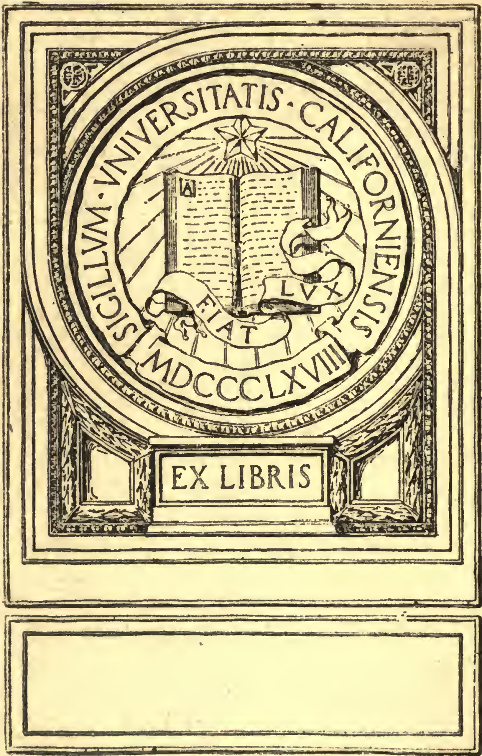
THE BLIND SISTERS OF SAINT PAUL

MAURICE DE LA SIZERANNE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Maurice de la Sizeranne
(reproduced from a hitherto unpublished portrait)

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Walter L. Colls, Ph. Sc.

THE BLIND SISTERS OF SAINT PAUL

By
MAURICE DE LA SIZERANNE

Authorized Translation
By L. M. LEGGATT

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THOSE who are, even through the medium of a translation, about to follow Monsieur de la Sizeranne's scholarly and sympathetic pages would need no preface in the usual sense of the word, were it not for the special circumstances of the Author. Maurice de la Sizeranne, born in 1857, elder brother of Robert de la Sizeranne, known by his study of Ruskin ("La Religion de la Beauté"), became blind in 1866. In 1889 he founded the Valentin Haüy Association for the welfare of the blind, of which he is Chief Secretary. He directs two papers, the "Valentin Haüy" and the "Louis Braille," and his principal work, "Les Aveugles par un Aveugle," was crowned by the French Academy. His earlier book, "Impressions et Souvenirs d'un Aveugle," is preceded by a preface from the pen of no less a personage than François Coppée, but I believe it is my privilege to be the first to introduce "The Blind Nuns of St Paul" to English readers, or indeed to many English Catholics. The latter will rejoice to hear that, as the community does not belong to a teaching Order, but ranks as a "Congrégation Hospitalière," it has received authorization. Should, however, any further development of ecclesiastical affairs in France dissolve the Community, the next scene of their labours would certainly be our own dear England. The present Superior, who according to the Constitutions is never chosen from among the blind, is an Irish lady. It only remains for me to beg

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the indulgence of those who, being debarred from reading Monsieur de la Sizeranne's beautiful pages in the original, must fain be content with a more or less inadequate echo. Perhaps this will merge criticism in gratitude.

Sutton, April, 1907. L. M. LEGGATT

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE hitherto practically unknown community of the Blind Nuns of St Paul deserves wider fame. It is sufficiently attractive to study the religious congregations of our time from a psychological and social point of view, since we can thus analyse and classify many needs of the present day, the spirit of self-sacrifice and those forms of physical or moral indigence differing so widely from those which a gift can relieve. But is not a still keener interest aroused when it is a question of nuns whose blindness places them under such special conditions? In this community all the sisters are not blind or threatened with blindness; there are many nuns with perfect eyesight; still the name of "Blind Sisters of St Paul" was given to the Congregation to emphasize the fact that it was founded for the blind and is their true home. Before penetrating into the convent, or describing the origin, the charitable aims or the future of the Congregation, it seems indispensable—though we must not overlook the problem of the blind girl's vocation, or the type of abnegation which leads a woman with eyesight to live in the midst of the blind—to speak, even at great length, of blindness in woman. It is necessary to analyse the impressions she receives from things and from people, and to discuss what her place in a home can be. Can she be useful or active? Can she love and be loved? Finally, what is to be her physical or mental share of life? These questions, though preliminary, never-

theless demand wide development, given the fact of how little we realize the real physical and moral condition of the blind. In the first part of this book, therefore, I have endeavoured to portray the sensations of blind women, and how they feel, live and act; I have quoted as much as possible from their own words, to give a sincere test of their impressions. I have also quoted largely from writers who appear unconsciously to have recorded purely tactile and oral impressions; so as to show that the "contact of the blind with nature" is not chimerical, since these perceptions and sensations which I claim for them have been felt and expressed by certain well-known and appreciated writers. It is, therefore, quite intentionally that I have multiplied quotations in this book, in spite of the disadvantages of such a method. I would add that it is always a pleasure to come across pages of charming writing, and if these extracts induce the reader to finish the book, he cannot blame me. Such is this modest work, and in spite of its want of cohesion—not to mention other defects—it seemed to me that its subject might interest philanthropists and students of psychology.

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PART THE FIRST

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BLIND WOMEN

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THE BLIND SISTERS OF SAINT PAUL

PART THE FIRST

BOOK I. Suggestions, Sensations and Impressions

HAS anyone ever wondered what passes in the heart and mind of a blind girl of twenty who enters a convent? It is unlikely, since it would seem that a young girl deprived of sight knows nothing of what makes the tangible charm of life, or even its moral worth, and she offers to others none of the charms of her age. She has nothing to lose, since she has nothing to give; her entry into religion is therefore an insignificant step.

Instead of the convent gates closing on a rich flower of promise and enchantment, they shut in a frigid and mournful creature who cannot offer life or perfume to almighty God. Beauty she rarely possesses. The hope of marriage she must lay down, for who could love a blind woman? Liberty?—the word is vain irony in her case—what can it matter whether she vegetate in the cloister or elsewhere? To one in darkness are not all places alike? This kind of reasoning is due to the preponderance of visual impressions over all others in daily life. Facts are so quickly and so easily acquired through the eyes that they absorb all our attention; we accustom ourselves to trust only to what we see, neglecting those impressions which are less attractive to the mind and also less convenient in ordinary life, but which, nevertheless,

although they are quite useful in practical ways, are penetrating and suggestive. We must not forget that in many cases the eye only beholds the outward symbol of things in a rapid and superficial survey. On the Resurrection morning, in the dew-drenched, spring-scented garden of Arimathea, Mary Magdalen was mournfully carrying a vase of perfumes to what she believed to be the grave of the Eternal Beloved. She saw a figure, looked again, but did not recognize Him. Her Lord had to speak and call her once more in that beloved voice, "Mary!" before she could fall at the feet of Jesus, and kiss them, touch them. Oh no! sight is not everything. It behoves us, then, to define and analyse the impressions which a blind girl can receive in her contact with things and individuals, that is to say, the impressions which she can receive from nature in the first instance, and secondly from her fellow creatures.

I. Contact with Nature

THE poetical, magnetic soul of a girl of twenty is not numbed because she is deprived of eyesight. Sight is not indispensable for us to feel ourselves in contact and communion with creation. The phenomena of nature take in the whole being; the great magnetism and enchantment of life penetrate to the soul through all its avenues; the mysterious emanations of a spring morning, the teeming vigour of a radiant summer's evening, the melancholy of some afternoon in autumn, the mournful peace of calm days in winter do not only appeal to the eye.*

The air, the vagrant breeze which we can smell and feel over our faces, has an acute savour and an intensity which vary according to the hour and the season; this difference is naturally more noticeable in fields and woods than in a walled-in street, and on a day typical of the time of year than in uncertain weather. The air is almost always saturated with scents; those of May are not those of October. The damp earth of spring sowings does not give out the same smell when turned, as in autumn when mixed with dead leaves; June and

* "The night before, storm clouds, following each other from dawn till evening over the sea, had passed over the country, and like empty grain sacks had poured their contents over the dry earth. Quantities of leaves had fallen, especially from the higher branches; others still hung heavily to the twigs. The scent of wet woods rose towards the tranquil, milky sky. No wind stirred; no bird sang; the landscape seemed listening to the last drops, formed in the night, which fell at the foot of the trees with a metallic sound. On Challans hills, all over the distant Fromentière the creaking of a far-off plough and the cries of cattle drovers announced the beginning of autumn labour.—René Bazin, "La Terre qui meurt."

September hay perfume the air quite differently from July harvests; the evening threshings of August give out a warm, sweet smell of grain, and suggest a sense of abundance, peace and prosperity. Even in a town there are marked differences: in summer doors and windows are open, and the temperature being lower indoors than out, air flows from the house to the street, and, so to speak, carries with it the odours of humanity. The moving heat develops the aroma of clothes worn by people we meet, the streets in winter are quite different in an olfactory sense to what they are in summer. It is a mistake to think that the "sun is always the sun"; bright and stimulating spring sunshine does not have the same effect on the skin as the heavy perpendicular rays of July; the still warm sun of October does not produce the same tangible sensation as the oblique and watery beams of December.

In winter the atmosphere is opaque, metallic and heavy. In spring the general rise of sap affects all nature, the air reaches us laden with the heady scents of grass, young leaves, newly-turned earth; it is fresh, light, fluid; impregnated with the smell of new buds. "Spring is everywhere," writes a blind woman in April; "the air is full of vague, indefinite scents, sap is oozing everywhere, peach trees are in bloom, little spring flowers gem the woods; despite the heavy layer of dry leaves that are crushed with a sound of rustling silk. And the birds! there are quantities here; from my window I can hear the crisp little trills of the chaffinch."

Summer is quite different—except on certain exceptional mornings when there seems a kind of returning memory of spring but without much of its charm, the atmosphere is usually burning or

heavy and dust-laden, and if, by accident, or in a mountainous district, the breeze is keener and fresher, it is generally scentless. It may carry some odour, but it will be that of full-blown flowers which spend their last treasures in their maturity. The promise and charm of sap are absent. "You can't think how lovely it feels," writes the same blind woman in June, "the drowsiness of summer makes one dream: hum of insects, penetrating scent of lime trees and sun-warmed roses, all is so different to spring, you can feel that Nature begins to be exhausted by her long blossoming time."

Surroundings, no less than seasons, alter the atmosphere. The sea breeze, damp, keen and salt, differs completely from the dry cutting blast from a glacier, or the more or less oozy and fishy emanations which we inhale near large pieces of fresh water. The wind of the meadows is not that of the cornfield. The south and north winds have each their definite characteristics: we cannot, by smell or touch, confuse the hot whirlwind of the equinox with the sleety snowstorms of midwinter. Let us recall the lines of Michelet and Lamartine; real nature lovers, they did not limit themselves to only describing what they saw:

"The two semicircular bays of Royan and St Georges, with their fine sands, provide the most delightful walking for tender feet. One can go on endlessly without fatigue in the scent of the pine trees, which brighten the cliffs with their fresh verdure. The beautiful promontories which separate the two beaches, and the inland moors send out their wholesome emanations from afar. The prevailing fragrance on the cliffs is almost medicinal, the honey of the immortelles seems to blend

and concentrate with the sun and heat from the sand. On the moors grow keen-smelling plants, which seem to revive the spirits and clear the brain. Wild thyme, clover, the voluptuous marjoram, sage prized of our forefathers for its great virtues, mint hot as pepper, and above all the tiny wild pink, give out all the spices of the East. Though it was October, the moor had all its mild scents, and they seemed to me at whiles more penetrating than ever. From the shore, as yet calm, a soft, warm air blew on my face, and no less gently did the treacherous sea caress my feet. I was not deceived, and I guessed what both wind and wave had in store for me. . . . We hear and guess the presence of the mighty sea before we catch a glimpse of it. First comes the distant, muffled, monotonous sound; gradually it dominates all others. Soon we discern the solemn rhythm, the deep, strong note, ever louder and more menacing—the oscillation of a clock is not more even, as it registers the hours. But here the pendulum does not swing with the monotony of mechanism. We feel the vibrating echo of life. And when the tide is high, and the immense flashing waves rise over each other, we can hear, through the stormy rushing of the waters, the sound of shells and thousands of living organisms which the sea brings with her. As the tide turns, the sand goes seething back with all the multitudes that had faithfully followed the sea to return again into her bosom.

"Many other voices has she! If she be ever so little roused, her wails and sighs contrast with the mournful silence of the shore. The earth seems to pause and listen to the threat of the sea, which yesterday was so smiling and so smooth. What will the sea say? I will not prophesy. I will not speak

here of the awful concert she perhaps will give, of her duets with rocks, of the deep thunders she sends echoing through caverns, or of those alarming sounds which seem to cry, 'Help! help!' No, let us think of her on her days of peace, when she is strong without violence."*

"The sun had absorbed all moisture from the earth. The mountain tops swam in summer air. A soft melodious Mediterranean south wind, gentle precursor of the equinox, blew from the Rhone valley. The blue waves of the sea of Syria alternately whispered and crashed as they frothed over the feet of Lebanon. I knew that the wind really came from there; only a few hours before it had rustled among the cedars and moaned among the palm trees. I fancied I could still hear, even without the illusion of the ear, among its hot blasts the flapping of great sails, the pitching of ships on high waves, the boiling foam dripping from the prow like water hissing on hot iron when the prow rises out of the sea, the shrill whistling when a cape is doubled, the noise of ripples along the vessel's side, and the muffled, hollow strokes of the boat's keel, when the fisherman makes fast on the perilous coast of Sidon.

"I sat down for a moment on the root of a chestnut tree, my face towards my empty dwelling. The south wind had grown stronger as the sun rose higher in the heavens; it blew in dry, stormy gusts. Since the sun had begun to sink, the sky was like crystal. The wind drew from the woods, the rocks and even the grass, harmonies which seemed mingled of sad and joyful notes, embraces and farewells, terror and bliss; it piled up whirling masses of dead leaves, and then let them fall and lie in

* Michelet, "La Mer."

glistening heaps on the ground. This wind had caresses in its breath, warmth, love, melancholy and those scents which dilate the lungs, ravish even the ears, and send through every pore the strength, the life, the youth of a pure element. It seemed to come at once from heaven, from earth, from the woods, from plants, from the windows of the distant house, from the fireside of infancy, from my sister's lips, my father's broad chest, my mother's yet warm heart, to greet me and kiss me on lip and cheek. It made the damp hair of my temples flutter under my hat-brim with thrills as delicious as had ever stirred my golden curls on my sixteen-year-old cheeks in these very woods! I drew it in as one presses one's lips to a fountain of clear water. I held out open hands with wide-spread fingers, like a beggar whom one calls to the hearth in winter to get, as they say here, 'a whiff of the fire.' I opened my vest and my shirt, to bare my chest, that it might reach my very blood." *

The blind can receive all these impressions as well as those who see, and perhaps even feel them with greater intensity, since all their powers are concentrated in their sensations.†

The sense of touch is not confined to the hand, it exists in varying degrees all over the body; the

* Lamartine, "Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses," 1849.

† In Lucien Biart's "Paysage des Tropiques" there are pages full of the profoundest impressions received by other senses than sight in those little-frequented countries. "It was just past midday, the hour of solemn aod mysterious silence in hot countries. Not a breath, not a movement, not the rustling of a leaf. 'One breathes fire,' said the Indian who accompanied me, as he lay down naked on the ground to enjoy a siesta. Not a sound, not the hum of an insect, a mysterious funereal stillness beneath the rays of the sun which usually wakes everything to life. Nothing seemed able to move, fly or even crawl, under the burden of air so hot and heavy that it weighed down even the gauzy wings of the dragon-flies. And this scorching, stifling air was saturated with the stale nauseous smell of districts where yellow fever prevails, a charnel-house odour, which those who have once smelt it wish in vain to forget. The half-light, the silence, the heat, the mephitic smell of the marshy ground, seemed to make me the denizen of a dead world."

skin of the forehead and of the whole face is extremely sensitive: the eyes, even when entirely blind, are still to a certain extent the avenues of a certain amount of sensation. But it is of course the ear which records the richest and most varied impressions. Every one speaks of the great voices of nature, tempests in forests and at sea, mountain storms, torrents and waterfalls, but generally we do not notice or listen to a multitude of tiny sounds, charming poetic notes which nature gives us in profusion; rustlings, humming of insects in the grass, the chirp of crickets, bird notes, the fluttering of wings, the trickle of a streamlet, the puff of wind which only stirs a few leaves. Just as the wind animates the visible landscape we can see, so it puts movement and life into what I venture to call the auditive scene. Thus the trees become living to the ear, they give out special sounds varying with their foliage and with the strength of the breeze: it is in a sense the colouring of the ear.*

As a rule we willingly admit that everything, mineral, vegetable or animal, can shew beauty of its own and harmony with the "great Whole." We can enjoy and understand Michelet, Ruskin, Topffer and their fellows, when they describe the charm which the discerning eye discovers in a

* "Stellus remained motionless, without an aspiration or a desire. At first he had only heard a monotonous diffused sound in every direction. Soon he distinguished the rustling of trees in each of their separate branches. Then he was aware of strange, supernatural noises like the song of fairies spinning or the breathing of celestial flutes. The murmur of the wind had a strange power. As he listened, Stellus felt new thoughts awakening in him, he seemed to know, to understand, and to see the forest living; he realized an ineffable soul in trees, in plants, in water, and the singing of the stars taught him celestial things. And yet he felt no surprise. These revelations seemed only old memories revived, and each fresh idea entered his mind like a returning exile. He listened tranquilly, and it seemed quite simple that these intuitions should be brought by the wind, like flowers from an orchard, blown along the night air."—Ephraim Mikhael, "Poèmes en Prose." La Solitaire.

lump of earth, a fragment of moss, a flying insect as it skims or creeps untrammelled; well, then, admitting how much we can grasp of the harmony of creation, would it not be strange that the sonority produced by all this should be as nothing to us? If a poor dead leaf lying on the ground can be clothed in lovely tints and warm shadows when the sun lights it up in a special way and a dreamer lose himself for an interminable time gazing at it, why should not the same leaf in an autumn wind produce a tiny yet lovely sound which can arrest the "dreamer of the open ear"? But every one does not know how to listen, any more than every one knows how to discover in the very heart of an imposing or majestic landscape, full picturesque details and sharply defined outlines, the timid, delicious charm of a tuft of grass, a ray of sun filtering through the branches, or similar effects.

"Usually," Daudet truly says, "descriptive writers can only see, and they are contented to paint. Turgenieff possesses both smell and hearing. He is full of the odours of the country, sounds of water and clear atmosphere; he gives himself up, without posing for any particular school, to the orchestra of his sensations. This music does not reach every ear. Dwellers in towns, deafened from childhood by the roar of large cities, will never hear it, they will not recognize voices in the assumed quiet of the woods, where nature believes herself alone, and man, because silent, is forgotten. . . . Pillaut told me something absolutely new about his art. A musician of great talent, brought up in the country, his very refined ear has retained and registered all the sounds in nature; he hears as a landscape painter sees. To him each fluttering of

wings has its own thrill; the rattle of autumn leaves, the babble of a pebbly brook, wind, rain, distant voices, rumbling trains, wheels creaking in the ruts of the road, all this atmosphere of country life is in his books."

