had the advantage of having him in his home, and being able to study at close quarters such a perfect model.

120 - The Rule of the Company of Mary

When he had finished these two missions, M. de Montfort retired to his refuge in St Eloi, for he always had an ardent desire to go into this dear solitude whenever he was enabled to do so by the programme of his missions. To all appearances, it was during these little intervening retirements that he drew up the plan for his new Congre-

gation of missionaries. What is certain is that it was completed when at the end of June 1713 he left for Paris, as we shall see later on.

The dispositions of this project seem to us to be so wise and so perfect that we have thought that the reader will be quite happy for us to give here the details.

The work bears for title:

Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary

“The priests who enter the Company,” says the pious founder, “must be called by God to preach missions in the steps of the Apostles who were poor, and not be curates, parish priests, teachers in colleges or seminaries, as so many other good priests are, God having called them to this good work. They therefore avoid such work as being contrary to their missionary vocation so as to feel free at all times to repeat after Jesus Christ: *‘Evangelizare pauperibus misit me’* (Lk. 4:18), or, as the Apostle said: *‘Non enim misit me Christus baptizare, sed evangelizare’* (I Cor. 1:17).

“They will give all their missions in complete dependence on Providence and must not accept any endowment for future missions as do some communities of missionaries founded by the King or by private persons. There are four main reasons for this:

“1. It is the example which Jesus Christ, the apostles and apostolic men have handed down to us.

“2. God repays a hundredfold even in this world those who show charity to the missionaries and often (as experience proves) gives them the grace of conversion as a re-

ward for their alms-giving. '*Date, et dabitur vobis.*' (Lk. 6:38).

“3. This mutual charity brings with it its own recompense in the form of a wonderful unanimity of heart between the faithful and the missionaries. who are preaching to them. Charity begets charity.

“4. The grace of a mission thus founded on Providence and on complete dependence on the people (a state of affairs most repugnant to proud nature) is, by far, the most effective and powerful means of converting sinners. In endowed missions, the missionaries are set up by their independence on a kind of pedestal and this, while flattering their pride and heaping honour on them, does not win for them the love of their neighbour or the grace of God. Only those who have tried both these ways of giving missions can appreciate how true this is.

“It is strictly forbidden, either during the mission or afterwards, to ask anyone, directly or indirectly for money. They are not, however, forbidden to mention in public or in private their state of dependence on Providence and the rules they follow in this matter.

“Whenever possible, they travel to their missions on foot, following the example given by Jesus Christ and apostolic men. If, however, their health is poor or there are difficulties, they may have no qualms about accepting any help which God's providence may provide, either to move from one mission to another, or for the movement of their luggage.

“They must be without benefices, even simple ones. If any of them have them, they should give them up, according to the advice of a wise man, before being admitted as a member of the Company.

“So, free from every other occupation and unimpeded by the administration of any temporal possessions which might hold them back, they stand ready, like St. Paul, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier and other apostles, to run wherever God may call them. Whether the call be to the city or the country, to a market-town or village, to one diocese or another, near or far, they will always be ready to answer, when obedience calls: *‘Paratum cor meum, Deus... ecce adsum, ecce venio’*. Although they do not confine the grace of God or their own zeal to rural areas alone, they will nevertheless share in the most tender inclinations of the heart of Jesus, their model who said: ‘The Lord sent me to preach the good news to the poor’. Consequently, they will, in general, prefer rural areas to the towns and the poor to the rich.

“The Company has one house where the missionaries retire for the rest they take from time to time, following what Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, said to his Apostles: *‘Venit seorsum... et requiescite pusillum’* (Mk 6:31). During this time, they will apply themselves to study and prayer in order to perfect themselves more and more in the art of preaching and hearing confessions, and to call down the blessings of Heaven on themselves and on their ministry. And if some of them become, through age or infirmity, unable to help in the missions, they will there end their days in retirement and solitude. They have no money or possessions of their own. The house will supply all that is necessary in the way of food and clothing.