Daudet himself knows how to listen in silence. "I pushed my boat among the reeds, and when the satiny grasses had ceased to rustle, I was well walled in, floating on the clear water of my little haven in the shade of an old willow tree. It made a study for me to write in, and my crossed oars served as a desk. I loved the smell of the river, the stirring of insects among the reeds, the murmur of long waving leaves, all the infinitely mysterious movement which the silence of man awakes in nature. How happy such stillness makes many of us! How it calms us! My island was more populous than Paris. I heard rummagings in the grass, birds pursuing each other, the flapping of wet wings. No living thing was startled at my nearness, they took me for an old willow tree." *

Let us leave the river and follow Taine to Fontainebleau. "Sometimes a raven croaked, robins twittered in a clear note. In the stillness grasshoppers chirped, and swarms of insects whirled in the heavy perfumed air. An acorn drops on the dead leaves, a beetle brushes a fallen twig with its wings. Gay little bird-notes and trills sound from the heights. A whole world lives under these skies and in this mossy ground; a turbulent baby population, whose infantile language does not reach the ear till it is half stifled by the deep sleeping breaths of the great Mother." †

Then Edouard Rod takes us up into the mountains. "In the midst of the great empty solitude

* "Trente Ans de Paris." † "Thomas Graindorge."

where nothing is heard but the sound of distant cattle bells, or the hum of insects amidst the slumbering echoes which no human voice awakens, I lie underneath the firs, drunk with the smell of Alpine flowers, or I sit by the brooks where I have slaked my thirst, feeling an indescribable sense of well-being, as if a weight had been lifted from me and I could breathe more freely."

And, last of all, René Bazin himself, little as he knows it, is a limner dear to the blind. They can see and assimilate much in his "Terre qui meurt." The following lines, among many others, seem written for them.

"This Sunday afternoon in summer seemed steeped in a deeper peace than usual. The air was warm, the light hazy, the wind which had risen with the sea, and was driving the tide before it, did not bring with it, as it blew over the immense green plains, a single echo of life. Not the creaking of a plough, not the sound of a spadeful of earth, not the stroke of a hammer or an axe. Only church bells broke the stillness. They answered each other, the bells of Sallertaine, Perrier, St Gervais, Challans with its new, cathedral-like church, and Soullans, hidden in wooded hills. The peals of High Mass, the chimes of the Angelus, the three strokes of Vespers kept them busy. They rang out into the distance the same old words, understood for centuries, worship of God, forgetfulness of earth, forgiveness of sins, union in prayer, equality in face of the divine promises; and the words soared into the sky, mingling with a thrill, like garlands of happiness entwined from one steeple to another. There were few among the toilers of earth, the cattle drovers and the sowers who did not obey

them. Towards evening the bells ceased. Even the village topers had left their inns and returned in the golden light of the setting sun to their silent homesteads. Universal silence enveloped the landscape. Never noisy even on working days, the district was quite quiet and peaceful for a few hours at the end of the week. It was a Sabbath rest which had a deep significance, a time when spiritual interests were uppermost, and the group of families peacefully and reflectively counted their living and their dead."

It would be easy to go on multiplying these impressions of the senses from the pages of great writers, who have communed with nature, but these are enough. They show that for those who can look close enough, the great enchantress has other means than sight of making herself known.

Let us read the letters, despite their length, of a Swiss woman who lost her sight at ten years old. She lives in France, but comes back regularly to her native canton; and her letters give a good test of what a blind woman can experience at different seasons of the year and in different parts of the mountains.

"Chamosson, September 18, 1895.

"The mountain is an old friend of mine; I had not 'seen' it again for ten years, and it never seemed to speak to me so plainly. It was to Les Mayens that I went in search of rest and fresh air during the month of August. You go up by regular chamois paths, impeded by stones, roots, holes, hillocks and every possible obstacle. But with strong boots and a cheerful temper all goes well. Besides, the noise of the torrent rushing down the ravine, shade from the woods on the left hand, and on the right a won-

derful scent which already shows you have left the plains, all keep you from realizing your fatigue and encourage you to climb higher. When you reach the first little upland, a fresher breeze meets you; confused sounds float down to you—cattle bells, human voices, bird notes, which you imagine rather than hear distinctly—but these vague echoes seem to call you irresistibly, and you cut short your halt. You climb, you put on a fresh spurt, you pass one chalet after the other, here is your own at last! What a pleasure to have reached it! I had a very peaceful stay at Les Mayens, rather monotonous perhaps, but still no weeks of my life ever slipped by quicker. The mountain seemed so living; her thousand voices, distinct or confused, speak to you incessantly and keep you constantly interested. The air is so light that it seems easy even to get to heaven. Every morning, when the sun had drunk up the dew, I used to walk over the pasture lands, stopping when a sweeter scent or a more fascinating sound than usual reached me as I passed. My favourite spot was the outskirts of the neighbouring forest; a great pine tree gave me a delicious shade, and its rugged, mossy roots made me a comfortable and convenient seat. They say that the view from thence is magnificent, and I never heard anywhere else such restful sounds. In the grass at my feet crickets and grasshoppers outrivalled each other in their monotonous chirpings, and accompanied the waxing or waning hum of the insects skimming in the air. Behind me in the woods I could hear a branch crack here and there, the furtive flight of a bird, or the distant strokes of a hatchet; at intervals the tinkle of cattle bells floated down to me from the heights in alternate waves of veiled or

sonorous sound. On Sundays the sweet church bells would ring in the valley; sometimes the whistle of a train rushing along in the distance roused me with its shrill note, as if to remind me that my holiday would soon be over, and steam soon be whirling me back to rules and duties; but the train rapidly disappeared and the pine branches stretched again over my head. The scent of the sweet gum in the trees and the fragrance of the grass, that exquisite mingled aroma which is the real mountain perfume still floated in the air. When a breeze stirred the woods and sent a long echoing thrill through all the boughs, I involuntarily pictured myself on the shore at Nice, and fancied I could hear in the distance the ceaseless murmur of the sea—not that the roar of the waves resembles the rustling of branches, but both sounds have a certain vagueness and a mysterious note of sadness which lulls and soothes you like a song. I don't know how the days passed; I wrote letters, and knitted a few stitches, and played with my small companion, a lively little girl with a a sweet voice, who was always exclaiming, 'Oh, Auntie, how lovely it is at Les Mayens!' She ran about picking flowers and putting them on my lap while she made them into nosegays. When I was her age I picked flowers too, and could see them opening in the fresh grass from as far off. In my memory I can still see, at will, a certain meadow beside a half-ruined châlet; it was the best place for flowers. There were the wide blossoms of the great white marguerites which seemed to smile directly they saw me coming, blue harebells, shining yellow buttercups and that very lovely pink heath which you can never pick in valleys. I too used to return carrying a brilliant, variegated sheaf. Then I

could admire colours, now I listen to voices; I draw no comparison, but I enjoy voices as I did colours. If mountain places overflow with life and movement by day, night brings with it a solemn stillness. No sooner has the sun sunk behind the peaks than the hum of insects and the whirring of their wings is suddenly silent, as if a magic wand had hushed all this exuberant region into a death-like sleep. A strangely chilly atmosphere rises from the glacier and steals over the mountains—a wind, untainted with dust, which barely stirs the plants and the grass, penetrates you, and in a few minutes makes you forget the heat of summer. Soon the cattle bells cease one by one over the pasture lands; all sinks into calm and rest. Then suddenly the 'yodelling' of the shepherds, singular and never-to-be-forgotten sound, breaks out, and is answered from different points; it begins on a high long-sustained note, and ends in four shorter ones in a descending scale; the forests and rocks echo it in chorus and prolong it with strange dissonances. The shepherds of to-day can answer each other without fear; they no longer hear, as did their forefathers, supernatural accents mingled with their cheerful 'yodellings.' Unlucky was the wight who answered those fantastic voices. Even this year I felt a thrill again at the oft-times-told tale which our old mountain story-tellers relate. I listen every night to the shepherds calling, and when at last silence reigns supreme over the mountain I gratefully enjoy the stillness and feel more intensely than ever the eye of God watching over us."

"September 30, 1895.

"It was such a lovely day that I could not leave without tasting some freshly picked grapes, on the

spot where they grow; they are particularly good this year. I decided to go to the Coteau des Crêtes; I remembered it as one of my favourite spots. We cross the principal village street with its uneven houses, the walls sending into our faces blasts of the heat which the sun has been pouring onto them for the last ten hours. Sunday is a real day of rest in the village. . . . No carts, no sound of working implements; here and there a group of men and women in front of their doors, talking and discussing 'tout a la douce,' leisurely, like people with plenty of time on their hands. But I am in a hurry to get out of this hot, stifling atmosphere. At length we leave the last houses behind us, a fresher, lighter air surrounds us, no obstacle checks the cool current of air coming down from the mountain, it reaches us as a reminder of the rarefied air at the summit. Our road leads us through meadows shaded, at intervals, by fruit-trees easily distinguishable by the various aromas of their branches; the smell of ripe fruit gradually replaces flower scents, the short grass where one's foot already crushes dead leaves only gives out a warm, indefinite odour; autumn is really here, all is mellowed and ripe. We reach the vines, the path narrows and begins to ascend; we leave the shade; sunshine fills the air. I do not seek to shelter my head; on the contrary it is pleasant to feel myself penetrated by life-giving heat which contains no impure emanations. We skirt a thorny hedge and reach our destination, the summit of the hillock. Our vine is at our feet, but I have no wish to go scrambling down its tiers; I leave that to some one more nimble, and prefer to sit by the footpath and once more enjoy the delicious language which nature speaks to those who are

willing to listen to her. As a child I used to love to look down from this hillock: the vines stretched before me in sinuous lines down to the plain; on one side I could see fields of waving corn, on the other the Rhone like a long white streak; on the left a chain of grey rocks, on the right roofs with their plumes of smoke. I have retained the picture, but then only my eyes were attentive, in my memory no sounds remain. How marvellous is Nature! If she hides from you her colours and smiling distances, she reveals to you and lavishes on you charms which you ignored, perhaps sweeter and dearer than what she used to show you. How varied is her language! . . . Each spot, in different seasons of the year, has its particular voice. What I hear here is not what I could hear on the mountain. The warm air round me stirs languidly, the leaves hardly move under its breath; the insects, attracted doubtless by the sweetness of the ripe grapes, seem to buzz more softly; the voices of pedestrians reach me clearly but faintly from below; all sounds seem muffled, the landscape is alive but very peaceful. Suddenly I am startled by a shot which breaks through the harmonious stillness—doubtless fired by a sportsman. At the sudden, sharp report, the rock wakes up with a thundrous echo; a second and a third shot follow, the echo redoubles and rumbles in fury, as if indignant at being roused out of repose. But the air becomes quiet once more, and sounds more in accordance with the peaceful surroundings strike on my ear. I hear the bells of St Pierre village, their quavering is unmistakable; for centuries they have rung for living and dead. How beautiful they sound to me from here, calling to Vespers! . . . The rock answers their half-gay, half-melancholy voice

by such a vague, subtle sound that it mingles with all the other noises of the vineyard. I wanted to tell you before I leave about my lovely walk of yesterday, but when I got back to Villeurbanne I felt as if I could no longer speak of it. The whistle of factories, the rolling of tramcars, the hoarse voices of hawkers, are such an unsuitable accompaniment for recollections and memories of nature's voice."

"January 4, 1896.

"Does nature speak to the blind in winter? Why not? Is not the very silence expressive? I have just been for a very short walk to pay a visit. A roundabout way took us quite into the country. The air is calm, dry and cold, but the sun smiles on us, and it is a joy to feel the gentle warmth of its rays. It is a fine winter's day, one of those days that invites you to walk, and as you go you feel less and less tired. The hard snow crackles under our feet. How much I prefer such a carpet to the dust of summer! 'All the country is white and evenly covered,' says my father, 'only the trees stand out boldly.' He looks, and I listen. What peace, what absolute stillness everywhere! All life seems to have ceased. But no; now and then out of this universal silence come sounds of living things. A woodpecker skims through the air, giving his metallic note. In the distance crows are sending up hoarse and imperious cries of hunger. Here, close to the road, snow is falling from the branches of a tree, and a little further off a brook is running with its bright, clear music. If it were a solemn, poetical stream, it would be silent; no poet has ever yet consented to let a 'brooklet' babble 'in the death-like winter.' But this tiny rill takes little heed of these immemorial rules; it goes

hurrying on with the greatest animation, as if to live and speak for all the voiceless objects on its banks. But gradually I lose its life-like voice in the distance, silence surrounds us again, and I can only catch the crackling of snow under my feet. 'Nature in winter is the symbol of death'; this is a sad image, and is expected to steep one in sombre melancholy. But I do not feel this lugubrious impression. This sleeping landscape in its peaceful rest speaks calmly and solemnly to me. It is true there is something about it of the ineffable quiet of a graveyard; but even this impression is not saddening. The silent graves will have their awakening; the buried countryside awaits the spring."

The blind can also have favourite spots; they prefer to be rather isolated, and protected from "profane noises." I know, in the mountains of Dauphiné, a certain habitation which, though famous for its view, makes me almost uncomfortable. It overlooks a great market town, with factories, forges and large schools, in fact, endless varieties of village noises which rise ceaselessly, and sound close by. So if those who can see retain the illusion of solitude because of the immense panorama of mountains surrounding them, the ear of a blind person is incessantly filled with sounds which appear too near at hand for him to realize that he is in an isolated spot. In this respect hearing is most arbitrary; in a town the person who can see feels as if he were in the country when he finds himself in a beautiful flower-bordered avenue of trees, whether it be in a public or a private garden—or at least so he says. For the blind this abstraction is very difficult, they cannot get away from the

busy rattle of traffic which, in Paris for instance, can be heard quite far into the Bois de Boulogne. Amongst trifling noises must be reckoned, first of all the noise of machinery, which mars auditive impressions in perhaps the same way that the sight of them spoils the view. In fact, there are many interesting parallels of this kind to be drawn. The farther a motor is, in its construction, from the scheme of nature, the less elegant and graceful in shape it becomes; it is not, in a word, æsthetic. It is rare for an agricultural machine to be pleasing to the eye, and it is never so to the ear. It is admitted on all hands that sowing, reaping, cutting or threshing machines are infinitely less picturesque in shape and action than the implements they replace or the gestures of the labourer who uses them. Well, their sounds are just as inferior. It is only at a considerable distance that the whizzing of a threshing machine or the click of a reaping machine are not absolutely horrible; whereas the sound of a scythe cutting through the grass, or the measured stroke of a flail falling on sheaves, although not beautiful in themselves, are quite in harmony with the general scheme of nature. The rumbling of carts, and the whistling of engines are unbearable, and unless they are in the distance, they spoil the auditive landscape far more than would the rolling of carriage wheels, or the trotting of horses' hoofs in the road. For the blind person who wishes to receive impressions from nature, when out walking, narrow paths are better than wide. That is easily understood; crossways suggest more than wide roads, and footpaths are preferable to either. And, indeed, a footpath is soft to the feet, and varies in its surface more than would be believed; sand, grass,

moss, protruding roots, pebbles, dry leaves, crisp or smooth twigs—all of these things which can be easily recognized are infinitely more pleasant than the dusty asphalt of wide roads, which is as tiring in its want of elasticity, as it is insipidly monotonous. Then in the footpath we are near things, here and there a branch touches us, we crush the grass, birds rise at our approach, we smell the vegetation, leaves, flowers, grasses, each with its separate odour.

"It was two o'clock on a September afternoon, the footpath skirting the meadows was bordered by upstanding grasses, like a natural handrail to guide and assist quick walking. Sometimes we are in bright, hot sunshine, sometimes in the shade of rows of poplars which cool the air, and bring sweet smells from the meadows. Coming back, the sun has set, but the wind is in the south, and the air quite warm. Farther and farther in the distance, we are accompanied and saluted on our way by the chirp of the cricket, like a little outrider shaking his bells in the night."

Of course light is wanting to this description, and the great magic of sight. I have known what it was, and after many years I still feel a thrill at Taine's beautiful lines on "Les Iles d'Or.* Indeed I do not intend in any sense to belittle the scope and importance of eyesight. I only wished to point out that the blind can have their share of

* "In January, at Hyères, I used to see the sun rise behind an island; light gradually filled the air. Suddenly, on the summit of a rock, a flame burst out; the great crystal sky widened its vault over the immense expanse of sea, the countless little ripples and the deep, even blue of the water where it was crossed by a stream of gold. At evening the distant mountains were tinged with mauve, lilac and the yellow of the tea-rose. In summer the sun's illumination fills sky and sea with such splendour that the senses and the imagination rise into a glorious apotheosis; each wave sparkles; the water takes the jewelled tints of precious stones, turquoise, amethyst, sapphire and lapis-lazuli, as it undulates beneath the universal and immaculate purity of the sky."—"Philosophie de l'Art."

the pleasures of nature. This share is not usually understood by those who, although not blind, want merely to "look" and not to "see"; then they only hear instead of listening, or, what matters far more, feeling. They do not saturate and intoxicate themselves with aromas, fragrances and sonorities as does the attentive blind man who has not been numbed by the loss of vision. His impressions are wonderfully varied, harmonious and reminiscent. The seeing man who wishes to reflect or meditate deeply, closes his eyes, and by this means completely shuts off the exterior world; it is in this separation and isolation that he imagines the blind to dwell. Edmond de Goncourt writes in his journal: "Well, perhaps a year or two's blindness before I die would not be such a bad thing; it would be a separation, a divorce from nature; in her brilliant colouring she has been such a captivating mistress to me! Perhaps it would be given to me to write a book, or rather a series of purely mental notes, all philosophical, and written in the shadowy world of thought."

But why does the seeing man imagine that darkness would cut him off from everything? Because, accustomed as he is to live principally by sight, and to receive nine-tenths of his impressions through his eyes, when he closes them, he is far more struck by what is wanting than by what he has not forfeited. Furthermore, his mind is taken up with the subject that caused him to isolate himself, and, as a rule, he does not prolong this experiment sufficiently to accustom him to think of what he does not see, or to concentrate all his attention on the impressions he receives through his other senses.*

* In the "Nouveaux Essais sur l' Entendement humain" (II, ix), Leibnitz

Finally, it is necessary to have what Topffer calls a sixth sense, one which has no organ. It gives us impressions, as charming as they are useless, for the practical and ethical guidance of life, which doubtless is the reason that all are not endowed with it. But what does this sixth sense feel or see? It smells, it hears, it sees, it touches—in a word, it unites the functions of the five others, but in a world which they have never entered. I have spoken of foliage, lakes, the sky; well, in all these things this sense feels a charm which depends neither on green nor blue nor on brilliant light, a charm caused by these sights though not contained in them; they excite and provoke feelings which they could not originate. I can affirm that this charm exists, but how describe it? Seek to fix it, it evaporates; seek to detain it, it evades you; approach it, it is gone! Sensation, pure and simple, is only the very humble handmaid of my sixth sense, furnishing it ceaselessly with matter for feelings and dreams, helping it to stray in the pleasantest manner in the world, in a lovely, limitless country, which is not the material earth seen by your eyes, and trodden by your feet.*

Of course I do not pretend that all blind people respond to the influences of nature; they as well as those who can see need this sixth sense which was so wanting in Madame de Stael when she wrote to Fauriel who had admired Lake Leman, "You still have countrified prejudices." When the Alps were praised, she exclaimed, "Oh! for the gutter of the Rue du Bac!" Alas! every man has not the soul

speaks of minor perceptions "which we do not notice in our present state. It is true that we could perceive and reflect on them, if their multiplicity did not confuse our thoughts, or if they were not obliterated by more important sensations."

*Topffer, "Réflexions et Menus propos d'un Peintre genevois, ou Essai sur le Beau dans les Arts."

of an artist, all who have eyes do not see the poetic effects of light in wood and meadow. No, every one does not feel the necessity of localizing and surrounding the great emotions of his life, amid impressions of nature, and associating her with them all; but there are certain temperaments that cannot dissociate anything from nature. Some of these exist amongst blind girls; they are not numbed, as I have said before, they are only rendered "attentive by their loss." They also make part of the infinite impulse towards reverie, and poetry, that awakes, as we realize how fleeting life and all human impressions are, in the face of nature; of nature the unchanging, though we return to her after so many changes in ourselves.

Yes, the blind can feel their heart uplifted or depressed by overpowering feelings, in some spot which a sad or happy memory has consecrated, each time they return to it. No, they are not indifferent to where they live; they can enjoy nature, and be penetrated by its charm, they can exclaim with Hugo:*

> O douleur! j'ai voulu, moi, dont l'âme est troublée,
> Savoir si l'urne encore conservait la liqueur,
> Et voir ce qu'avait fait cette heureuse vallée
> De tout ce que j'avais laissé là de mon cœur!
>
> Que peu de temps suffit pour changer toutes choses,
> Nature au front serein, comme vous oubliez!
> Et comme vous brisez dans vos metamorphoses
> Les fils mystérieux ou nos cœurs sont liés.

* "Tristesse d'Olympio."

> I seek to know, my mind oppressed with grief,
> If perfume lingers yet within the urn,
> Or if the vale, lovely beyond belief,
> Will echo, as my mournful steps return.
>
> Briefly your wand can change the face of things,
> Calm Mother Nature! vexed by no regret,
> Spinning the thread that round our pathway clings,
> Catching our feet within its magic net!

THE BLIND SISTERS OF ST PAUL

Dieu nous prête un moment les prés et les fontaines,
Les grands bois frissonants, les rocs profonds et sourds,
Et les cieux azurés, et les lacs et les plaines,
Pour y mettre nos cœurs, nos rêves, nos amours!

God decks His world in beauty day by day;
Thro' leafy wood the blue sky seems to smile;
Lake, plain and cavern, take one voice to say,
"Here may poor mortals rest and dream awhile."

ℂ II. "Seeing" our Fellow-Creatures

IF a blind girl gifted with an appreciative artistic nature be not isolated by her infirmity, and can, on the contrary, feel pleasure and delight in all living surroundings and in the savour of the very air she breathes, she will certainly be keenly attracted to the society of other human beings. Besides, the unprejudiced view which looks upon the blind as insensible to the charms of nature is modified with regard to their position towards their fellow-creatures. Still, the admiring surprise shown by many people at being recognized by their step, their voice or the pressure of their hand, proves in itself their ignorance of the real attitude of the blind towards those about them. They conclude that those without sight can only grasp purely moral and intellectual conceptions, so strong is the opinion that physical differences in people are only discernible to the eye. Consequently many imagine that a blind person, surrounded by his acquaintances, who are merely exchanging commonplaces, cannot recognize anyone who does not give his name or say something to give a clue to his intellectual identity. This is an error; most people have auditive, tactile or olfactory characteristics, which are perceptible on the slightest contact, and taken together or even separately, suffice to make them recognized. Gogol writes:* "Dear friend, if you wish to render me the greatest service that I expect of a Christian, collect these little treasures (little daily events) for

* Epilogue to "Lettres."

me, wherever you find them. It would not give you much trouble to make notes like the following every evening in the form of a diary: 'Heard such an opinion; talked to so-and-so; he is in such and such a position; his character is this or that; he is good-looking and well-bred, or the contrary; he holds his hands so; he uses his handkerchief so; he takes snuff in this way, . . . in a word, all that your eye perceives, from great events to the merest trifles."

Nothing is mentioned here except what can be seen; no allusion is made to feeling, hearing or touch; yet Gogol was a great observer. Are these last impressions so delicate that exceptional perceptions are necessary to receive them?

Not in the least; only, as I said before, the man who can see is so absorbed and satisfied by the impressions his eyesight records, that he simply ignores smell, hearing and touch. In analysing the atmosphere which any person exhales, we find it vary sui generis according to age, health, habits of hygiene, food and drink; it is affected by intentional causes, such as the constant use of any one perfume, by accidental causes which have become habitual, such as smoking, and something may be known of the wearer's profession by the sort of clothes, materials and gloves he affects. Every one can testify to this; we only need to concentrate our attention, to discover that one old lady smells of ether, another of sandal-wood, pepper or some old-fashioned powder which preserves fur. Some fashionable young women use this or that scent, one man smokes Turkish tobacco, the smell of which is stronger than the scented soap he uses; another prefers a pipe, and a third, a cigar—spirits, wine, coffee, pastry, soaps, toilet washes, woollen stuffs, furs,

kid gloves (especially when heated by the sun or by the hot air of a drawing-room or a theatre) these all make their presence known. Then there are the objects we habitually handle, such as wood, iron, copper, oil paints, medicinal herbs; thus the carpenter, the locksmith, the tailor, the shoe-maker, the painter, the printer and the chemist, do not diffuse the same odour. Clothes quickly absorb the atmosphere that they are most constantly worn in, the foul and exhausted air of offices, the steam of kitchens, the smells of a painter's studio, all impregnate woollen materials and cling to their wearers. Some people wear mackintosh, heavy black garments and countless other clothes. All these things make up a complete range of olfactory impressions, which, in the aggregate, are alternately agreeable, attractive, indifferent or unpleasant, but useful in differentiating and characterizing people, without the help of vision.* Sometimes it is sufficient to pass quickly from one atmosphere into a very different one, for the olfactory and tangible impressions of the former to cling to clothes. Who that has been ill in winter, and remained in bed or by the fireside for several days, has failed to notice the strong, sudden current of cold which the doctor or nurse brings from outside as they approach us? "She [his mother] came back from some morning errand to the town . . . bringing with her an odour of sun and summer from out of doors. . . . She bent over my bed to kiss me, and then I wanted no-

* We have received the following in a letter from America: "I can tell you of a fact which is not generally known, and that is, that in deaf-mutes, the sense of smell is as much developed as it is in sporting dogs. Julia B—— can take a dozen gloves, and after smelling the hands and faces of several people present, she can return each glove to the hand it belongs to. Helen Keller recognizes the clothes of people about her, even when they have been washed. And another girl, Elizabeth R——, if she stands by an open window, can tell by the smell who is coming towards her."

thing more—I stopped crying, and did not try to get up or go out."*

But if we bring with us something of our late surroundings, the temperature we go into acts very perceptibly on our clothes. You have just arrived, you are out of breath, and breathe rather loudly, you blow your nose, you cough, often that is sufficient to reveal your name to an attentive ear, for there is individuality in these functions. There is much, perhaps, in our walk—grace, or awkwardness, vulgarity or good manners, are fairly apparent in walking. The ring of a footstep, its cadence, the different rhythm of sex, age, physical type or even moral character, acquired habits, and the preoccupation of the moment, all can be heard in the step. Firmness, indecision, carelessness, roughness, calm, gravity, indolence, activity, timidity, courage, affectation, vanity, natural simplicity, fatigue and vigour can all be discerned up to a certain point in the step. Notice, for instance, and listen to a servant going downstairs to do a commission for you; he goes at quite a different pace when he is going out on his own business, particularly if it be in secret; in the former case he walks in his usual way, more or less fast, as the case may be, but you feel that he is at ease, "taking his time"; in the latter case there will be something timid and embarrassed about him, you can tell that he is anxious to disappear quickly without attracting attention, and it is just this anxiety which arrests the attention of a keen ear. It is quite evident that in a curtained, carpeted room, or out of doors on gravel, grass or snow, footsteps become confused, characteristics are minimized and disappear. On the other hand, if you

* Pierre Loti, "Le Roman d'un Enfant."

walk in slippers, or change your usual footgear, it is possible to "make up" ("grimer") your step and bearing, as you could your physiognomy.

Children's footsteps differ very much from those of adults, the cheerful, active, springy youth has not the same walk as the heavy middle-aged man, who feels his own importance, and wishes to impress others; he moves complacently, self-conscious in his walk, as in his speech, while the step of quite an old man will be slow and dragging. Slim, elastic, graceful girls and young women have a kind of rhythm in their feet which the woman of forty, even if still distinguished and charming, loses as she sobers down—and the ear will not confuse the latter's step with that of a vulgar, fat woman, devoid of all charm or distinction.

The nature of the garment worn, be it a long or short dress, full or scanty, silk or wool, can also, by various forms of rustling or crackling, give a clue to the wearer's personality. Then there are objects usually worn, the extras, so to speak, of the costume: spurs and swords for soldiers, or rosaries and bunches of keys for nuns, while the starched caps and veils of the latter give out very perceptible sounds according to the gesture which moves them.

Some tricks of habit can be heard at once. I know a nun who when she has anything very important to say always lifts her cap a little with one hand. I had noticed and remembered this peculiarity long before I heard it remarked upon by a man who could see it. Some people play mechanically with their eyeglasses, watch chains, etc. It is needless to say that any movement made with a fan, a card case, or a newspaper, can be heard more distinctly

than if the hand alone moved. Then there are certain movements which cannot be made in silence, because of the friction they cause; if anyone turns sharply, waves an arm, moves leg or head, all this can be heard. In listening to a person talking you can tell if he be standing or sitting, upright or bending forward, tall or short, because of the direction from which the sound comes; you can trace by this means many gestures of the head and body, and his various changes of positions. If anyone walks a few steps with you, giving you his arm or hand, you can easily imagine his general air and carriage; sometimes it is sufficient to walk next to anyone and brush his elbow, for though the elbow is very inferior to the hand as an agent of sensation, still it does convey a certain amount of contact.

"I did not see her, but I heard her," writes a blind woman. "I knew that she was graceful, calm and sweet, as standing at the door she pressed my hand in farewell. And I shall always see that picture of her in my heart." Here the blind woman could well say she "saw" a picture in her heart, since she possessed two fresh means of knowledge, the contact of the handclasp and the voice.

"Upon the doctor's doorsteps one day Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. The other hand was locked in that of Florence. How light the tiny pressure of the one! how loose and cold the other!"*

"Anatolia held her hand out to me and said in her turn, 'Welcome!' Her gesture was free and frank, and the contact of her hand communicated a sensation of generous strength and practical kindness,

* Dickens, "Dombey and Son."

she seemed to pledge herself to me in a kind of brotherly compact. Her ringless hand was neither too white nor too long, but vigorous in its purity of form, strong to lift and to support; supple yet firm, its smooth back diversified by the relief of joints and the network of veins, with valleys of softness in the warm concave palm, which was a wonderful centre of magnetism."*

Indeed, hands give very diverse tangible impressions. In how many varied ways it is possible to shake hands! From the complete full grasp of a sincere, frank, open person to the fawning, hesitating pressure of the cunning and crafty. Persons who are very affectionate, rather excitable, or rather nervous, shake hands with warmth and emotion; timid and embarrassed ones never know how they are going to offer you their hand; some barely give you two fingers. Certainly there is a complete compendium of the whole person with his or her physical and even moral characteristics in the structure of the hand, and also in its gestures, contractions, etc. Graphologists will not contradict this, since their curious deductions can only be arrived at by close correlation between the most hidden traits in a person's character, and the instinctive contractions and movements of his hand. Now if we admit that our disposition can betray itself in movements which we make mechanically with pen or pencil, it is natural and even unavoidable that one human hand in contact with another, should reveal something of the character and feelings of its owner.

> Il me semblait déjà dans mon oreille entendre
> De sa touchante voix l'accent tremblant et tendre,
> Et sentir, à défaut de mots cherchés en vain,
> Tout son cœur me parler d'un serrement de main;

*D' Annunzio, "Les Vierges aux Rochers."

Car lorsque l'amitié n'a plus d'autre langage,
Le main aide le cœur et lui rend témoignage.*

It would be easy to multiply quotations showing that the hand contact so perfectly understood by the blind, is perhaps even stronger than sight. Mireille and Vincent looked at one another, it is true, but they did not tremble or blush until their hands met.

Comme dans un seul sac les brins étaient roulés,
Sous la toile où leur main s'avance, etc.†

François Coppée, in some charming lines, shows us the father and mother of little Amédée Violette on the balcony.

"It was cool on the high terrace. The sun had set. The great clouds now looked like mountains of gold, and a pleasant smell of grass rose up from the surrounding gardens. M. and Mme Violette did not join in the conversation. Perhaps they were not even attending to it; and when night had completely fallen, they gently took hands in the dark and looked at the stars."‡

Coppée has this verse in his "Chanson d'Exil":

* "I felt as if I could already hear the touching accents of her gentle voice; failing the words that would not come, her whole heart spoke to me in the pressure of her hand. For, when friendship is at a loss for words, the hand aids the heart and is its witness."—Lamartine, "Jocelyn."

† "The twigs were all heaped in the same sack, their hands crept under the canvas, and inadvertently (honi soit qui mal y pense) they met. They trembled and blushed, their souls were kindled by a hitherto unknown fire. Mireille was agitated and withdrew her hand. Vincent addressed her in his softest voice: 'What troubles you, Mireille? Has a bee stung you?' 'I know not,' she answered low. And as they both bent over their basket-making they watched each other roguishly to see which would smile first. Their hearts beat fast, and the work went on apace. . . . The white hand and the brown kept meeting in the sack, whether by accident or design, and clasped each other. This little trick amused them very much."—Mistral's "Mireille," from the Provencal Dialect.

‡ "Toute une Jeunesse," Coppée.

Triste exilé! qu'il te souvienne
Combien l'avenir était beau
Quand sa main tremblait dans la sienne
Comme un oiseau.*

Further, does not hand-contact, like proximity, simultaneous movements and rhythm, constitute a great deal of the attraction which dancing always has had and will have? Dancing produces the greatest possible impression on blind people; it sets every nerve vibrating, and the very privation of sight enhances the excitement.

A new sensation due to modern invention is the power of hearing people's voices long after they have ceased to be present, and being able to hear them speak, sing, laugh, even breathe as at the moment they were beside you. Will not the oral record which the phonograph is about to preserve in the interests of friendship (though it may sometimes endanger them), will not this record produce an impression as vivid as any known hitherto? After many years of separation during which a great friend is often forgotten, after promises of life-long devotion, would it not be more agitating to hear his voice than to see his portrait? "I should never have known him by his face; but his voice revealed what his face hid from me."† The voice of a man is his whole personality. If the eyes are the "mirror of the soul" the voice is the soul's echo and breath, the voice is the most infallible interpreter of the innermost feelings.‡

* "Sad exile, do not forget how fair the future seemed when her hand trembled like a bird in thine."

† Dante's "Purgatorio," canto xxiii.

‡ "The voice is a human sound, which nothing inanimate can imitate successfully. It carries authority and an individual claim, which is wanting to handwriting. It is not only air, but air modulated by us, impregnated with our vital heat, enveloped in the vapour of our own atmosphere; our identity gives it a certain configuration and special power of affecting other minds. Speech is but thought incarnate."—Joubert, "Pensées."

To a human being the great charm of sound is that it is essentially expressive. It causes him to share the joys and, above all, the sorrows of his fellow-men. Grief finding vent in words generally moves us more profoundly than if expressed in face or gesture.* Those who are not blind are often expert in voice expression. Horace Mann says: "Feelings of anger after punishment cannot be entirely concealed; the child's eye and especially the sound of his voice never fail to betray him. His manner is constrained; he cannot play with ease; his glance shifts as it meets that of the master, or else he fixes him with a defiant look. It is not unusual for him to be especially particular in performing his tasks, the better to hide his projects of revenge. But his most subtle organ, the voice, unfailingly betrays him. These indications will show the master that peace is not yet established in the little heart."

It is not so much the tone of the voice, in a musical sense, that we have to consider: kindness or harshness, bitterness or sweetness, stupidity, intelligence, an inclination to indecision or dreaminess betray themselves in the accent and vibration of the voice, in inflexions and in the shape of words, so to speak, and this, I repeat, independently of the tone which in itself may be insignificant, spiritless and weak, or of things said which may be ordinary and commonplace. "I have just come back from Mme L's. . . . What a good soul! I think the whole world finds favour in her eyes. Directly she meets you, as soon as she opens her mouth, you recognize and know her for what she is: kindness, simple, unaffected kindness itself! Her voice is rather quavering and monotonous, her words a little slow;

* "L'art au point de vue Sociologique"; "Problèmes de l'Esthétique contemporaine";Guyau.

but you forget all that directly, because of the sincere cordiality which rings in her speech. It is with the moral and intellectual quality of the voice, as with the graphological meaning of handwriting, which is shown by its shape and style, independently of the words it reproduces. When the phonograph is perfected, when it becomes the custom to reproduce at different ages and under varying emotions, the voices of people whom we love or feel an interest in, as their faces and attitudes can now be photographed, then we shall be able to fix, analyse, assemble, and compare those elements hitherto so essentially fugitive and, so to speak, dependent on an experiment which perforce had to be unique and unchallenged by verification. For, after all, how is it possible to compare, discuss and control by various tests that which as a rule has only been heard by one person who, again, has only recorded it in his memory and can only compare it with his own recollection?