“Priests in poor health or old priests are not admitted since they are not able to fulfil the essential aim of the Institute, which is to work in the missions.

“They never accept the care of schoolchildren, or clerical or lay borders, even if they want to donate all they possess. Lay Brothers are, however, admitted into the Company to take care of temporal affairs provided they are de-

tached, robust and obedient and ready to do all they are told to do.

“The Superior is always chosen from within the Company, and all will obey him, both in matters concerning the allocation of work and the good order of the Company.

“If charity is the superior and the queen of the Company, who governs it with her golden sceptre, obedience is the foundation and unshakable support of all its holiness and of all the blessings which God confers through its ministry; and the missionaries should be so penetrated with esteem and love for this virtue that they will look upon formal or obdurate disobedience to a superior, even in unimportant things, as an offence which merits exclusion from the community.

“They will obey the bishop of the diocese in which they happen to be, and will act in agreement with the parish priest of the locality where they are giving the mission in all things which concern the external organization of the mission such as the place, the time and other such circumstances. These matters, of no great consequence in themselves, take on a very beneficial and important aspect when regulated by obedience.

“The purpose of their missions is to renew the spirit of Christianity among the faithful. Therefore, they will see to it that, as our Holy Father Pope Clement XI has commanded, the baptismal vows are renewed with the greatest solemnity. Only those who have seen the results of this practice can appreciate its value.

“Completely devoted to the Blessed Virgin, and relying on the protection of this Queen of Angels, they will draw everyone, as far as it lies within them, to her service, establishing with all the breadth of their zeal in the course of their missions the great devotion of her Holy Rosary. They will explain all its mysteries and virtues and the spirit

proper to each mystery, and the offerings of which it is composed, in their conferences, sermons and other instructions; and above all they will encourage and teach its practice among the faithful by their example in reciting every day the whole Rosary at three different times of the day, one chaplet in French at each service. This is one of the great secrets come down from heaven to water hearts with celestial dew, and make them bear the fruit of the word of God.”

Such is the plan for the Institute of M. de Montfort, or of the society of missionaries that he called at first the Company of Mary.

However, it was not enough for him to have drawn up on paper such a beautiful plan, so conformed to the apostolic spirit. The main thing was to put it into execution. God, who had inspired him with it, also enlightened him as to the suitable means to achieve it. The first that he made use of was to go and consult about it among his old friends, the directors of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris, with whom he had always maintained the close relationship that he had enjoyed with M. Desplaces.

121 - The Mission at La Séguinière

He had decided to make this journey, but before undertaking it he could not refuse the pressing invitations of M. Kentin¹², the parish-priest of La Séguinière who, for some time, had been pressing him to come to his help in a parish where, despite his zeal and vigilance, there remained much good to be done and much evil to be destroyed. This worthy pastor was convinced as well that,

¹² The parish-priest's name was actually Peter Keating, an Irishman.

despite the assiduous work of a parish-priest and a curate, in a large parish a mission is always useful and often necessary. The word of God always proclaimed by the same minister no longer has the same attraction for the people, and the vigour with which it is proclaimed to them is not what contributes most to getting them to listen with enthusiasm. A priest will attract the crowd first of all by his fervent manner and his talents. Then no matter how he surpasses himself in varying his discourses, he will have a hard time reviving the charm of novelty. It is always the same man who is speaking. He makes no more than weak impressions. If his morality is severe, they will be persuaded that it is proper to him. Even the regularity of his life will aid that conclusion; they will want to hear another prophet; but they are rare, and duty obliges them to stick with this one. It is up to him to go along with the desires of his people and obtain for them someone sent by God who, preaching the same Gospel, will confirm what he has preached himself, and work his way deeper into these desires by a new manner of exhorting and instructing. The exercise of his ministry in the confessional will cause him to feel even more strongly the need for outside help. He will fear that the vehemence with which he has spoken against the vices may have inspired too much timidity and lessened people's freedom to make them known to him. He knows that, obliged as he is to live in a close relationship with his parishioners and to know them all, reasons of prudence and sometimes a real necessity can cause them to seek out someone unknown, and finally that there are certain enormous sins that they will speak about with more confidence to a priest that they have never seen and that, perhaps, they will never see again.