Those only who are obliged to depend principally on hearing would be aptest at observing and studying those moral and intellectual characteristics of the voice, so easy to catch, and so indiscreet in their revelations. Must not something of the delicate, intimate charm of such observations, when only made by the few, of necessity disappear when they are the subject of classes in a "laboratory of experimental psychology," and they become, in a sense, public property? I should be inclined to think so, but we must be prepared to lose in poetry what we gain in exact science. When, after long absence, you meet some one who has had a great physical shock or a heavy mental trial, you can see directly if he be bent, wrinkled or dim-eyed; and, sufficiently

warned by the visible footprints of sorrow, that irreparable ruin which it rends the heart to see in those we love, you go no further. You do not notice if the voice has also altered, lost or diminished its clearness, lowered its pitch or become slightly tremulous; these changes in the voice are what wrinkles are to the face. The organ is modified according to the whole physiognomy.*

It is rare for an acute ear to be much mistaken as to the real or alleged age of a speaker. Words like the following have been put into the mouth of the blind: "Now that my eyes are closed, you can grow old, for you will never change for me." Alas, they only speak so in books; in real life they feel painfully the flight of time over those they love, and M. de Pontmartin was mistaken when he wrote the following lines:

"I have always thought that the charming legend of Philemon and Baucis would be more convincing if Baucis and Philemon had been blind. In marriage, as understood by really exceptional natures and as our Holy Mother the Church presents it to us, blindness would be a great grace. . . . The reason why ordinary marriages are exposed to so many perils and tribulations, and often to ridicule, is that the soul only plays a secondary part in them, and is almost ignored. Love seems at the mercy of a caprice of the senses, a disfiguring illness, an unbecoming pregnancy, white hairs and wrinkles, want of taste in dress and age, especially age, which seams the skin, dims the complexion, swells the cheeks, makes the portrait a caricature, and beauty into a memory only—nothing of this exists for the blind

* "She spoke in a voice that was the perfect musical expression of the forms which produced it."—D' Annunzio, "Les Vierges aux Rochers."

husband and wife. The clock of their church stopped at the hour when they entered it, to receive the nuptial blessing. They are as young to each other at sixty as at twenty-five."

Of course some more or less delicate and expressive voices alter and age much earlier than others, but nearly always the features are in harmony with them.*

It is generally noticed in women that brunettes have contralto, and blondes soprano, voices. Each individual, then, has a voice and a manner of speaking which is as individually his own as his face.†

"It was between Lausanne and Geneva—I believe that my mind was a complete blank—that the train stopped at a station, the door opened, a traveller got in, and came towards me. I did not catch the first words he spoke to me, but I awoke from my abstraction with a sudden start. That voice—where had I heard it before? But, after all, was he speaking to me? The new comer recalled himself to me; he had often visited our school in Lausanne, and he thought he recognized an old pupil in me. As he spoke, my memory returned; the unaffected voice, the crisp, incisive speech, the manly tone which age had mellowed, making it tremble ever so slightly without taking away from its sonority, that cordial voice, the most magnetic thing in the world, all this caused me extreme pleasure. I recognized

* Nul signe de fatigue ou d'une ame blessée,
Ne trahissait en lui la mort de la pensée.

† People often wonder if, apart from music, the blind can really enjoy the theatre, or if the privation of the "action on the stage" prevents them from following the play? The truth is that most blind people are very fond of going to the theatre. "Few," writes one, "enjoy an opera or a vaudeville more than I do; all plays interest me except the pantomime." And, of course, with the ear alone, it is not at all difficult to follow a scene of several personages, and, unless the cues are too confused or the actors' voices too much alike, you quickly identify each as he or she returns to the stage.

him; I could not be mistaken in pronouncing the name of M. R——. It was he. He seemed surprised and pleased at my faithful memory. During the visits he used to pay to our establishment, he had not spoken more than once to me individually, but we were so fond of our sympathetic visitor that as soon as he came in, and we heard the first syllables of his friendly greeting, a murmur of satisfaction ran through the room."

Perhaps there are more voices than faces which resemble each other, perhaps a little more time and contact are necessary for the memory to record an auditive physiognomy than a visible one; this is possible but not certain; then, as we know, the blind are not limited, in identifying anyone, to the character of the voice; they have other clues. The following extract from a blind woman's letter strikes me as very significant on this point:

"During the last few years that M. G—— has lived in this neighbourhood, there is one continuous concert of his praises; his visits are an honour, his intelligence is quoted, his wisdom appealed to and his piety proclaimed; he is a 'perfect' man, nevertheless I must confess that he does not please me, and his physiognomy is not sympathetic to me. . . . Each time I meet him, I listen, I analyse him, and the impression remains the same. I am convinced that some day events will justify my instincts, hitherto they have never misled me. Still I do not believe myself gifted with any special perspicacity, but I certainly think that in these matters we can see more clearly than those with eyesight, for what we observe speaks to us more unmistakably than what they look at. I do not often inquire what are the features or the expression of such or such a one—

have I heard him speak? The image of him which my ear conveys cannot be influenced by the witness of others' eyes. But to return to M. D——; I had not met him for thirteen months, he was announced at M. P——'s. I listened to his coming, his light, yet over-precise tread recalled Walter Scott's description of Olivier le Dain's entrance into the audience-chamber. M. D——'s bows to me; I dread his shake of the hand, what is there so antipathetic about it? I can't tell, but I should know it amongst a thousand. He assures me that he is delighted to see me again; I don't believe it, and feel relieved when a seat is offered him at some distance from me. A conversation is started; he is the chief speaker, and I am able, without indiscretion, to take him to pieces at my leisure. His musical, rather feminine voice is gracefully modulated, and lends an insinuating charm to his easy flow of words. But in his soft tones I catch a secret, indefinite thrill, something which inexplicably repels me, and tells me unerringly that his speech and heart are not at one. His laugh confirms this impression: it seems afraid of itself and rings false. We now enter on religious topics; oh, on this point M. G—— is most edifying! What beautiful sentences fall from his lips! Still all this annoys me; I could almost get up and protest against all these holy things; the more I listen to his voice, the less truthful it sounds to me."

But the critical sense is not always working; in some tones of the voice, as in some eyes, there is a fascination, a caressing charm. Many blind people are attracted by the sheer music of the organ, as those who can see are caught by the velvety beauty of a glance. They allow themselves to be ensnared, spellbound; they will not hear, or do not listen to

intellectual and moral characteristics. "One day, when I was young," says an old blind spinster, "I heard a young man recite some quite insignificant comic pieces at a concert, I paid no attention to them, but I have never forgotten the sound of his voice. It penetrated my very heart; I felt an intense wish to know and speak to him; it was a kind of irresistible attraction, and I was obliged to exercise the full force of my will to prevent myself constantly thinking of his voice." The irresistible charm which certain voices have for certain people is not only recognized by the blind. We remember the verse of the Canticle of Canticles, "My soul melted when he spoke," and these words of Lacordaire:

"At the sight of the human face, where begins the revelation of the invisible world, man becomes troubled. He would not shed a drop of his blood for the universe as a whole: he is ready to give it all for the creature of a day or an hour. A look decides him, and if speech be added, if that power which in nature is only a sound, a murmur, a melody, become a living voice which reveals the thoughts of the soul; then that love which was only an instinct in him is transfigured with the soul's image, and death itself is powerless in presence of a sentiment only dependent on moral beauty."

Thus contact by vision is not indispensable for singling out, even physically, any one individual, and becoming affected by his presence. We can feel attracted and charmed by what I have called the "auditive physiognomy"; apart from any appreciation of moral or intellectual qualities. This appreciation is on quite another plane, and can gradually increase. A young blind wife writes of her husband:

"I love in him the sound of his voice. Even when he is speaking of ordinary, commonplace subjects, I feel an infinite charm. As soon as I hear him my heart beats and I feel happy. Besides the freshness and youthful vigour which echo in his voice, it has exquisite inflexions in pronouncing certain words. He does not speak my name like the rest of the world; in his mouth it sounds sweet and delightfully musical to me—I love his large, firm hand; when it presses mine it conveys emotion, joy, inexpressible tenderness, enthusiasm and virile force; when he touches my arm to speak to me, I feel enveloped by a strong and tender protection. I love his steady, resolute step, I feel in it what mine lacks, I love to feel his silky hair under my fingers. I love to hear him breathe, as if his breath were a sweet perfume —oh, I love him altogether, I see him from afar with his ever-rapid step, the brisk movement with which he opens and shuts a door; I know his way of putting a key into a lock, and I love all that too. Are his pictures handsome? I know nothing of that. For me his whole soul is in his voice, his whole heart in the handclasp which ends all our dear talks."

ℂ III. The "Voices" of the House

ALL houses are not alike to the impressionable and observant blind woman, any more than all faces can be. The family house, where successive generations have left stored-up memories, the beloved house where childhood and long years of life have been spent, where some great emotion of life has been felt, becomes even to a blind person a living thing, a being imbued with her own life and individuality. When she is far away, and recalls her home, it is naturally not a visual image that will remind her either of her home or of her experiences there; but we know that such images are not the only ones that can be graven on the memory, and there are other impressions beyond those received through the eyes, which are capable of moving the heart and recalling the past.

> Je parcourais du pas tout le champêtre enclos,
> Où, comme autant de fleurs, mes jours étaient éclos;
> J'écoutais chanter l'eau dans le bassins de marbre;
> Je touchais chaque mur, je parlais à chaque arbre,
> J'allais d'un tronc a l'autre et je les embrassais,
> Je leur prêtais le sens des pleurs que je versais,
> Et je croyais sentir, tant notre âme a de force,
> Un cœur ami du mien palpiter sous l'écorce.*

Besides a general type and topography which the blind woman can perfectly grasp and retain, many houses and apartments have sometimes a strongly defined aspect, or, so to speak, an olfactory, audi-

* "I wandered slowly over the meadows where my days had passed as flowers blossom, I listened to the water singing in the marble basin, touched each wall, and spoke to every tree, going from trunk to trunk and kissing them. I tried to think they understood the reason of my tears, and I felt as if under their rugged bark a heart akin to mine was beating."—Lamartine, "Jocelyn."

tive, tactile physiognomy. This strikes people whose sense of observation is not limited to visual impressions.*

"In the hall each step echoed on the tiles between the subterranean depths and the reverberating heights of the staircase. It was the real ancient atmosphere and hereditary odour proper to old rural dwellings; smells of cooking, the mustiness of cellars. Personal exhalations from bedrooms combined in unequal proportions; the faint mixture of lavender and iris mixed imperceptibly with the emanations of mildewing stuffs; a strong air, a subtle perfume, impregnated with life and death as the château itself, filled as it has been in turn with cradles and coffins."†

Henri Lavedan also has remarked the type of old house in the provinces, "with heavy portals, and lugubrious stone staircase, smelling of raisins, cellar and cat." It is certain that the fruit shelves and the cupboards of a good middle-class house in a small town, filled in autumn with jams, the traditional prunes, apples, preserved grapes, intended to supply winter desserts till after Palm Sunday, exhale through their cracks characteristic whiffs, making the hall and staircase smell quite differently from Parisian back premises, which are too small to keep large stores and are limited to the dessert of the day, with recollections of the day before and hints of the morrow: desserts at which fancy cakes and shop-made preserves eke out home-made dainties that would taste and smell stronger.

* "Gradually I got to know the smallest details of the old dwelling, the feeling of the walls, the warping of the canvas of certain old pictures, the chips in cabinets, certain blocks of the flooring which bent under the foot, imperceptible nothings which I have never forgotten, and all the noises of life and the silences to which I was attentive."—Henri de Régnier, "Jours heureux."

† Art. Roe, "L'Assaut de Loigny."

Different again is the smell which hangs round the refectory of a college or community. The poor man's house has not the same atmosphere as that of the rich, and in each of these categories there are many degrees and shades. Almost every room has its special smell which comes from its draperies, stuffs, the wood of the furniture, etc., and is especially due to its inhabitant and to his habits. He uses certain soaps, toilet washes, scents; hence, as I said before, we get a whole scale of odours from the rural basil and lavender, to the latest, subtlest blend of fashion, giving the note and special character of the habitation.

"My aunts inhabited rooms on the second floor. My Aunt Marcelline's room was hung with a light, flowered chintz and had padded chairs to match. The chintz had a special smell which mingled with the remains of scent in the bottles on the toilet table. . . . At the head of the bed a gold watch hung ticking on a nail. I put my ear close to it to listen. . . . The smell of scent grew stronger as the window was kept shut. . . . A gold-coloured moth would sometimes come out of the old arm-chairs in the drawing-room; it flew on dusty, downy wings through the silence, in a vague odour of camphor and smoking lamp-wick. Each room had its special smell. I can well remember that of the stables below; it was composed of meat, game, wood, dress-stuffs, and in the midst an old carriage gave out a smell of damp leather, varnish and dusty cloth."*

Then there is the "voice" of the house, made up of the familiar sounds of its interior life. A sick woman wrote some months after her brother's death: "I think of blind people much more than I work for

* Henri de Régnier, "Jours heureux."

them, for in my confined life the functions of the ear become daily more important. Think how quiet a house is, inhabited only by two women, and what significance the sound of an opening or closing door, or the echo of a footstep, has in such a silence; remember that for eleven inactive years I could only keep in touch with my brother by listening to him in the distance when he was at home; he was too busy to give me more than a few minutes at a time, and still, after more than a year and a half I have sudden illusions; then it is that I think of the blind." The noises made by doors and windows often vary very much, as Gogol so aptly puts it:

"I don't know why the doors creaked so—was it because the hinges were rusty? Or had the carpenter who made them concealed some secret mechanism in his work? I don't know if this could be, but the strange thing was that each door had its special voice. The bedroom door was the lightest soprano; the dining-room, a rolling bass. As for that which closed the hall, it gave out a queer, plaintive, quavering sound; on listening very attentively, you could distinguish the words, 'I am freezing, Master.'"*

We have the special sonority of footsteps going hither and thither, the greater or lesser echo in certain rooms, staircases and landings; then outside noises, which can be noticed in certain rooms at certain hours and seasons: the bell, the church clock, timepieces in neighbouring houses, which in summer can be heard striking in their different tones through the open windows. Then the carpenter's plane, the anvil of the smith opposite, the muffled roar of the train, the bells of the diligence, which persistently

* "Mes petits pères," Russian familiar address of servants to masters.—Trans.

passes at a fixed time and waits at the bottom of the street, its horses stamping under the afternoon flies. Then the shouts of the street boys of the neighbourhood, who from generation to generation have played in front of this special door, in this tiny market-place, always with the same cries and doubtless at the same games. The children at play and the grown-up people who watch them have given place many times to others in turn, but the scene has not changed; the traveller who returns, be he blind or no, listener or onlooker, is carried back once more to his childhood, when he envied the street boys at their games, probably because he was not allowed to play in such a public spot. You can hear the creaking of a pump, the plash of the street fountain; from the other side comes the noise of a poultry run, and the cries of swallows, who come and build their nests always under the same eaves of our old homestead and are more faithful than ourselves to the annual stay under the parental roof. Dear little swallows, don't think that you do not exist for the blind man! True, he cannot see you, but as you come and go, you call, you twitter, you make a soft, harmonious brushing with your wings; he hears and loves you! Then there is the great fir tree in the garden, with its ever-recurring wail in the autumn wind; in spring it always shelters the same birds, singing the same notes at the same hours.

Breaths of sweetness from beds of mignonette, carnations and roses, are wafted on the night air into the rooms. In a word, the wandering air, the atmosphere of the old patriarchal house is unmistakable; it enfolds you; your heart sinks or rises at its contact or even at its memory, suddenly recalled to you by some tangible, olfactory or audi-

tive sensation you have experienced there. "I was in bitter grief, but I involuntarily noticed the most insignificant trifles. The room was very dim and hot; it smelt of peppermint, eau-de-Cologne, camomile and Hoffmann's drops. This odour made such an impression on me that when I happen to smell, or even remember it, my imagination carries me back directly to the dark, stifling room, and calls up all the details of that dreadful hour."*

And d' Annunzio says: "He leaned his head on his mother's knees, growing calm under the maternal touch. A sob still shook him from time to time. The far-off sorrows of his youth took vague shape and crossed his mind once more. He heard the twittering of swallows, the whir of the knife-grinder's wheel, voices shouting in the street, well-known noises of former afternoons, noises which made his very heart sick.†

Places recall memories to the blind as well as to those who can see. When you come back to a house or a garden where you have received some great impression, where a "piece of your life" has been spent, the memory of long-past events and feelings revive with joyful, or, alas! more often with sorrowful, intensity. Neither is it a matter of indifference to the blind, any more than to those with eyesight, to pass their lives always in the same house, where memories can be accumulated and classified so that they can be recalled, instead of being scattered pell-mell amongst the fleeting impressions of a more or less nomadic life. A blind person in a town or a house is as much confused by the absence of familiar sounds as by hearing strange noises, or

* Tolstoi, "Souvenirs."
† "Le Triomphe de la Mort."

rather noises which were not to be heard where he was in the habit of living.

One can accustom oneself to an "atmosphere of sounds," which, in a sense, lives with us, and is, so to speak, the "auditive horizon." The solitude of places is not purely objective; there is an important subjective side to this impression, for you feel all the more lonely and isolated when surrounding objects and sounds are unfamiliar to you, recalling none of your preoccupations and unassociated with none of your daily cares. After the lapse of several days the interest in life returns; you have lost some associations, you discover others; but during the first hours of days when the sound of the clock is new, footsteps are strange and recall no one, and the opening or shutting of doors is no clue to who is coming in or going out; then the sense of solitude is very vivid. And it is by no means the same thing whether you wake up to the old-fashioned chimes of a quiet Flemish town or to the whistles of a factory district in Lyons.

Here again progress has not always taken a poetic direction. Nothing was so pretty as to hear in a town, and especially in a village, each hour announced by a bell, the Angelus, the Curfew, the call to school on week-days and to church on Sundays—convents, private schools and even the large work-rooms, "works" as they used to be called—regulated all their movements by the sound of a bell which assembled the workmen; and steamboats announced their arrival by loudly ringing the bell in the stern. In the distance this was not unpleasant; it was sometimes quite poetic. But we have moved with the times; "works," which now call themselves manufactories, announce by a stri-

dent and prolonged whistle, the hour of work; steamboats arrive with the bellowing of sirens, everywhere whistles replace bells. The Town Hall and all secular buildings which hope to supplant the Church, will perhaps wish to give some auditive signal for the principal divisions of the day; they cannot let off cannon like the Eiffel Tower; they will not, like the belfries of the Middle Ages, borrow from religion her mode of calling to prayer, they doubtless consider it more appropriate to the modern lay spirit to borrow from factories the signal for work which the steamer uses, to mark the "legal limit." So that probably in future, we shall grow quite accustomed to the strange formula, "There goes the fifteen or seventeen o'clock whistle," (la xvme, la xviime heure a sifflé). . . ." Then it will no longer be possible, at the close of an ever-to-be-remembered day, to say with a sigh, "We must part, it is the peaceful hour of falling dew. Did you hear? The evening Angelus has rung."