The wise pastor, affected by all these motives, wanted a mission just as much as others, for quite contrary motives, avoid having one, most of all because they know well that the general reform that normally follows this holy work must begin with themselves, as well as being unable to put up with the vision of their sheep having a docility towards and a confidence in another, when they have not made themselves worthy of the same.

The news that spread around the area that a mission was going to be given at La Séguinière meant that at its opening there was an extraordinary gathering of people from all the neighbouring areas. And what followed corresponded with the beginning. Never was there a mission better attended nor more edifying. There were a prodigious number of conversions during it. Several of these were striking, or rather it was the case that, for everyone, being a penitent and appearing so were the same thing. Finally it was the occasion of a universal renewal throughout the whole parish, and the pastor had the consolation of seeing, in the space of a few short weeks, laxity give way to fervour, scandals to good example, and superstition to enlightened piety.

But what completed his joy, and what was at the same time his claim to fame, was the long persistence of these fruits of the mission. He cultivated them with the same zeal that had brought them about, and did so with such success that, eight or nine years later, finding himself in Angers with M. Grandet who was then working on his life of M. de Montfort, he assured him that his parish had preserved all the fervour in which M. de Montfort had left it; and that the Rosary was recited every day in the church with a great gathering of people, and three

times on Sundays and Feast days, one at the end of the first Mass, another after midday and the third after Vespers. He added that he did not believe there was a single house in the parish where each one did not recite it in private or in common. We have often remarked that M. de Montfort had not found any surer means for confirming the people in the sentiments of piety inspired by a mission than getting them to recite this prayer, so holy, so highly recommended and so salutary, every day. In fact, it is scarcely possible that someone who is faithful in offering this tribute of praise every day to Jesus Christ and his divine Mother, should not have ever in mind the motives that brought him to make such a resolution, and should not at the same time remind himself or herself of the great truths which then made such an impression in his or her mind. So this prayer is at one and the same time both a kind of on-going meditation on what they have heard, and an ever-flowing spring from which they draw the most special graces to enable them not to stray from the good path on which they have had the good fortune to enter. When the parish-priests, who do us the honour of calling us to their parishes, take on the task of upholding this pious practice, there is little more for them to do so as to reap for a long time the fruits of their zeal and of our work.

What M. de Montfort had to cope with during the mission in La Séguinière reduced him to such weakness that he was afraid that he would not be able to complete the final week. However, God supported him and he did not give up any of the exercises. He did not want, even, when the mission was finished, to accept the invitations of the parish-priest who was pressing him to stay with him to take some rest, nor to accept the offer of Mesde-

moiselles de Beauveau, the sisters of the Bishop of Nantes, to come and relax at the Château de la Treille. He was too concerned with his journey to Paris and the reason he was undertaking it. Courage brought him strength.

122 - Journey to Paris

He set out on foot, for he never travelled in any other way, even on the longest and most painful journeys. He went by way of Angers and arrived in quite good health in Paris. One of his first visits was to the Community of the Holy Spirit. This community was already numerous and brought together excellent subjects from various countries who distinguished themselves by their piety and knowledge. He found these gentlemen gathered together for recreation, After greeting them all in general, they were quite surprised to see him go and select and embrace a young seminarian who did not in any way expect this distinction but who, without knowing what he should attribute it to, was not insensible to it; but, while he was taking satisfaction from it interiorly, the holy priest said out loud: "I thought I must show this mark of friendship to this young man because he was the most poorly dressed of the whole company, and because the livery of poverty, wherever it is found, deserves special regard." Everyone was extremely edified by this pious sally, and so ingenuous a declaration, which the young man had not expected, served as a remedy for the little swelling of his heart that he had experienced at first, and became a very useful lesson, as much for him (who recounted the tale himself) as for the whole company.

However it was not there that M. de Montfort experienced one of those humiliations that would have de-

lighted him and that he would have regarded as the happiest encounter. He would have to suffer many more striking ones of a quite different sort. He found them in Paris as elsewhere, or rather he found in Paris more than anywhere else what would satisfy his taste for insults and crosses. All that had been said of him in the provinces had been repeated and exaggerated in the capital. Thousands of supposed or veiled facts, thousands of ridiculous stories about him, were believed there. He had even been painted in the darkest colours there. The pious inventions of his zeal had been recounted as extravagant farces. His most innocent actions had been misrepresented to the point of making them pass for scandalous excesses, and his calumniators spoke assuredly of things with such firmness that the least credulous were disposed to believe them. He witnessed the prejudice against him reaching even his friends, and hardly any friends remained for him except among the friends of the Cross. So it was among them that he went, not at all to unburden his heart, but to proclaim his joy when he experienced some of those crosses that are more burdensome for nature, that he called weighty crosses. He invited them to rejoice with him, to give glory to God and to join their acts of thanksgiving with those that he never ceased to offer himself. This was the normal burden of his conversations with several holy people that he knew to be led by the same paths as himself, and whose acquaintanceship he sought.

One of those with whom he formed a closer relationship of confidence and piety, was Mademoiselle de la Vieuville. This holy woman, who seemed to have lived for eighty-six years only to be the longer the good odour of Jesus Christ in the monastery of Perpetual Adoration, was the disciple as well as the niece of Madame de Bar,

known as Sister Mectilde of the Blessed Sacrament, the foundress of this religious institute. Formed in such a good school, she had made great progress in the ways of perfection and above all in the love of Jesus Christ and his Cross. She had a particular talent for engaging in and sustaining a spiritual conversation, and spoke of God like an angel. As soon as she got to know M. de Montfort, she discovered such a great similarity between the sentiments of this man of God and her own on the subject of crosses that she could speak of nothing else with him. It was he to whom she spoke most effusively of the happiness and the advantages of crosses. The holy priest spoke of them above all with such overwhelming desire to have them that he was, according to the testimony of Mademoiselle de la Vieuville, so desperately in love with crosses and humiliations that he often obliged her to beg, with him and for him, for the gratification of his desires. It would have made a most edifying spectacle for a third person, if that person happened to be at the grill, to see them on their knees, each on their own side, making prayers to God so different from those that are commonly made as a sign of friendship. The pious woman, so docile in entering into the views of M. de Montfort, had every reason to think that she had been heard in the prayers she offered for him. He continued to be humiliated and persecuted. Crosses seemed to spring up under his footsteps and to await him wherever he went. This is how he himself speaks of this in a letter that he wrote to his sister who was a religious in Rambervilliers on 15 August 1713.

“May Jesus and his Cross reign forever!

“If only you knew the half of the crosses and humiliations I have to bear, I don’t think you would be

so eager to see me; for I never seem to go anywhere without bringing something of the Cross to my dearest friends without any fault of mine or theirs. Those who befriend me or support me suffer for doing so, and sometimes draw down upon themselves the wrath of the devil I am fighting against, as well as the world I am protesting against and the flesh I am chastising. This veritable ants' nest of sinners against whom my preaching is directed cannot leave me or my friends in peace. I have forever to be on the alert, treading warily as though on thorns or sharp stones. I am like a ball in a game of tennis; no sooner am I hurled to one side than I am sent back to the other, and the players strike me hard.

“However, my dear sister, thank God for me for I am content and happy in all my troubles. I think there is nothing in the whole world so welcome as the most bitter cross, when it is steeped in the blood of Christ crucified and in the milk of his holy Mother...”