Some may smile to read the foregoing, and may think such things very trivial, perhaps even very material. But others, I hope, will understand, because they know how infinitely many are "les fils mystérieux dont nos cœurs sont liés." And they will realize that a blind woman also can be bound by them. Who does not carry in his mind's eye some corner of a house or garden, which he loves to people with dream-memories? Our heart loves to linger there, for it seems that there in the distance, we have been, or could yet be, happy—there dreams, desires or regrets are born, and we love the spot the more. Our life and that of those we love, is spent perforce in material surroundings, amongst objects often insignificant in themselves,

but which take a meaning from our contact. They retain this significance long after those who imparted it are gone, and they become, in a sense, mementoes of life. They exist to preserve to us certain pages in our lives, which otherwise would be effaced; to remind our poor fickle hearts of those we loved—and whom we cannot always remember, and lastly to recall us ourselves to those who promise always to remember us, but who perhaps would very quickly forget us without these tangible relics of our passage. Do not let us dwell on these aids to memory. It is in the natural order of things that the general type and class of a house and its furniture would change. But it ought to be by degrees, and with much much respect and caution, without violent upheavals, and without attempting to ignore time, that indispensable agent in all harmonious and durable formations. Nothing is so sad as an old dwelling that has been roughly stripped of furniture; it is bitter to those who remain, unprofitable to those leaving, and even repugnant to casual observers. It is a hateful and anti-social custom, to separate in such a way what time and man had joined together. The family home is a living person; let us not mutilate it! Let those who forsake it, going far afield to found a new home, a branch of the old one they are leaving, because they must "grow and multiply," take some things away with them. Well and good, but let them be relics, not dislocated fragments. A great leafy tree has given us pleasant shelter and a resting-place after a tiring expedition; when we start again, if we pick some of its leaves and fruits, it is not to despoil a kind friend, it is that we may take away the slips and cuttings that will make it live again, or to tie a green sprig of memory to our travelling knapsack.

BOOK II. Physical Activity

I. How to find One's Way without Eyesight

WE have not solved every problem by accumulating and testing impressions from contact with persons and things; it remains to be seen how the blind girl stands, as regards the material side of life, and what her own disposition and feelings are. Let us, first of all, ascertain how she finds her way about.

Has it ever happened to you to enter your house at night without a light? Did you not find your way across the courtyard, through the hall, and up the stairs? In spite of the darkness you put your key in the lock, you reached your bedroom, where you found the matches on the mantelpiece. If you are fairly handy and methodical, I am sure that you did all this without too much feeling about, and you upset nothing. Now, this aptitude for getting about, and finding objects in the dark, in familiar places, which necessity suddenly reveals to you, is also the prerogative of the blind. The latter daily cultivate it instinctively, and in them it is highly developed.

It would be a mistake to compare the power which blind people, under some conditions, possess, of guiding themselves and finding their way, to the faculty inherent in many animals of reaching their destination in complete darkness. For animals have instinct, the five senses are not enough to explain the phenomena observed*—it is supposed that they

*See Fabre, "Souvenirs entomologiques," 1st series; and Capitaine G. Reynaud, "Les Lois de l'Orientation chez les Animaux," "Revue des Deux Mondes," March 15, 1898.

have a "sense of locality." Man, on the contrary, whether he have the use of his eyes or not, has no other faculty for locality but sight, and in him the sense of locality results from association and reason, not from instinct. It is not very difficult to retain in one's mind the plan of a room, a house, a garden or a town. Try to call up the mental picture of a room topographically described as follows: Fifteen feet by twelve, window on one of the smaller walls, door opposite window, mantelpiece in the middle of the long wall which faces you as you enter. The principal pieces of furniture are grouped thus: bed in the right-hand corner behind the door, large writing table between mantelpiece and window, bookcase opposite mantelpiece, to the left of bookcase, dressing table, to the right, cheffonier; two or three arm-chairs to the right and left of fireplace; chairs in corners, occasional tables here and there, but principally near the fireplace. Well, although you have never seen the room, have you not a very clear idea of it? The topography of a house is more complicated; still if the construction be fairly regular, it does not require a great effort to understand and retain it, if there are a great many irregularities it may take time to study them. As to the garden, let us suppose it bounded on the south by the house first of all, and then by the fence of the poultry yard, on the north by a high wall, on the east by a wooden paling and a row of large trees, on the west by a low wall, and having a fountain nearly in the centre. Eight principal paths adorn and divide this garden; one to the south, one to the north, one to the east and one to the west; four others start from the four sides and lead

up to the fountain. It is quite simple to picture these long lines, the mind easily retains their position, and they serve as starting points for the details to be noticed later, such as little alleys, arbours, clumps of fruit-trees, baskets of flowers, patches of vegetables, etc., etc., which themselves will stand for landmarks. The topography of a town impresses itself on the memory, by the same means. You go from simple to complex ideas; first the important roads, the river, if there be one, squares and the principal monument; then when these landmarks are well retained, you gradually group round them the detailed indications; little streets, irregularities, etc., which are pointed out to you by degrees.

"But," we hear you object, "It is not enough to carry the topography of places in the mind, how can we get about a room, a house, a garden, a town, without eyesight? How can we know where we are, and not lose ourselves at every moment? In a room we can touch the furniture and walls, but walking about the house is more difficult, we run the risk of falling downstairs. Then how can we manage in the garden, or in the street?" Well, remember what I have already said about the communications and connexions of the blind man with the external world; he hears, he smells, he touches (not only with the hand, but with the whole body, and particularly with the foot), he can utilize these diverse sensations in practical ways. Do not therefore let us imagine a blind girl afraid to make a movement unless her hands are stretched out before her, for ever fumbling and tapping either indoors or out, and afraid to venture into the garden. If she be in the least degree intelligent, with

any instincts of movement, and activity, she feels about very little, and has other means of taking her bearings; she moves hither and thither and generally manages to touch the right objects in familiar places, we may be sure. She turns everything to account; hearing, smell, the touch of foot or elbow, draws reasonable inferences from the impressions she receives, and utilizes them. We do not, I repeat, find our way about merely by tangible means, but also by auditive and olfactory clues.

In a room the window looking on the street or garden is nearly always a landmark, when open or even shut it admits sounds from outside, such as wheel traffic or the song of birds. The fireplace is also a clue; if the fire is alight, it can be heard crackling, or its warmth is apparent; then there is often a clock on the mantelpiece, whose ticking is also a guide. A vase of flowers, a wash-hand stand with its varied odours of soaps and toilet washes, even a bird cage, are landmarks which it is not necessary to touch in order to locate them. A carpet in the middle of the room, a mat by the bed, a hearthrug are indications to the feet; then one's elbow brushes against a curtain, a portière, or the angle of a piece of furniture in a familiar place; the knee encounters a heavy arm-chair, or an ordinary chair in a usual position, all these well-known indications are practical helps. I will give an example, and the reader must excuse the explanation being necessarily minute and complicated, but it has to be so, in order to answer a question which has been put hundreds of times. Supposing that a blind woman loses her bearings for a moment, as often happens, owing to the rapid noisy movements of several people? Well, she feels

with her foot the corner of the carpet in front of her; the parquet floor is at her left and also behind her; that guides her to a certain extent, but there are two corners to the carpet which both reach parquet flooring, one to the left, and one to the back of her, as the carpet stretches in front of her to the right. How is she to know which of the two corners she is standing on? The noise from the street which is heard on the left, and indicates the window, will decide; as the carpet stretches in front and to the right and the window is on the left, the blind woman must necessarily be between the middle of the room and the window, for if she were on the other corner of the carpet, she would hear the window on her right; therefore she must face the fireplace a little to the right, and have her back to the chiffonier, the bookcase, etc.; the door must be at the end of the room to her right. She takes a step to the left, so as to be within range of the fireplace, and she hears the clock ticking; a little further on she can smell the flowers in the vases; she is therefore perfectly sure of her position without having touched anything: no looker-on would even have noticed her moment of hesitation, without he happened to be very observant and accustomed to the blind.

Indoors, the foot is a great guide, for it can immediately discover tiles, boards, parquets waxed or otherwise, a woollen rug or fibre mat, a strip of bamboo or cocoanut matting, oil-cloth, linoleum, etc, etc. There are several ways of ascertaining the approach to a staircase; sometimes the first step is in stone and is in abrupt contrast with the carpet; sometimes a very slight inequality may be easily felt, sometimes a strip of stair carpet begins or ends

suddenly—sounds and special echoes in certain rooms and passages, smells and various noises are precious clues which are easily remembered. As a man with eyesight remembers visible surroundings, so the blind man retains the memory of auditive environments; the former when he enters a room which has been enlarged, although not otherwise altered, will have the impression, even after a long absence, of greater size; the latter by his hearing will realize the same thing as he walks or speaks in the room.

In a very large, luxurious apartment, heavily carpeted, with curtains and portières which muffle all sounds, the blind man is very much puzzled to discover his whereabouts, he cannot get about alone if he has not been able beforehand to examine each piece of furniture carefully, or to pass in review an inventory of the contents. Furthermore, for him to find his way about a room, he must be allowed to see the arrangement of it and to touch, however lightly, the principle pieces of furniture. Of course if he is always led from the door to the seat intended for him, without being taken round this room or the others which he passes through and asked to discover for himself the general arrangements he cannot tell where he is, and, unless the topography be very simple, he will not be able to grasp it.

The blind man can neither find his way nor circulate easily and safely in either a very small room full of scattered furniture, or a large empty one where the foot only finds a wide, smooth surface, either of polished parquet flooring or of very flat even carpet. The landmarks wanting in the latter are numerous it is true in the former, but they are

confusing in getting about unless after long habit. The most convenient are medium-sized rooms, with furniture ranged along the walls rather than arranged in isolated groups—unless a room is very large and very full, an inventory can soon be made. And, of course, it is not necessary for getting about and finding the way to make a list of ornaments, trifles, pictures, wall-brackets, trinkets, etc. It is sufficient to see in a bedroom, the door, window, fireplace, bed, chest of drawers, wardrobe and table; in a drawing-room, beside the doors, windows, fireplace, piano, sofa, principal chairs, tables and consoles. The knowledge of minor objects will follow later, and their position be retained in the memory. The best way of starting on the first or general inventory is to go round the room, making the door, the fireplace, or the bed the starting place; coming back to it each time we have ascertained the position of any object by means of its surroundings. On taking possession of a room, even for one night, this little tour of inspection must be made. In proportion, I should say the same of the garden or suite of rooms—it is better to devote five minutes to ascertaining the arrangement of our bedroom, and half an hour, or an hour if necessary, to learning the topography of the house where we are going to spend several days, so that we can afterwards come and go freely and find what we want alone, than to be perpetually obliged to ask favours of others, because we would not take a little trouble to get acquainted with the contents of the house. The short and preliminary inventory has also the effect of teaching the blind man, if he be at all accustomed to travelling, the class and consequently the tariff of the hotel he is stopping at; the position and dimen-

sions of the room, the comfort of the draperies and furniture, the arrangements, the cleanliness of toilet requisites will all indicate within a few pence the price of the lodging. And we may add in passing that the same thing applies to restaurants; the way the table is laid, the thickness of the crockery and glass, the polish of the plate, the manners of the waiters, the tone of conversation and a certain something in the air, will enable the experienced blind man to say with practical certainty, "Our lunch will cost so much," before he has tasted his cutlet or boiled egg.

Of course it is not enough to have spent a few minutes in a room, or a few hours in a house, to acquire that precision of movement which enables a fairly clever blind person to put his hand unerringly on the object required though he knows its position, or to stop mechanically without counting his footsteps outside a door or at the foot of a staircase; to do this he would have to possess in his arms and legs that sense of the exact distance to be traversed which the pianist has in his fingers; but at least he remembers that a certain thing will be found in a certain spot, and, with a little attention and preliminary fumbling, he will find what he is seeking. Repetition of the same movements creates habit, which quickly brings ease and security. When a blind man has occupied the same house during several weeks, it becomes, barring special complications, a lasting memory; when he returns, even after many months or even years of absence, he feels quite at home. At first he may feel some slight hesitation, owing to the difference between the dimensions of the familiar premises he has left and those to which he has returned after

partly forgetting them. If he takes possession of a large room after taking spending a long time in a small one, although he may not hesitate about the position of the smallest objects, he will feel for the first few hours or even days checked in his movements; he will try to touch things which he cannot reach without changing the position of his whole body. When he has got out of the way of walking about in wide, long corridors and suddenly finds himself back in them again, even if memory has perfectly retained their topography down to the smallest details, at first he feels a certain awkwardness and sense of strangeness, he fears he has passed the stopping point when it is still some distance off, but this impression passes quickly and the old feeling of security returns.

As we leave the house for the garden, our foot continues to discover a certain quantity of indications. In the garden I have taken as an illustration one path will be laid with fresh gravel, another with fine sand, and another has not been relaid for some time and gives hardly any sound. The path leading from the house to the fountain shelves abruptly upwards, whereas the one under the north wall is almost concave, the ground there is often damp, and the last path is unmistakably wider than the others; a border of box runs along both sides of the paths to the east and west of the fountain. The foot can easily distinguish between a stiff, firm row of box and an edging of limp, almost creeping, plants; even if the fountain happens to stop, there is no fear of falling into the water round it, since the foot comes in contact with the sloping edge, and is stopped. The shade of a certain tree, the bright sunshine in a particularly exposed part of

one of the paths, the smell of a special basket of flowers in a familiar spot, the effluvia and the noises of the chicken-run to the right of the house, are so many clues which enable the blind man to find his way about perfectly; he can come and go without the slightest hesitation. Besides, the arrangement of such a garden is easy to remember and the land-marks numerous; the sound of the fountain always indicates the centre, noises from the street the north, the east can be remembered by shade and clumps of trees, under the low west wall runs a flower-bed which the foot discovers at the edge of the path, while the three other paths lead straight to the wall. To the south is the house with all the odours and sounds of humanity, and the farm is always easily recognized by ear and nose. Suppose a blind woman finds herself unexpectedly at one or other of these points: how is she to know where she is? Is this not precisely the question which puzzles those who can see? If she knows she is overlooked, or fears to be, or if she does not want to appear puzzled, she will pretend to be slowly walking about, she will follow the path she is in till it ends, that is to say until she finds another path or another corner of the garden; if it be a centre or surrounding path she will retrace her steps and come back again. But, as she goes, she will walk in a gentle zigzag, so as to ascertain the width of the path and what its borders are composed of, paying the greatest attention the while. First, where is the sound of the fountain? Behind her—as she goes on, she finds shade and can therefore conclude that she is in the middle path, leading from the east side of the fountain. As there is no wind she cannot go by the sound of the branches—but it

might also be the northern path, which at this time in the day is also in shadow; she must risk a few more steps, the ground is soft and open, the blind woman feels no shelter; it must be the north path. . . A cart passes along the road. . . The question is settled with no more doubt; she follows the path to the end, expecting to reach the low western wall, and as her foot encounters the flower-bed she is quite reassured: she turns to the left, towards the farm-yard, which she reaches after passing the clump of rose trees which she knew would be there, on her left, and which finally convinced her that she was in the west path. As she grows more sure of her locality, her step becomes quicker and firmer.

So we see that if a blind person is to walk unhesitatingly about gardens, town or country, he must constantly encounter objects which may serve him as landmarks. Thus, a narrow path, of unequal surface, more or less well-rolled, with here and there an excrescence of gravel or a soft patch, and an occasional protruding root, is very helpful in walking alone. The obliging person who wishes to start a blind person on the right way never fails to lead him well into the middle of the road, however wide, and then to say, "You are quite in the middle, there is nothing in your way, you can go forward quite safely, you have only to walk straight before you. . ." But to walk straight in the middle of a wide road, path, pavement or avenue is precisely the great difficulty. Thus the blind man when left alone and free to proceed as he prefers, if accustomed to guide himself, will immediately turn to one side, the side he knows best and which has the fewer obstacles, and especially the most land-

marks—stepping-stones we might almost call them —he would even rather meet at times with obstacles which he can overcome and use as indications; for instance, he will prefer the side of the road which is lined with houses to that which only consists of open gardens and fields, offering no clue by hearing, smell or touch. Supposing it possible—which it is not—to keep an absolutely straight course without eyesight or landmarks, or turning however slightly aside, to find himself in a wrong direction, or if after some hundred yards the blind man suddenly wishes to know exactly where abouts he is, and some check, interruption or false step has made him lose count of the time elapsed since he started, he will have to cross to one of the sides of the road and get in touch with his landmarks again. But unless he has thoroughly mastered all these landmarks, or they are very numerous, he will find them much more difficult to discover than when he passed them unexpectedly one by one. It is therefore easy to understand why large empty spaces of even ground are very unfavourable to finding one's way by hearing and touch.

If the ground is covered with snow, this topographic and auditive monotony is very confusing to the blind. Changing noises, rain, high wind, etc., prevent the usual sounds being heard, such as echoes and those particular noises which, as I have said elsewhere,* are valuable clues; very bewildering also are loud carriage-traffic, galloping, cavalry bells and drums; their vibration fills the ear and prevents the blind from seeing, or feeling their way. It is only under such conditions that the hand ought to be used to find the whereabouts, by touch-

* "Les Aveugles par un Aveugle," Paris, Hachette.

ing a tree, plantain, chestnut or privet, or a familiar wall covered with glyceria or ivy. The resonance of footsteps varies according to whether we walk on an open path or along a wall, and especially if trees form an arch over our heads. If a door of sufficient dimensions in a wall be suddenly opened, it is easy to hear very distinctly. Then there is the realization of so much space covered; if a blind man knows a certain door is to be found in a certain spot, at such and such a distance from where he started, he will not make a mistake: even if there be a slight inequality in front, or a projecting step, he will go in without hesitation.

We see then that the blind can freely move about on familiar ground: rooms, houses, gardens. I do not assert that all can do so with ease, but I have shown how it is possible. It is not their blindness, but some other obstacle peculiar to themselves which prevents those who do not.

ℭ II. Everyday Life

THE following description is taken from the address on the Prize for Virtue, given by Edouard Pailleron, November 20, 1884. "She* took care of her helpless mother and her hemiphlegic stepfather at the same time, going constantly from one bed to the other. The mother is dead and only one patient remains, but Léonore nurses him with unremitting care. How handy she is! Yet she herself is blind and in delicate health! She idealizes her task, and invests it with a kind of dim poetry which is in herself. She covers the chimney-piece with flowers to cheer the sick man's eye, and the doctor often finds the patient's pillow strewn with rose-leaves!"

Yes, the blind sick-nurse is a possibility and a reality! She is not the ordinary, mercenary servant, produced by our unnatural social conditions, but the member which each self-sufficing family ought to possess. The elder sister, or unmarried aunt, who lives at home to play the gentle, loving part of benefactress to her relations, who takes care of

* Léonore Papin, Château-d'Orleron (Charente-Inférieure): "Blind from childhood. When her father died, and she was twenty years old, she was placed in a home. Her mother was left penniless, and re-married in 1848. During the war of 1870 L. Papin was sent back to her parents, and refused to leave them again, so that she might look after them in their old age and infirmity. Her mother, who had dropsy and liver complaint, has just died at the age of seventy-five. She continues to take devoted care of her stepfather, aged eighty-three. The old man is asthmatic, wheezy, half-deaf, semi-paralysed, and subject to all sorts of inconvenient infirmities. Though blind, Léonore makes the most ideal sick-nurse. In spite of perpetual poverty and illness, the house is always astonishingly clean, and visitors are surprised at the polite and quiet welcome they receive. Léonore is often tired to death, but she never loses her balance or slackens in her thoughtfulness."

young brothers, nephews and aged parents, and is the centre of peace, happiness and security in the whole family, sometimes happens to be a blind woman. If a calming potion has to be prepared, or a sick person rubbed or dressed, her misfortune is no obstacle, and the afflicted one becomes a help instead of a burden.