It seems from this letter that not all the friends of the servant of God had abandoned him. The directors of the Holy Spirit Seminary were among those who remained constantly attached to him. Owing their establishment to the late M. Desplaces, his friend, they always had retained for him the esteem and friendship that this illustrious dead man had professed for him until the end. These sentiments became, as it were, hereditary; they did not hide them and, though they could not approve, like many other highly virtuous people, some of the extraordinary actions of the venerable and worthy priest, at least they had the wisdom and discretion not to blame him for them and, looking to the source from which they flowed, they

recognised in them a pure intention, an ardent zeal, an evangelical simplicity, a sovereign mistrust of the world, and a complete emancipation from all human respect. And it was not at all in a fear of straying from the rules of charity that they presumed him to be animated by the spirit of God; the proofs of this were only too obvious. Obedience and humility are the mark by which one can tell for sure works which are genuinely holy from those that merely appear to be so. These two virtues were apparent in a very obvious way in all the actions of M. de Montfort. They were, as it were, the soul and the motor of them. You could see him always blindly obedient to the most rigorous orders and the least expected, and perhaps he would never have drawn these upon himself if the desire to be humiliated and despised had not made him too inattentive to certain considerations which are not in any way opposed to zeal and Gospel liberty. Finally, the virtuous friends that prejudice could not string along, saw in him only what had been admired in those great men whose memory was quite recent and whom he had taken for models, a Father Eudes, a Father Honoré, a M. Bourdoise, a M. de Nobletz, and M. Desplaces himself, their founder and father. So it was in the light of this mutual exchange of friendship, trust and reciprocal esteem, that he opened his heart to them concerning the idea he had come up with of forming a Company of missionaries, uniquely dedicated to giving missions and detached from all other concerns than the acquisition of knowledge and attending to the exercises of piety proper to their state. He shared with them his plan and gave them a reading of the rule that he had drawn up for those of their students and others who might wish to join him in entering upon the same career. Everyone applauded his

plan, and the directors promised him they would play their part effectively in it by training subjects capable of supporting and perpetuating this good work. As a consequence of this declaration, which both sides considered as a kind of treaty, he immediately wrote at the head of his Rule these words which were like a formula for it: "There is a seminary in Paris, that of the Holy Spirit, where young clerical students who are called to the missions in the Company of Mary receive academic and spiritual training to prepare them to become members." And to better inculcate the memory of this in the minds of its readers, he wrote these words a second time in the body of the work. And he did not stop there. He wished to perpetuate this happy and holy association with a public and sacred monument. He had a wooden image of the Blessed Virgin made, decorated with paintings, about a foot and a half in height. She was clothed in a cloak which was open at the sides in the form of a fan, in the shade of which there were twelve little images of priests—six on each side—who, with hands joined and eyes fixed on their good Mother, seemed to be congratulating themselves on being admitted into her Company. Dilapidation and the re-arrangement that it has been necessary to make in the house since that time, have meant that the twelve figures are no longer to be found in their same place, but the image of the Blessed Virgin is still decently placed in a room of the house, where the directors and their students never fail, every day, to go down on their knees before her and greet her saying an *Ave Maria*, the *Sub tuum præsidium*, etc..., either after prayers or whenever they go into town or return from there.

Such was the origin of the intimate union that exists between the men of the community of the Holy Spirit and

the missionaries of Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. It is in order to fulfil the voluntary commitments of this most holy alliance that the disciples of M. Desplaces see it as their duty to send some of their young students to the establishment of M. de Montfort, when they find some who have the vocation to become members. And as this fraternal relationship began under the auspices of the Queen of Heaven, those who come to belong to the new Company are soon at home with the pious practices by which it glories in being totally dedicated to her, and which serve to nourish the zeal with which it is animated to maintain her cult, defend her privileges, especially that of her Immaculate Conception, win all hearts for her, and bring the whole world, if possible, into her service.

A friendship so solidly established has never altered. It has been cultivated on both sides. On both sides there are the same views, the same sentiments, the same zeal, the same spirit of poverty and abandonment to divine Providence, and the same ardour for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The first ones inspired by the touching exhortations of M. de Montfort with the idea of devoting themselves to the work of missions were Messieurs Thomas, Vatel, Hédan and Le Vallois. M. Vatel, however, was the only one to work in the missions during the lifetime of the servant of God. The other three did not have the advantage of having him for master and guide, and came only after his death; but the vocation of M. Le Vallois is something so remarkable that we believe we must make special mention here of this worthy missionary.

123 - The vocation of M. Le Vallois

M. Jacques Le Vallois was born in La Haye-Belfond in the diocese of Coutances on 6 October 1690. As soon as he was capable of learning the first principles of the Latin language, he was sent to college, where his application to studies was ever in line with the innocence of his morals. Having completed his humanities, M. Vatel, his friend and neighbour, who was already at the Holy Spirit Seminary, enticed him there. Fervour reigned, as it always has reigned, in this establishment. M. Le Vallois found there great examples, and soon became himself an excellent model. There was manifested in him a certain quality of liveliness and fervour that distinguished him from the others, even when he seemed to do nothing more than they. He was appointed prefect, even though he had not yet been a year in the community. His humility caused him to be alarmed by this. However, he obeyed, and his good conduct in this task, that is as broad as it is difficult, justified the choice that the superior had made of him. The most rigorous abstinence and penances of all sorts, that he carried to a pious excess, would soon have affected his health and temperament, if limits had not been placed on them. However, they allowed him enough of them to crucify nature, for the eight years that he was to spend at the seminary. The superiors let him continue as prefect of the house all this time, which says more to his credit than we might be able to say. He had been scarcely two years in Paris when M. de Montfort appeared there in 1713. It was during the meeting he had with the community that they began to know one another. As his conversation, as gay as it was edifying, always gathered the majority of the seminary around him during recreations, the

young Le Vallois was always the one who sought to get nearest to him. He listened attentively to all the words coming from his mouth, and from that time on he regarded him as a saint. He said to himself: "Here is a saint; here is one whose life-story will be written, like that of M. Le Nobletz that we are reading at present in the refectory." These were his own words. One day, the man of God, who was trying to gain followers, seeing himself surrounded by all these pious youths, said to them all: "On which of you am I going to put my curse?" Then, turning slowly around among them, and fixing his eyes on them all one after the other, as though he wanted to read it in their eyes and their hearts, he grabbed the hat of the prefect, put his own flat hat in its place, and said: "This is the one; it is good, it belongs to me, and I will have it." M. Le Vallois thought that he was only speaking of his hat, which was new. But it was not long before he was undeceived and came to realise that it was a question of his person. In fact, a moment later he felt a very strong desire to join him. He made plans to do so, but without letting it be seen, because he wanted, he said to himself, to finish his studies. So he remained at the seminary for almost another seven years, to form himself more and more for the ministry of the Gospel. We will see later how he responded to his vocation.

124 - M. Caris and the missions

Even though the directors of the community of the Holy Spirit were at that time just enough in the way of priests to fulfil their tasks and run the house, the desire they had to oblige M. de Montfort by seconding his zeal, brought them to make several sacrifices for him, and they decided to let one of their number go to accompany him in his

apostolic journeys, while waiting for the time when they should have trained subjects for him. M. Caris was the one among them who showed the greatest enthusiasm to follow the holy man. Not content with training missionaries, he wanted to become a missionary himself, and he worked so hard on this that the lot fell upon him. From that moment on, which seemed the happiest of his life, he dreamed only of preparing himself for the missions. The day of his departure was fixed; with his white staff in his hand and his breviary under his arm, he was going to say his farewells, when the Superior, who had not slept all night, stopped him and said that in truth, he had no doubt whatever that he would do a great deal of good in the missions, but that he was persuaded that he would do even more in the community; that he could not let him go; and that, in a word, he was withdrawing the consent he had given. Such a sudden change, that was so unexpected, was like a thunderbolt to him. But he submitted, and since then they have had all the time needed to be persuaded that the superior's opposition was truly founded on the need the house had of M. Caris. The extraordinary success with which he governed its temporal affairs for more than fifty years, and the blessings that God bestowed on his economy are proof that it was reserved to him to be its support, its bread-winning father, and to act in its regard like a wise minister of Providence in the various trials it has had to undergo. The house has not ceased and still does not cease to bless the moment when obedience overcame his zeal. As for him, he consoled himself for not having been able to be a disciple of M. de Montfort, only by his efforts to gain disciples for him. This is how he put it himself to the subjects he sent to his community:

“You are fortunate, my child,” he said to one of them, “and I envy your lot. If only I were allowed to leave with you, or to go in your place! I have always yearned for this holy mission. I have often begged for it. I was even chosen to go, and was on the point of departure when my sins got in the way.”