"For the last fortnight," writes a blind woman whose father had just died after a long illness, "he called me up several times in the night, although I go to bed very late. Not only would he never take anything without consulting me, but it was usually I who had to warm his drink, and give him his tabloids or ether capsules. I used to put them into his mouth!"

I know a considerable number of unmarried blind women who from taste or necessity live alone. They look after their little households entirely themselves; and there exist many more mothers of families than would be credited, who, becoming blind between the years of twenty and forty, are skilful, active and enterprising; they do all the work of their houses, cook, attend to their young children, sweep, dust, wash, mend, and even sometimes make clothes. From kitchen to laundry, using all the clues furnished by hearing, smell and touch, and drawing more or less instinctively the right inferences, the blind woman goes about her business like any other;* she can light a lamp or candle, kindle the fire and keep it up, without eyesight. Nothing is easier than to strike a match; the prepared side of the box can be recognized in an instant. The smell of sul-

* Because a very short-sighted person makes a slovenly cook, this is not necessarily the case with the blind. Indeed, in the former instance, the defective eyes are still depended upon, whereas in the latter case the blind woman uses her fingers as tests, and fingers discover many things which escape weak eyes.

phur, the noise of the flame and the heat indicate ignition. The match is then placed to the wick of lamp or candle, which, stiff when cold, grows limp and flexible directly it is alight; the blind person perceives this. A wood fire is not difficult to lay, light or keep up; with the tongs the pieces of charred wood can be felt and collected and the half-consumed embers dispersed; with the left hand the fresh log can be thrown on, or, if this is difficult, one end can be held in the hand while the other is guided by the tongs. A coal fire in a range or a stove can also be kept up without sight; it is true that it must be constantly touched, which necessitates frequent hand-washing, but it can be done.

"We can dress our hair almost as easily as women who can see," said a blind woman to me, "if anyone will take the pains to show us how to do it. To imitate a coiffure, it suffices us to pass the hand lightly over another person's head and carefully to follow her movements as she dresses her hair. Then we experiment on ourselves, and follow the explanation given. Touch is a perfect guide to regularity, but not to gracefulness; and often when our hair is perfectly neat we are told it is badly dressed, because we do not know how to give the negligent grace so much praised on the heads of women who can see. We can curl, wave, or puff out our hair with little combs, raise the back knot with the finger, etc., and we can also dress another person's hair, but our tendency is always to produce a flat, straight effect, rough, flowing hair being unpleasant to our touch."

Blind women who have lost their sight late in life, and remember what good hair-dressing looked like, have better taste and more success.

Objects generally considered very delicate, such

as watches, can be handled without seeing them. To tell the time it suffices to take a watch between the four first fingers of the right hand, raising the glass by the introduction of the thumb nail between the dial and the frame of the glass; the thumb is then laid flat on the hands to ascertain their position. Very many actions appear at first impossible to to the blind, but are in reality quite feasible by frequent, progressive and leisurely practice.

Naturally the great drawback in most cases is slowness; the blind person leaves the place where he has just been working surrounded by various objects that he fears to forget; whereas those who can see make sure with one glance that they are leaving nothing behind them; the blind man is obliged to see with his hands, an equally accurate but much more lengthy process.

In some schools for the blind they make a point of training young girls to domestic work, such as peeling vegetables, choosing them in the kitchen garden by feeling their leaves, laying a table, washing crockery, simple mending of clothes, sewing on buttons, washing, sorting and hanging out linen to dry, and recognizing its quality, texture, hem, etc., by certain signs perceptible to the touch.

It is thought, and rightly, that a blind girl thus trained can be less of a burden to her family if she is to live definitely, or even temporarily, at home. But it is at the Blind School at Janesville (U.S.A.) that this domestic training has been carried to the greatest perfection. There they have a regular cookery and housework class. The pupils are accustomed, when quite children, to use cooking utensils as playthings, and then are gradually taught to light fires and to use the kitchen range, beginning with

simple dishes and going on to more elaborate ones.* These require very careful judgement, for instance, separating the whites from the yolks of eggs, and weighing and measuring quantities. All the dishes prepared in the class are served in the refectory, where the skill of each pupil can be tested and appraised. The aim of the Janesville School is not, of course, to train cooks for domestic service. It is only intended that these blind girls should be able to be of use in their homes by practical everyday cookery; the school totally denies any attempt at turning out professional cooks, which, of course, would be absurd.

Whether or no they have been trained in schools, whether their aptitudes be developed systematically or revealed by necessity or the wish to be of use, the fact remains that there are, in Europe and in America, blind women who have been able to take an active part in family life.

In concluding these concrete examples, I venture to append the following description actually written by a blind American woman:†

"I was eighteen years when I lost my sight, and my agony, when I realized my irreparable affliction, cannot be described. I was a poor girl with no spot on earth that I could call home; and in the bitterness of my heart I cried out, 'All is lost!' But I will not dwell any longer on that part of my life when

* Our completely blind girls have succeeded in turning out the following dishes alone, from the choice, weighing out and preparing of the ingredients, to the dishing up: milk toast, bread and milk, biscuits, cream crackers, dry and buttered toast, lemon cake, fruit cake, dry tea biscuits, cream shapes, roast beef, beefsteak, roast fowl, fried ham, hashed meat, rissoles, cauliflower and potato salads, boiled, baked, fried and mashed potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages, carrots, turnips, cod-fish, apple, jelly, grape jam, preserved quinces, lemons, peaches, pineapples and tomatoes; pickles, jams, sauces, etc.—Extract from "The Boston Mentor."

† Elizabeth Putnam, Extract from "The Boston Mentor."

I feared to lose my reason. Two years later, at the instigation of friends, and wishing to find shelter for five years, I entered the Boston Institute. One evening as I went through the class-room I overheard two of my companions deploring the discouragement which I had allowed to paralyse all my faculties. I went back into my room resolved to overcome myself. I had no talent for music, but I was very strong at figures. Setting myself resolutely to work, I soon discovered that behind the clouds the sun can still shine. After my five years of study I left the Institute, carrying with me the esteem and affection of my companions and teachers. I passed my first winter with my sister in Canada, and in the spring I paid a short visit to another sister in Boston. She fell ill and I nursed her for a year. There I made the acquaintance of a young carpenter, who married me two years later, in spite of the forebodings and opposition of his friends. I began immediately to keep house, only partially assisted by my husband. I soon learnt to cook any kind of meat or fish; if I had to roast, I used to test the heat of the roasting oven, and decide the length of time required by the size and quality of the meat. When I had to fry, I would thrust in the fork to see if the meat or fish were done, and in the case of beef-steak a touch of the finger was enough. At first I found pastries and creams very difficult, but by putting my hand in the oven I soon learnt when it was hot enough, and I used just lightly to brush my finger over the cream to see if it were ready. I failed many times, but my husband always urged me to 'try again.' I took his advice, and at last grew quite a skilful cook. It cost me many tears, but 'there is no victory without effort.'

"Three years later a little son came to brighten our home, and the gossip began again, 'What will she do? She certainly can't look after a child,' etc. But baby flourished, and seemed as strong and happy as other children, despite paternal anxiety. My husband confessed to me that when he went away to his work in the morning for the whole day he felt worried and anxious. Six years later God sent us another boy; but this time all fear was over, and I could cut out and make all my children's clothes, cook and take care of the house, and I had the satisfaction of hearing people say that the blind woman's children were better turned out than any others in the school. My husband gave up carpentering and took a grocer's shop. It was in a very busy street, and people were constantly coming in for eatables. We then decided to sell cakes and pastry made by me. Not only excursionists stopped for a meal, but neighbours would buy things for their table, so that I had to take a help, though I still did the cooking myself. Our shop became a success, but after a few years my husband's weak health obliged him to give up work, and though he had committed the folly of marrying a poor blind girl, we had saved enough to retire on. Six years passed, and one morning when my husband was riding with my sons, he was thrown, and picked up dead. Happily I had still my children. I live with my eldest son, now a widower, and take care of his house."

BOOK III. The Blind Woman Herself

ℭ I. Appearance, Tastes and Disposition

"I KNOW of nothing more touching and expressive than those calm faces," says de Vogüé, speaking of the blind. "With us, all the light of the human physiognomy is concentrated in the eyes, in them it is diffused over all the other features; each muscle expresses attention, but with something of infinite gentleness and purity. As you watch them, their faces convey the same impression of rest which you receive on entering a dark room after a long walk through the streets on a hot summer's day."* A blind girl's face may be quite agreeable without even possessing beauty. Her manners and attitude may be quite easy, unconstrained and graceful. I say they "may be," but I do not mean in the least to assert that they always are: far from it; but this is supposed never to be possible. Is it not true that to most people the idea of a blind woman calls up a poor disfigured girl, groping along with outstretched hands, her head thrown back for fear of hitting it against something, never knowing where she is, unable to get from one place to another without some kindly arm to guide her, always passive (at any rate physically), and incapable of any initiative or effort in life? This, of course, is why a celebrated contemporary preacher says of the blind that they are "reduced to an exceptionally painful and humiliating position." The orator was thinking

* Vogüé, "A Travers l'Exposition."

of the blind beggar, determined to shew his affliction under its most lamentable aspect; he had never seen what is quite common, an active and handy blind woman, moving about easily, helping her parents, sharing the household work, useful and agreeable in the home circle. Such women exist, and it is of them that I wish to speak here.

Gesture and facial mobility, which are in so many people the silent but important accompaniment of speech, completely escape the blind; hence they themselves are excessively and almost painfully quiet. The blind face expresses and reveals less than that of an ordinary woman, it is often quite impassible. It is said that blind girls blush less than others, because blushing is attributed to the effect of being looked at; still, little blind girls often blush when they fancy themselves watched, or when they are moved by some person's voice or words. There may remain more to be discovered on this point, but the immobility of attitude is indisputable. Blind women have little inclination to make gestures from self-consciousness, they are more inclined to make sounds, such as affected coughs, either to keep themselves in countenance or to attract attention. Does paucity of gesture oblige blind women to talk with special precision and clearness? This would seem to be so, according to a curious theory of M. Fouillée, who declares that certain savages, whose language is very primitive, express so much of their meaning by gesture that when they wish to talk at night they are obliged to light torches to make themselves understood. I do not think, however, that blindness sensibly increases precision in speech; indeed some people reproach the blind with using certain painfully inappropriate expressions, such as

"seeing" or "looking," which verbs are constantly in the mouths of most blind people. It would, of course, be more exact to say touching, examining, testing, encountering, searching. But that would often be impossible without circumlocution; and the customary word is shorter and more convenient. The blind woman uses it without necessarily "pretending to be able to see," and without considering that some of her hearers may be pained.

This class of persons consider that amongst French writers only Bossuet and Voltaire can be convicted of flagrant misapplication of terms. Furthermore, it has been very truly said that languages are very conservative, and our speech retains many words which no longer have their original meaning. We calculate in francs, while we still speak of sous, livres, écus and louis. If we take the trouble to go into the question, we can quote many daily expressions where the verb "to see" is very loosely used. What, for instance, is the meaning of "You will see how well that woman sings," or "How beautiful that symphony is," "See how good this wine is," etc.? Or again, in repeating a remark, "You can see how spiteful she was." The fact is that the verbs "to see" and "to look," unless we intend to speak pedantically, are employed as synonyms for taking into consideration, ascertaining or understanding, and it is in this sense that they are used by the blind. It is quite certain that when a blind woman takes out her watch with the remark, "I am going to look at the time," or "I will just see the time," she is aware that her eyes take no part in her action, but it is quicker than saying, "I am going to find out the time" or "examine my watch"; she could say "touch the time," which would, of course, be

more exact, but it does not occur to her, so instinctive is the habit of using hearing and touch where others use sight. The medium of perception and the intermediary agent between the brain and the object have changed; but she uses habitual expressions, and says with the rest of the world, "I am going to see the time," "I am going to look over that sonata again," instead of "I am going to practise it, and go over it again." "I shall go and see so-and-so." "It's a long time since I saw Mme X——." In all cases where the eye is only used as an agent of information, and not as a medium of esthetic impressions, if another sense conveys the required information, the desired end is accomplished, and the knowledge acquired.

It is but too true, as I have repeatedly remarked, that one range of impressions and esthetic pleasures must remain a dead letter to the blind. Beauty of line, feature or colour is unknown to the human being who has never had eyesight, but it can, on the contrary, exist for the man who kept the use of his eyes late enough in life to enjoy plastic beauty and who retains, besides his vivid recollection, a sense of touch delicate enough to appreciate purity of form. The celebrated animal sculptor, Vidal, felt real pleasure in touching beautiful shapes, his fingers were exceedingly sensitive and no smallest details in relief or indentation escaped him. This delicacy and subtlety of touch is known to be also the privilege of sculptors who can see, but whose touch is refined by modelling. Ghiberti says, in speaking of an antique statue, "Words cannot express her perfections. She has lines of suave beauty which the eye alone cannot grasp; the hand is required to appreciate them." And be-

yond this peculiar pleasure in sensation the brain receives the impression which the hand conveys; failing eyesight, the brain reconstitutes and sees the "ensemble" of line and shape, which the fingers can only trace in fragmentary succession. Touch is essentially analytic; sight alone is synthetic, and the synthetic apprehension of details discovered by the touch, the interior vision of an assemblage of lines and shapes which the hand could only ascertain by degrees, can only be produced, to my belief, in a brain which has once had the idea of a plastic whole conveyed to it by the eye. In this case, as in others, the finger is only an intermediary instrument, the brain is the real seat of perception.*

Writers who introduce blind characters generally describe them as feeling the faces of people they love so as to find out what they look like; this could only be true of a person who had once been able to see, and that for long enough to regret not knowing the shape of the face; Vidal, the sculptor, used to say in his somewhat coarse studio jargon: "I can't see, I must feel." But those blind from birth or childhood, or who have kept their sight till the age of eight or ten, lose the wish to feel the faces of people they love after a few years of blindness. The real cry of the blind is always, "Speak to me that I may see you." . . . This is what the blind love and wish for; in ordinary intercourse they are, so to speak, helpless in the presence of silence. As a rule blind girls are not much attracted by form, they have an excessive admiration for regularity. In arranging objects, they will aim at sym-

*This question has been studied and exhausted by M. J. L. Soret, "Sur le rôle du sens du toucher dans la perception du Beau, particulièrement chez les aveugles."—"Archives of Physical and Natural Science," Oct. 15, 1885.

metry, harmony of dimension and order, or else their ideas of beauty will be based on what they have heard described as beautiful. A blind girl will exclaim, "What a beautiful piece of lace!" because she knows it is considered so, and others which resemble it in design will be also described by her as beautiful. As for dress and the cut of clothes she prefers those which fit closely; she does not care for anything flowing or frilled, as not being neat and symmetrical. She likes plenty of elaborate trimming, curled and crimped hair, and is rather given to an exaggerated style of dress. She will wear any amount of fringe, lace or fur, and, of course, all sense of line and colour escapes her. Texture of materials is of paramout importance; she likes velvets and satins, the rustle of silk delights her, a taste she shares with her seeing sisters; the shopmen at the Bon Marché when they are selling silk always expatiate on its rustling capacity. Blind women are very anxious to "look like other people," and when they take great pains with their dress, it is principally that they may appear like other women. The idea that she is looked upon as a being apart is one of the most painful reflections to a blind woman, particularly while young. I have often been told of a young, clever blind girl, who, being very well off, wished to "do like the rest of the world." Her parents found her a husband, and she lives in a provincial town where she is to be seen sitting out of doors amongst her women friends, a pretty piece of fancy work in her hands, listening to the band; her children and their nurse are close by, she feels "like other people," and is quite happy. Social conditions are the most trying to blind women; we have seen that

they can enjoy nature, and be resourceful in means of getting about. But blindness is awkward in going to strange places and making a first appearance; hence the blind woman clings to her home life and is happiest indoors, where she can move about in comfort. She likes to be always busy, she crochets while talking to keep herself in countenance, and, as we have seen, does not make many gestures. Her preference for home life does not prevent her, however, from enjoying a walk, when some one takes her out with whom she feels at ease. It often happens, too, that she likes walking for walking's sake, and for the sense of well-being induced by activity. She appreciates sweet-scented flowers, which she will grow on her window-sill within reach of her hands, where she can touch them and follow the development of the plant and its new leaves; she knows when a flower is about to open, and when its perfume will fill the garden, the house or, in some cases, the single garret; she tends her plants, waters them, and takes them in when the weather turns cold. Blind women are also devoted to birds; they like their little twittering, and jealously value the privilege of feeding and attending to them. It is needless to say that cats and dogs, so dear to all lonely persons, are doubly so to the blind, who take the greatest pleasure in petting them, and being caressed in return. Another companion in loneliness and a great magician in the home, with a never-failing language for the blind, is the fire. "A fire has a moral fascination beyond its material qualities; it attracts human thoughts, fascinates man by its vitality, and plunges him into a world of dreams. Now sad, now gay, a fire lights up the vanished past and the ghosts which peopled it; it

shows the future and then woos us to rest."* The ear catches the living animation of a fire; the constant flame produces cheerful, crisp, crackling sounds; the wood sparkles with little whistling, moaning noises; suddenly the embers are displaced and fall in with a crash. Our thoughts wander far afield, a crowd of memories waken in our mind. Yes, the blind woman enjoys more of the fire than its grateful warmth; if she have ever so little imagination and intelligence, she will have favourites, such as the wood fire, which can talk to her.

Since I have adopted the plan of quoting so largely and hope by this means to render my book especially interesting, I will give some extracts from Christmas-holiday letters written by a blind Swiss girl. They show what home life is to her.

"Chamosson, December, 1895.

"I haven't much to tell you, most days are alike; but you know I can enjoy everything, and time passes so quickly that I shall wake up at the end of these holidays like after a beautiful dream which ends too soon. I always specially delight in these winter holidays; they take in the real home life. This is the time for long, intimate talks; in summer every one is in a hurry to get out of doors. A great deal of snow has fallen; all outside noises are muffled; I go out very little but enjoy staying indoors; the house is so cosy and the fireside so attractive. I feel so comfortable that I don't even quarrel with the winter weather, and we generally get some sun every day. It seems warmer here, now I know what the fogs of Lyons are. You ask how I fill up my time? Be content to know that I

* Biart, "La Baie de Santécornapan."

am never idle, or without my long strip of pink work that I sew on every day. . . . Besides if I had nothing whatever to do, Agnes and Edmond would make it their business to occupy my 'far niente'; I hear them run downstairs, and along the corridor, as they come to take possession of me. I have to dance and play hide-and-seek. Behold us whirling round and round till we are giddy; the house is almost shaken, and they still cry, 'Again!' Grandmamma laughs, grandpapa is often drawn into the game. Then we play at something else; we look at pictures and Tante Hélène has to show them. I am not joking; with heads bent over the magic book, which is always the same and always new, we are as absorbed a trio as we were lately riotous. My explanations, as you may imagine, take the form of questions: "'Well, what is on this page? Can you describe it?' Agnes hurries to begin, proud of her knowledge; Edmond echoes her, and I fill up the gaps in the story."

Is not this picture charming? The young blind aunt, happy in making others so, and becoming her nephew's and niece's playmate! But we wonder if, as she kisses the little heads, she ever murmurs to herself, very, very low: "If I were their mother!" Perhaps, but she does not linger over this regret, for she is sensible above all things, as we shall see by what she writes, in another phase of her life, to a blind friend of twenty who has confided in her:

"Really, my dear Caroline, you are a perfect fool (une grande sotte). The word is not polite, but it is intensely appropriate. Sitting moping, a nice occupation! I should like to be near you, not to pity you, but to give you a good shaking. How often

have I asked you why you can only think of happiness as consisting in what you lack? There are thousands of things which I know are charming and delightful, but it doesn't occur to me to grieve because I can't have them. Enjoy what you have and take an interest in little everyday amusements. You say you envy me my days which pass so quickly and peacefully. But do you know, you unruly member (difficile citadine), how monotonous winter is in the country? A little hypochondriasis would soon make me feel as if these hurrying hours were endless. Now, would you like to know what my principal amusement was yesterday? Listening to the village children sleigh-riding down the sloping orchard. Such excitement! Such headlong rushing and racing! Well, I enjoyed hearing them amusing themselves in the way I used to myself. I pictured myself a child again, sharing my brother's little sledge; my hands red, my hair flying, triumphantly courageous, as I flew like an arrow over the dazzling snow. The little incident which pleased me would have saddened you. You would have remembered that your eyes used to be open to the light as the children's are now. . . . Oh, I don't mean to tell you that I have never looked upon my blindness as a great affliction. . . . Having once known the boon of eyesight, I can realize all I have lost; but I tell myself that if I had kept that blessing, perhaps many others even more precious would never have been mine."

Alas! all blind girls are not so wise and philosophical, and many regret that they are not "like the rest of the world." They murmur sadly as they caress their nephews, "If I were only their mother!"

¶ II. The Life of the Affections

I CANNOT recall what thinker it was who said, "Sooner or later, the soul becomes all in all to us." The blind soon reach this stage; they grow to love the spiritual side of their friends when their affliction has of necessity removed them from a certain sphere of action and from irksome preoccupations, such as dress, purely social ties, and that light reading which often absorbs the best part of our time and attention and wastes a large amount of our lives. Friendship means a great deal to a blind woman; she is capable of becoming profoundly attached to a friend and is happy in her devotion. The exchange of ideas and sentiments between the two is a joy to both. Blind women, above all others, love intimate talks; they are slow in giving their affection, but they can become very deeply attached. If they are not indifferent to where they live, and can take an interest in surrounding objects, it may well be imagined that human beings mean a great deal more to them, and the life of the affections is almost the whole of their existence. A blind girl can feel herself powerfully attracted; why should we hesitate to say that she can love? Why should we fear to see the word love in these pages? Does not love come from God, with its special place and mission in the divine plan? Does not God bless human love, when man receives it with sanctifying respect and self-control, recognizing that it is but an episode in life and not the whole? But the moment which teaches man what love is, implants in

him the desire of the Infinite. The yearning for the Infinite, which exists in every human soul and can only be satisfied by God, begins even in childhood. Youth is vitally and intensely influenced by it. The Infinite is sought in everything, and we are loth to recognize on all sides a little of the true and the beautiful with an admixture of evil; we long for each of our fellow-creatures to be complete with an unmixed array of qualities. Marvellous is the phase of unity we pass through, when we believe it possible to finally and unerringly love, hate, attract and repel. Then, under maturer experience and analysis, we adopt violently one-sided opinions and usually only settle down, as life declines, into impartial judgement of men and things viewed as a whole. But this outlook is acquired by much self-training, and is no longer spontaneous and instinctive as were our early views. It is only after many heart-rending disappointments that we come to recognize almighty God as the only centre of Infinity and absolute truth.

When we are young, it goes against us to divide our affections, we aspire to give ourselves to one only and for ever. "For ever!" Solemn words which we say so gladly and lightly to a fellow-creature! We cannot bear the idea of ever so little of our affection and daily life being shared indiscriminately. We fancy that love and devotion must be undivided, and are worth nothing when they are not concentrated on one alone. A wonderful dispensation of Providence it is which inspires such energy and vigour in our affections just at the moment when strength and confidence are essential in forming the basis of family life! The blind girl reaches this point as well as her happier sisters; then little is needed

to fan the flame of love; heart and head, imagination and sentiment, all combine to set a halo round the beloved being, whom in many cases they hardly know. Stendhal has ingeniously defined and analysed what he calls this symbolical "crystallization," which he compares to the process undergone by "a twig of dead wood, kept in a grotto where the atmosphere is laden with certain salts, until it becomes covered with sparkling crystals and looks like a diamond aigrette. Love is no more at its birth than the dead, black twig; imagination and lonely day-dreams transform it into a brilliant jewel, blazing with all the fires of heaven." This is quite possible; but whether the aigrette be of crystals or diamonds, its beauty is the same, and it is all the dearer to its possessor for the imagination and affection she has lavished on it. Perhaps the blind girl's twig is very small and black; but this matters little if the grotto where she keeps it be heavy with crystalline vapour, only waiting for a centre on which to concentrate.

It is then that the affliction of blindness is bitterest. The blind girl, thrilling with the magnetic aspirations of her age, longing for reciprocal love and supreme surrender, is bitterly grieved and wounded at realizing the barriers with which her affliction surrounds her; she exaggerates her position and the "impossible" obstacles which she, unlike her happier girl friends, must overcome. Her reason sternly tells her that love is forbidden, while her heart whispers, "Oh, if he knew how I could love, and how happy I could make him. I would give him my whole life and heart, my very self!" Still the poor blind girl fancies that her affection is not quite worthless; she knows it to be disinterested, profound and lasting. She believes herself drawn to a

union of souls, and knows that, spiritually, her love is unsurpassable, while the man often feels the dreadful sacrifice he makes in taking a blind wife. She is only longing for abnegation.

"There is an epoch in the life of man which must be faced—paternity. I feel, as you do, that now we must live for others, we must shed tears, feel unknown anxieties, watchings, sorrows and equally unknown joys; you feel, as I do, that life cannot be spent alone. It is a bitter grief for a woman to remain barren. Her whole heart and being are filled with an immense sterile ardour, a huge, useless energy. In spite of herself, her arms stretch out after the child they were meant to enfold, her breasts long and yearn after the frail creature that should have drawn its life from them, and her lips unconsciously murmur, 'My child, my son!'"*

With the longing to give ourself to the beloved, comes the desire to be loved, and, so to speak, enwrapped in reciprocal devotion. This feeling is all the more intense in those who are a little withdrawn from the stress and tumult of daily life.

"To be blind and beloved," writes Victor Hugo, "is one of the most poignantly exquisite forms of happiness attainable on this earth, where all is incomplete. To have constantly by your side a wife, a daughter or a sister, a lovable being who is there because you both need her and are essential to her, to feel that you are indispensable to one who is a necessity to you, to be able to test the depth of her love by her constant presence—all this is the special joy of the blind man. He can say to himself, 'She gives me all her time, which proves that she has given me all her love. I see her thoughts instead of her

* Henry Perreyve, "Lettres."

face, her fidelity stands out in my dark world, the rustle of her dress is the brushing of angels' wings, I hear her come and go, in and out, I listen to her voice as she speaks and sings, and I remember that I am the goal to which her every action tends, I draw her with a power all my own, and all the stronger for my infirmity. I am in darkness, and by this very darkness I become the light towards which this angel gravitates. What happiness can equal this?' The highest joy in life is to know ourself beloved, loved for ourself, better still, in spite of ourself; this is the special joy of the blind man. In his affliction, all care of him is a caress. He wants nothing more, love takes the place of light. And what a love! entirely made up of goodness. There is no such thing as blindness where we have faith. Soul falteringly seeks soul, and they meet. The soul we meet and test is that of a woman. Her hand supports us, her mouth brushes our forehead, it is her breathing that we hear close by! To owe all to her, from her devotion to her pity, never to be forsaken by the gentleness which is our strength, to lean on this unbending reed, to be able to touch and embrace our earthly providence, what God-given bliss! The heart, like a celestial flower, blooms mysteriously in the darkness. Such shadows are more precious than the light. The angel soul is always near; if she goes away it is only to return, she fades like a dream to reappear as a reality. Warmth comes with her. Peace, joy and happiness shine out of the gloom. Every trifling action and each one of her little services take enormous importance in the blank around us. The most heavenly tones of a woman's voice lull us, and are the medium of communication between us and a hidden world.

It is a caress of the soul. We see nothing, but feel ourselves beloved. It is a twilight Paradise."

Perhaps the wish to be loved is greater in men than in women, though they too feel it deeply. A blind woman who is an exquisite poet has expressed this with great charm:

> Je ne le vois pas, ton regard qui m'aime,
> Lorsque je le sens sur moi se poser.
> Qu'importe! un regret serait un blasphème.
> Je ne le vois pas, ton regard qui m'aime,
> Mais j'ai ton baiser.
>
> Mes yeux sont fermés, mais qu'importe l'ombre!
> J'ai trop de rayons, et j'ai trop de jour
> Pour qu'il puisse faire en moi jamais sombre,
> Puisque j'ai l'amour!*

Is the love of a blind girl often returned? Sometimes, certainly; but not often. There are young men of a refined and rather dreamy temperament, who could easily become attached to a blind girl with charm, cleverness and grace; she would have a strange veiled fascination for them. But what happens oftenest is that the girl's feeling quickly develops into love, while the man stops short at friendship. His sentiment will not be proof against a glance from pretty eyes, and some flattering tribute to his vanity; while his friends and relations will all preach cold, practical reason to him, exaggerating the drawbacks of a blind wife and possible mother, impressing on him her inability to look after servants, etc. It is a terrible blow for the woman who is already married to become blind, still, up to a certain point, the consequences can be mitigated by intelligence and good management, if the husband makes allow-

* "I cannot see your loving glance when it falls on me. What matters it? A regret would be blasphemy, I have your kiss. My eyes are closed, what matters the darkness? Too much light and sunshine are in my heart for me to grieve at shadows, for I have love."—Bertha Galeron, "Qu'importe!"

ances; but to marry a blind woman is the greatest folly! This is what the young man hears on all sides, and one cannot wonder at it. The romance of the blind girl almost always ends sadly; a short struggle, a brief hesitation, a few promises of faithful remembrance, and the lover fades mournfully into the distance. Time passes, he soon meets with other attractions and quickly forgets; nothing happens to cheer or rouse the blind girl, and she is left to her sweet but painful memories of the past.

Blind women between sixteen and thirty can feel all the ardours of love; sometimes their feelings run away with them beyond the bounds of prudence; great tact and sympathy are necessary in such cases, the more so that the sentiment is generally sincere and disinterested. Reader, if you have reached a later stage of life and experience, do not smile; give a glance, and go your way. Go on your way respectfully, sympathetically, or at least compassionately; you are in the presence of an immortal soul, willing to immolate herself at the feet of what she believes to be her ideal. If you feel it your duty to disabuse her, let it be tenderly done, for such illusions are not uprooted without the cruellest pangs.

ℂ IV. Conclusion

I HOPE that my readers will not make the serious mistake of dismissing as trivial and commonplace those impressions which they may not have received themselves but which I claim for the blind. Is not nature richer as a source of emotions than man can be in observation and sensation? I have already observed that form and colour are fascinating enough to absorb our attention completely, and the man whose sight serves him does not always notice the impressions he receives through his other senses, whilst he is dazzled by what he can see. Blind women's perceptions are always on the alert; they eagerly seek impressions of ear, touch and smell, keeping them jealously in their memory, and always associating them with their feeling of the moment.

We read the following in the correspondence of a blind person:

"Do you remember our walk in the woods that afternoon in autumn? The sun was shining, and the wind was full of the smell of pines, heather and dead leaves. The path was narrow and rough, and sometimes we had to walk very close together. I remember how the branches flew in our faces and made us laugh, and the magpies, who were disturbed by our approach, flew over our heads, telling all the woods of our arrival. I remember how we sat on the mossy ground, reading and talking, grave and gay by turns. I remember the wind in the tall fir trees, and the chestnuts we picked up under the

big chestnut tree near the little stream, where we stayed so long listening to its limpid ripple. Yesterday I went over the same ground again, and stopped at all the same spots, the same sun was shining, the same warm wind was laden with the same sounds and scents. I recalled most vividly our walk, already so far in the past, all things spoke to me of you. . . . But you were not there, so we cut short our walk and our stoppages, we did not prick our fingers, as you said we should, gathering horse chestnuts under the big tree by the clear little stream."

The most poetic part of memory is the mingling of mental emotion with impressions of the senses. Memory, like love, transforms all things, and the event most trifling in itself becomes precious when it grows into a memory.

> But ever and anon of grief subdued
> There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
> Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
> And slight withal may be the things which bring
> Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
> Aside for ever, it may be a sound—
> A tone of music, summer's eve, or spring,
> A flower, the wind, the ocean, which shall wound,
> Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly
> bound.
>
> —Byron's "Childe Harold."

"In the great crises of life our minds cling closely to the places where we went through great joys or sorrows. Charles minutely examined the box borders of the little garden, the faded, falling leaves, the gnarled fruit-trees, the breaches in the walls; picturesque details which were to remain graven in his memory, eternally associated with these supreme moments by the special mnemonics of passion."*

*Balzac, "Eugénie Grandet.'

Ruskin says: "Let the eye but rest on a rough piece of branch of curious form during a conversation with a friend—rest however unconsciously, and though the conversation be forgotten, though every circumstance connected with it be as utterly lost to the memory as though it had not been, yet the eye will, through the whole life after, take a certain pleasure in such boughs which it had not before, a pleasure so slight, a trace of feeling so delicate as to leave us utterly unconscious of its peculiar power, but undestroyable by any reasoning, a part, thenceforward of our constitution."*

These mnemonics of recollection apply to sounds often insignificant in themselves: "The most trifling episodes of this last evening seemed strangely important; when the time for the farewell drew near everything was magnified and exaggerated as before the approach of death. In the resonant darkness the barking of a dog on a distant farm made them shiver with gloomy foreboding."†

No one could read Dostoïevsky's "Crime et Châtiment" without being struck by the psychological importance of old Alena's tinkling cracked bell, as Raskelnikoff rings it in the empty room after the murder. "Instead of answering, Raskelnikoff got up, passed into the hall and pulled the bell-rope. It gave out the same cracked, tinkling sound! He rang a second and a third time, bending down his ear and recalling the past. His terrible sensations as he stood on the old woman's doorstep a few days ago, returned with increasing clearness and intensity; each peal of the bell sent a thrill of strange pleasure through him."

* "Modern Painters," II, iv, 37.

† Pierre Loti, "Ramuntcho." Chateaubriand was reminded of home and fatherland by a dog who barked at night in the country.

So slight a thing as the feeble sound of a little cracked bell, perfectly insignificant and unnoticeable in itself, can strike awe into one who has heard it at a decisive, epoch-making moment of his existence. Ever after, that little sound, or any similar one, will rivet his attention and recall the terrible crisis. Such impressions are purely subjective as are those we receive when we hear one particular song or hymn: it may be ugly and inartistic, yet we cannot listen without remembering some one who at a given moment interested us, and has for ever associated himself with the song. The hymn will ever after recall the sweetest, most peaceful hour of our existence; the ballad, however feeble, will always carry us back to a certain year of our childhood, and call up the loved one who sang it.

"He grew young again in the midst of us, and would ask us for old, old airs and songs that we would sing to him in chorus:

> Il était un petit navire
> Qui n'avait ja-ja-jamais navigué.

"Then his old face would light up as distant images filled his mind; he kept time with his white head and smiled to himself. What was he thinking of? Of his whole past life, bereavements, the dead ashes of passion, vanished griefs which the kind hand of time has hidden in the veil of oblivion; vague figures, visible only to his eyes, arose and moved before him."*

In the same way any one special scent or flavour, though perfectly ordinary in itself, becomes full of meaning if it recalls a person or thing associated with one particular period. "If we admit

* Edouard Rod, "Le Sens de la Vie."

that sight is the sense of knowledge and hearing that of reason, we might call the sense of smell memory, since it reminds us more vividly than any other of special events and circumstances however remote."*

Suppose that I am working alone by a wood fire, why, before long, do I feel myself irresistibly carried back to the days of my childhood? Because the log which is burning just now happens to give out a particular odour. It is not specially pleasant, but I remember smelling it long ago and far away, when we children used to nestle down on the floor, in the room where all the family assembled after meals, round my grandmother's chimney corner, and my heart aches at the memory of the vanished past. Another time memory will awaken at the smell of grass, flowers, new-mown hay, or at the taste of fruit, for flavour, even more than scent, evokes past associations.

"As we passed the flowering bindweed my mother said to me, 'Smell those flowers and don't forget that they smell of sweet honey.' This is my first recollection of smell; and by an association of memory and sensation, which each of us has felt but cannot explain, I never smell bindweed without seeing that spot in the Spanish mountains and the wayside path where I picked it for the first time."†

Even when we have never very distinctly experienced any of these impressions of hearing, smell or touch, we realize their mysterious power and we understand and love those who can express them in words. "As we were crossing the Rhine, I asked the ferryman in mid-stream to let the

* Schopenhauer, "The World as Will Power," etc.
† George Sand, "Histoire de ma Vie."

ferry boat drift with the current. The old man raised his oars and the majestic river carried us along. I looked around me, I listened, I called up memory; suddenly I felt a vague sense of pain; I looked up at the sky, but even the heavens were not calm; the stars seemed to pierce the atmosphere, and the ether throbbed and palpitated. I leaned over the water; its dark, cold depths reflected trembling, scintillating stars; all around me seemed vibrating with life and I grew more and more troubled. I leaned my elbow on the side of the boat; the wind murmured at my ear, the muffled ripple of the water under the rudder irritated my nerves, the fresh exhalations from the water failed to calm me; a nightingale sang on the bank and its song seemed to pour some delicious poison through my veins."*

Has it ever been noticed that some of our most celebrated poems are full of purely auditive impressions to which some memory is attached? "Dost thou recall that night when we floated silently over the waters? Nothing broke the stillness, but the rhythmic cadence of oars upon the lake's sonorous breast. . . . The moaning wind, the whispering reed, the subtle perfumes of the scented air, all that we hear, see and breathe, murmured, 'They have loved.'"†

Mystical writers, following the example of Holy Scripture, constantly use the metaphor of perfumes in referring to persons and things: "The memory of Josias is like the composition of a sweet smell made by the art of a perfumer."‡ "Give ye a sweet odour as frankincense."§ "Draw me, we

*Tourguenieff, "Assia." †Lamartine, "Le Lac."
‡Ecclus xlix. §Ecclus xxxix.

will run after the odour of thy ointments."* Perfumes had a privileged place in the ancient liturgy. "The Lord said to Moses: Thou shalt make an altar to burn incense, of Setim-wood. . . . And Aaron shall burn sweet-smelling incense upon it in the morning. When he shall dress the lamp he shall burn it. And when he shall place them in the evening, he shall burn an everlasting incense before the Lord throughout your generation. . . ."† We read in the Gospel, "Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard of great price and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. . . ."‡ And the Church, in our own beautiful Catholic liturgy, burns incense at the most solemn moments of her worship.