He said the same thing to another who consulted him. “Go, my dear child, leave without delay for Poitou; you will do much good there. Go and take my place; for I was due to go. With my breviary already under my arm and my staff in my hand, I was leaving to go with M. de Montfort, when my Superior cut me short. It is only obedience that has always kept me here, and that still keeps me here.”

In this way he encouraged them all. He died as he had lived on 21 June 1757. People had always remarked in him the most perfect submission to the orders of divine Providence. And he preserved this right to the end. He never showed such a smiling and tranquil face as in the last days of his life. He passed these in the sweetest encounters with God, ceaselessly proclaiming passages from the Scriptures, and especially the psalms. This is the epitaph dedicated to his memory:

*Hic jacet Petrus Caris
Pauper Sacerdos servus Mariae hujus seminarii
procurator. Deo et proximo vixit: numquam sibi.
Obiit 21 a junii 1757
Ora. Imitare.*

So M. de Montfort left Paris without taking with him any missionaries from the community of the Holy Spirit. But, apart from M. Vatel who had the advantage of work-

ing with him, it trained for him some excellent missionaries who were associated with his missions after his death. M. Boüic, superior of the house, did not wish to let him leave without receiving from his hand something that would recall his memory, through the great impression he had formed of his virtue. "I asked him," he told me himself, "for some sign of his friendship. He presented me with a small crucifix, the length of my finger, saying to me: 'This is the most precious thing I have in the world; I give it to you.'" And M. Boüic added that this little crucifix was quite worn away by the frequent use M. de Montfort made of it, to kiss it.

125 - Other works of M. de Montfort in Paris

The zeal of the servant of God, any more than his reputation for sanctity, were not confined to the house of the Holy Spirit alone. A very virtuous priest who was always closely united with him in friendship, and who happened to be in Paris at the same time, told me what you are about to read. I am simply copying it word for word: "Never was there a man who was a more faithful disciple of St Dominic on the devotion of the Rosary than M. de Montfort. He recommended its practice to everyone, and he had himself confided in some of friends that he had obtained from God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the conversion of the most obstinate sinners. He had a book telling of the marvels of the holy Rosary. He explained these with such a fervent manner that everyone was charmed by it. I believe that he got more than a hundred thousand people to commit themselves to it. For myself, I was witness to the fact that,

having come to Paris, he got three communities, as well as a prodigious number of people of the world, and even those of the highest rank, among others a distinguished cleric and doctor of the Sorbonne, to say the Rosary every day. I would never be finished if I tried to recount all the trouble he took on this topic.”

Though he had decided to leave Paris immediately to return to La Rochelle, he could not refuse the entreaties of the religious of the *Ave Maria* to give them a retreat. He agreed to their request with so much more zeal as it was a question of developing the ways of perfection for virgins consecrated to Jesus Christ under the auspices of his divine Mother. He had no doubts that the Word of God would bear fruit in this blessed soil. They, for their part, encouraged by his reputation for sanctity and for devotion to the Blessed Virgin, manifested a very strong desire to hear him. Their expectations were fulfilled on both sides, with reciprocal satisfaction. It is true that some of these good women, who knew of M. de Montfort only by what they had heard tell of the austerity of his life and of his thunderous preaching, were afraid at first that he would trouble their consciences, and they hesitated to speak to him of their interior life; but they were soon put at their ease. They saw that there was nothing outlandish in his discourses; that he preached the great truths without introducing anything that is foreign to what the faith obliges us to believe; that he spoke of God’s justice in a manner most apt to inspire fear, but did not forget to make them feel, through the most touching expressions, the infinite extent of his mercies; that it was very necessary that his exhortations should be proportioned to the needs and characters of the people he was addressing, since he spoke to them only of what was fit-

ting to their situation; that he even seemed to discern their most intimate sentiments, and to read the depths of their souls better than they themselves; that the word of God in his mouth was a heavenly manna suited to all tastes; that, following the example of St Paul, he spoke only of wisdom with those who were perfect (1 Cor 2:6), and that if sometimes, like this same apostle, he seemed less reserved and less wise, he was forced into this by the necessity of the situation, and his reproaches should only fall on those that he had to correct and instruct (2 Cor 12:11). They could see that his moral teaching was neither lax nor too strict; that in truth he was very exact, but his bent was rather towards clemency; that after having scared the sinner in the pulpit, he was able to console the same in the tribunal of reconciliation, to sympathise with their weakness and lead them back to their duties, less by impressing fear than by the attraction of his charm and gentleness. The first ones who consulted him soon spread the word throughout the whole community. His reputation and a pious curiosity had prepared the way for the efficaciousness of his discourses. Confidence added weight to them. They listened to him as one sent by God; the decisions he made brought peace of conscience or brought about reform, and the retreat had as much success as could have been hoped for.

It only remained for the religious to manifest their gratitude towards the pious missionary. They knew his disinterestedness; but in the end they did not want the trouble he had taken for them to go without its reward. Their problem was in imagining what they might give him, and opinions differed. They knew that a pious person having had a soutane made for him, he had exchanged it, with a poor priest, for one that was old and

patched, saying that a new soutane suited this priest better than him. They knew, too, that on another occasion, having received a hat, he had given it to a poor lad and taken his; and that in 1704, when he was to leave Paris, he had been given ten écus for his journey, which he had immediately made over to a poor gentleman, wanting to retain for himself no other resource than the funds of Providence. So they were afraid that his charity would deprive him pretty quickly of the gift that they were thinking of giving him. Each of them gave their opinion, but the difficulty still remained. One of them hit upon an expedient, and said that they would have to give to the holy priest something that would be so in line with his own situation and so useful to him that they could be, as it were, assured that he would not defer; and to this end they had only to make him a vestment for the celebration of Holy Mass. This idea seemed to them to be a good one, and they immediately set about the work. Each of them was keen to work at it, as they sought to use their talents for the minister of Jesus Christ. The vestment was soon brought to perfection, and the holy man accepted it, and it was the one he used for the rest of his life in the course of his missions.

We have said that Madame de Mailly, whom he had converted in La Rochelle, had retired to Paris. She had the consolation of seeing him there, and was witness to an event quite suited to confirming her in the faith he had led her to and to increasing the profound veneration that she had for his person. One day when he was leaving after saying Mass at the house of the religious of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a woman from the Saint-Germain faubourg, who had come there, drawn by his reputation for sanctity, left after him and followed

him into the street. She had one of her children by the hand whose head was being eaten away by ringworm, which had already caused a considerable wound. Having no longer any idea what remedy to apply, she addressed herself to the holy priest, completely grief-stricken, begging him to have the goodness to intercede before God for the healing of her son. He stopped and said to her: "Do you believe that Jesus Christ's ministers have the power to cure, in the name of their Master, the various sicknesses and to impose hands?" - "Yes, Monsieur," replied this woman, "I do believe it, and am persuaded that if you ask God for his healing, it will be granted to you." Instantly M. de Montfort laid his hands on the head of the child and said: "May the Lord heal you, and reward in you the faith of your mother." Instantly the ringworm dried up, fell off, and the child was completely cured. After this M. de Montfort made a prompt getaway, so as to avoid the demonstrations of respect and veneration that this marvellous action would have drawn upon him.

He did not delay any further his plans for leaving Paris, where he had spent more than two months, and had finished the business for which he had gone there, namely his agreement with the superiors of the Holy Spirit to gain missionaries.