This being so, why should we have to conquer a widely spread prejudice or sentiment in giving their due importance to the influences of smell and taste? The reason must be that, smell and taste being merely used in practical life for purely material purposes, we grow to refer all our intellectual associations to sight. We confuse the uses of sensation with its nature, and the nature of sensation being in the fullest sense physical, we are apt to think of it as purely material, and incapable of being put to intellectual uses. But when we go a little deeper into the question, is it not apparent that the vulgarity or nobility of sensations do not reside in the sensations themselves, but in the use to which we put them and the images they evoke? What is there so ethereal in the function of seeing? Reading—in other words, perceiving coloured strokes—is not more intellectual than becoming aware of sounds, scents

* Cant. i. † Exod. xxx. ‡ John xii.

or flavours. And if the function be performed by a person of low tastes who delights in gross and sensual descriptions, I, for one, cannot place it any higher than hearing, smell or even taste, when employed by a man of more refined nature. The latter, assisted by his senses, remembers good and beautiful things; he recalls the moment, when, as he heard one particular sound, inhaled some special odour or tasted such and such a thing, he was interested by some human being, or by an idea that has remained in his memory owing to the physical impression of the moment.

"Our imagination is based on the senses, and, to recall the past, physical contact is almost a necessity. To yield to this intuition without disputing the subtlety of the theory is the best way of reviving in our minds the spirit of past ages and understanding 'the spirit' and not 'the letter' only of what was but a dry, dull list of names."*

Thus considered, the impressions which our senses convey are, in a way, but the symbols which the soul uses at will; one man will only use his eyes for practical everyday life: he comes and goes, reads his newspaper, and only notices in people and things that which procures him some material gratification. Another will be specially impressed by beauty of line and colour, the play of light; in a word, his æsthetic perceptions dominate all the rest. To some people the sound of the sea, the moaning of the wind in trees or through doors are only noises which become a nuisance if prolonged; for others they contain a world of memories and poetical impressions, proper to these particular sounds.

"I know," writes Gogol, "that many persons

*Bourget, "Sensations d'Italie."

cannot bear creaking doors; I like them very much. When I hear a door creak in St Petersburg, I am suddenly reminded of a little low room, full of country smells and lighted by an antique chandelier. Supper is laid on a table near the open window, through which can be seen the beauty of a lovely night in May. The song of the nightingale fills the house and garden, and penetrates to the dimly shining river in the distance; the trees whisper softly. Dear God! What distant memories come back to me one by one!"

Very vivid associations cling to the smell of a plant, the taste of a fruit or of some seldom tasted food. Is it not conventional prejudice to consider a person intellectual who carefully preserves an object, be it picture or drapery, and tells you: "I admit it is ugly, but I like to have it near me because it reminds me of my parents and my childhood," and to brand as sensuous another who says: "I like to hear that sound, to smell that scent or to taste that flavour, not because they are pleasant or agreeable, but because they recall the past and the memory of people and events who filled a particular period of my life." And when we gradually forget—not with the forgetfulness of the mind, which a sensation can disperse, but with that incurable infidelity of the heart which time brings with it and the laws of nature impose—then we no longer seek the sound, the scent, the savour which had power to thrill us. What we loved was not the sensation—that remains intact—but the being whose "leitmotiv," so to speak, it was, and who, alas! is nothing to us now. A very commonplace sensation can recall a very subtle, delicate impression; the smell of wet pitch and river mud immediately trans-

ports me to a certain landing place in Switzerland, which was the starting point of a delicious boating excursion, full of unforgettable memories. When I put a little branch of fir before me on my writing-table, it is not only to enjoy the smell of resin warmed by the October sunshine, but because it reminds me so vividly of a winter spent near the Mediterranean, and the multitude of impressions I received as I strolled through the pine forests of those sunny lands. It is incontestable that taste and smell can become the servants of vulgar and sensual instincts. The Book of Wisdom admirably describes those fools who say:

> Come then, and let us use the things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth.
>
> Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, and let not the flower of the time pass by us.
>
> Let us crown ourselves with roses before they be withered, and let no meadow escape our riot.*

But shew me the faculty which man has not succeeded in profaning or abusing. He seeks to enjoy, seize, possess and exhaust that which he was only intended to taste; it is then that he sins, his aspirations die, and he suffers. What is true of the material, is also true of the spiritual world: reflection, observation, cautiousness in trusting to appearances, insight into our own and others' characters, are good and necessary things; but when we become intoxicated by the heady though intellectual fumes of analysis, and insist on analysing, dissecting and sifting everything, where do we find ourselves?

To use as much as is necessary of our faculties and impressions without seeking to enjoy them for their own sakes is to remain within the due bounds of duty and wisdom, but it also brings happiness and

* Wisdom ii.

helps us to retain the poetry of life. When you walk along a path and are charmed and obsessed by a sweet perfume from one of its borders, allow the scent to blow towards you, but do not seek it, nor even linger too long to breathe it: above all, do not sacrifice the flower for its perfume; that is selfish, bad and illusory. Leave the flower to bloom and sweeten the way for the traveller who may come after you; if none follow, let it live for its own sake, for God, who made it so lovely and so fragrant. He knows each beauty of the flower He created that it might glorify Him silently.

Reader, whether you have eyesight or are blind, memory, sweet memory, is all that you can depend on to preserve for you eternally the one precious hour of your life, or the dear personality who walked beside you on your way. Courage! God will keep that memory for you, and some day a chance resemblance will bring back the picture with added brightness. Have faith, for hope and memory are the best that life can offer; remembrance is better than possession, a short glimpse of the ideal is better than a life-long disillusionment, and even here wisdom is happiness.

Now that I have tried to portray the blind woman's contact with nature, people and things, her disposition, her capacity for love and sorrow, in a word, her share of life, will anyone maintain that a mathematical division can be made of her advantages and disadvantages? Can it be said that her chances of happiness are infinitesimal, and that it is no sacrifice for a blind girl to enter a convent, since all that she gives up, though really tangible sacrifices to a girl with sight, are only dreams and illusions to the blind? Now, in the first place, does

the normal girl always find that certain happiness in the world which she expects, and from which the three vows of religion debar her? This cannot be answered lightly, and I will return to the subject later. Further, is it nothing to give up our hopes before life's terrible lessons have taught us that they are nothing but illusions?*

I have already said that to enthusiastic, imaginative natures there is greater poetry and charm in seeing and hearing things from a distance than from close by. Distance minimizes and effaces hard, coarse details, and imagination has the marvellous power of adding to the evidence of the senses, while it weaves the real and the ideal into one. The same may be said of what are known as "the joys of life," hence both the anticipation and the recollection of the supreme moment are always sweeter than the moment itself. The blind woman may picture comfort, independence, home life and friendship, and may imagine in her youth that perfect happiness would consist in possessing such blessings.

Everywhere and in everything our illusions are what we hold dearest, since, created by ourselves, they are absolutely conformed to our tastes and aspirations; the reality is sure to jar, wound or disappoint us in some direction. And to speak frankly, are we to gauge the depth of a sacrifice by the real enjoyment of the thing sacrificed? Does not virtue generally become easier, when we have discovered how very little real pleasure is to be got out of the forbidden action? Is not the most difficult thing of all to give up the fancied good, which we have clothed in all our own ideas and illusions?

* "The depth of tragedy does not lie in the greatness of the aim before us, but in the violence with which we pursue it."—Vogüé, "Le Roman Russe."

In the spiritual combat of life the struggle lies more between thoughts than realities; appearances are tempting, for when the harm is done, if we persevere in it, it is more often from a weak will than from attraction to what so soon satiated us. Sacrifice as well as happiness is essentially subjective; God alone can judge of the relative value of either. It follows that it would be as cruel as unreasonable to say to anyone: "In giving yourself, you think the gift has value, it has none; you think you are offering up realities, they are phantoms." Would you have the questionable courage to open the eyes of a child who in his great love offers you a trifle or a flower, which he prizes because he knows of no greater gift? We read in the "Imitation," "A prudent lover considereth not so much the gift as the love of the the giver." It is evidently thus that God looks upon the gifts of His poor creatures. As the blind girl crosses the convent threshold, she too may have something to leave behind, as she makes her burnt-offerings of sweet savour. It matters little whether it be reality or illusion; sometimes in giving up our illusions, we sacrifice what we hold dearest on earth.

PART THE SECOND

THE COMMUNITY OF THE BLIND SISTERS OF ST PAUL

BOOK I. Their Origin and Founders

IN studying the evolution of charitable organizations we find that even amongst the most important and flourishing there were few which did not begin in humility and uncertainty. In nearly every case the man who was the instrument of Providence in a work destined to become famous had, so to speak, to feel his way; he had a certain aim in view, and circumstances (that is to say, Providence) led him in another direction. Sometimes it is only late in the life of a Founder that he undertakes the work which posterity recognizes as his raison d'être; he suddenly discovers that some detail, a mere accessory of the creative scheme, has been its chief success; it has developed and become the dominating idea, the mainspring of the whole. In the face of such facts let who will put his faith in human calculations.

The work of Mère Bergunion and the Abbé Juge was not exempt from uncertainty and humility in its beginnings. The sketch of the lives of these two Founders of the Blind Nuns of St Paul will shew their early anxieties and hesitation.*

*The community are preparing copious biographies of their founders and first nuns, which doubtless will eventually be published. The following is merely intended as a comprehensive sketch.

ℂ I. The Founders

ANNE* or Annette Bergunion was born in the Rue Trognon, parish of St Merry, Paris, her parents being small tradespeople. Her mother brought her up piously, and in the strictest ideas of order and economy. At sixteen she entered the novitiate of the Mère-de-Dieu nuns at Versailles, but a year later she returned home to nurse her invalid mother. She herself was delicate until towards the year 1850.

Though very ardent and devout by nature, she was apt to be nervous and unsettled. She had always longed to enter religion. Though her parents, being opposed to her vocation, tried to find her a husband of their own choosing, Annette refused absolutely. M. and Mme Bergunion, in the hope of overcoming her opposition, took the strong measure of turning their daughter out of the house. This was in 1837, when Anne was thirty-three years of age; her niece and a maid servant who was entirely devoted to her shared her exile. As she had to make a livelihood, she took the advice of her confessor, Père Boulanger, and opened an outfitting work-room for young girls in the Impasse des Vignes. This work was transferred later to No 18 Rue des Postes, a house next door to the Jesuits and belonging to them.

Anne, with implicit faith in Providence, went to church, and kneeling before the altar of the Blessed

*Jeanne is the name in the baptismal register in the church, but she was known all her life as Anne, or Annette.

Virgin, placed the undertaking under our Lady's protection, begging her to intercede for her suppliant and send her some work. The prayer was granted, and tradition says that the work-room, which finally employed as many as eighty young girls, never wanted for orders. Every evening the best-behaved of the girls were allowed to lay their work before the statue of our Lady, the patroness of the work-room.

At last M. and Mme Bergunion were reconciled to the idea of Annette remaining single, and took her back. She settled at home again, still keeping on the work-room in the Rue des Postes. Her mother being still ill, Annette nursed her devotedly till her death in 1843, when she transferred her devotion to her father, who died two years after. Being now her own mistress and still desirous of becoming a nun, Anne Bergunion entered the novitiate of the Sacré-Cœur on the advice of Père Varin, whom, it will be remembered, was the adviser and helper of Mme Barat; but as a prudent director he induced Anne to keep her work-room open, in case she did not get on at the convent. This proved a wise precaution, for Anne, soon discovering that she had mistaken her vocation, left the Sacré-Cœur and returned to the Rue des Postes.

The years went on. Mlle Bergunion busied herself with works of charity, besides her work-room, where she employed neglected children. Still she could not find rest or peace of mind; at forty-five years of age she was still undecided as to what her real life-work was to be. In 1840 she was begged to admit blind girls and deaf-mutes into the work-room where homeless waifs and strays were harboured, but she always refused on account of her health.

Several people approached her repeatedly on this subject, but without success. At last Père Varin in the latter years of his life—he died April 18, 1850—thinking that perhaps these repeated demands were an indication of the will of Providence and that Mlle Bergunion was at last about to see her way, and to put her devotion and courage to good use, urgently pressed her to admit blind work-girls.

In consequence towards 1851 she admitted four rather troublesome and utterly untrained girls, and shortly after a fresh group of six, of whom three had been expelled from the Institute for the Blind. With such materials she had the courage to begin her work-room for blind girls, which was destined later to become the community. The very primitive premises consisted of an oratory and refectory on the ground floor with a little courtyard; and on the first floor the work-room itself, Mlle Bergunion's room or office and the dormitory. Difficulties and censure were not wanting, but the recollection of Père Varin's words, "Courage and confidence," supported her. Her great treasure was a little book, preserved now in the convent as a relic; she had read it one day, and ever after it was her most cherished memory and an influence over her whole life: this was the life of Mlle de Lamourous.* Many a time did she meditate on the naïve conversation described by the biographer, and apply it to her work.

"The gentleman did not speak in a way calculated to encourage us much; he said he did not know why, but houses like ours did not succeed as a rule.

* "Vie de Mlle de Lamourous, dite la Bonne Mère," by Abbé Pouget, Périsse, 1843.

"'Do you want to know the reason?' I answered. 'It is because people make their calculations in a human way before receiving girls. They want a convenient house, linen in the cupboard, corn in the granary, money in the drawers and everything comfortable. They do not trust entirely to our Lord's words, Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' The gentleman took my answer in good part, and certainly our work, being purely spiritual, can neither be established nor maintained on human ideas or on calculations agreeable to nature. But it is for us, the directresses of the House of Mercy, to draw down on it that superfluity which God has promised to thrift and care. Let us value whatever Providence has deigned to send us. However coarse or cheap these objects may be, they are the gifts of God. We must beware of self-deception, and not procure comforts for ourselves which, though nature does not find them too luxurious, are unsuited to poverty; such things would draw down on us the anger of God, and deprive the house of that superfluity on which it depends for existence. We are the first poor to live here, and we ought to add to the prosperity of the house by our order and economy. We must never try to possess what the poor cannot have. Let us always keep an even mind, free from extremes of anxiety or agitation."

Tradition says that one day as Anne Bergunion was reading aloud the life of Mlle de Lamourous to a select audience of blind and other girls, she came to these words: "People think that a great many things are necessary for founding a House of Mercy. What is really required? A house with four rooms, namely, chapel, dormitory, work-room and refec-

tory. To start with, the refectory might be combined with the kitchen. What else is wanted? Enough bread for one day, work for one week, and six francs in money. That is quite enough. In my opinion that is all that is necessary to found as many Houses of Mercy as you wish; I speak of what I believe Almighty God wants of me—others may have other views and act differently. As regards myself personally, I believe that Almighty God wishes me to work in the way I have described."

These words, the answer to long perplexity of heart and mind, moved Anne and roused her enthusiasm. "Well then," she said, turning to her little audience, "if you are willing, we too will found a community."

I wish I knew the date of this reading, which must have been a day of days in Anne Bergunion's life. I should have liked to perpetuate the memory which was so solemnly enshrined in her heart, for I have a predilection for such moments in the life of a foundress. They are times of hope and enthusiasm. Obstacles loom large, everything is lacking, but nothing can damp her courage and confidence! She has not yet begun to face those countless, unforeseen difficulties which will clog her steps and, like devouring microbes, use up her strength and wear out her will-power in trivial yet incessant struggles.*

*One of the first mothers of the Assumption writes of a similar phase, that it was the beginning of great things. "The hand of God could be seen so plainly at work. It seemed the fountain from which our lives as Assumption nuns were to flow; we were vessels, filled that they might be poured out anew. We were penetrated, especially our mother, by the great graces which God bestowed on us in those early days. We were told that there is a special blessing on foundations at their commencement, and we could feel it. We seemed to be in touch with the supernatural; we listened for the voice of God, and He seemed sensibly present in our midst. The real poverty in which we were living kept us completely detached from created things, and obedience, which M. Combalot made us unsparingly practise at every moment, annihilated our own wills, the obstacle which would have kept us from God." —"The Foundation of the Order of the Assumption."

If we recollect that a few years before Mlle Bergunion hardly dared introduce one or two blind girls into her work-room for fear of their becoming a burden, we can form some idea of the progress which love of the blind had made in her heart and mind. Indeed it was now no longer a question of housing a few blind girls or children for a comparatively short time, but the project was to organize religious life for the blind, an absolutely new departure. All religious orders, congregations and convents of all kinds retain in their communities any one member who loses her sight, and generally make her their special care, but her affliction classes her among the sick and the infirm, the exceptions; no one hitherto had conceived, or at any rate realized, the project of founding a Congregation and a Rule for the blind. The little community of the Rue des Postes had no assured resources whatever, not even the next day's food, but Mlle Bergunion trusted in Providence. The Abbé de la Bouillerie and later Mgr Sibour visited the work-rooms during their transition stage, and were most encouraging. In 1852 postulant's dress was adopted, a fair number of women with eyesight presented themselves, and in January, 1853, the work-room being too small, the community was transported to 205 Rue de Vaugirard, in larger and more suitable premises. On May 12, 1853, thirteen nuns, of whom seven were blind, received the habit, and Mlle Anne Bergunion became Sister Saint Paul, the Apostle struck with blindness and miraculously cured being chosen patron of this spiritual family of blind and normal women.* When once

*Later on, towards 1876, it was thought necessary to reduce the number of blind. The ecclesiastical superiors, in view of the small help which the

the community was formally established, the Jesuit fathers, in conformity with their rule, ceased to be its ordinary chaplains, and it was then that Providence sent to the nuns the Abbé Juge, who may also be quite legitimately considered as one of the founders.

Son of a commissary,* Henri Juge was born at Angoulême in 1810. He was put into a little school kept, it is said, by a quondam revolutionary. Being of a gentle, charming disposition, with an absolutely equable temper, he seldom penetrated below the surface of things. In turn he took up painting, architecture and physics, and was an assistant for some time in a chemical laboratory. His father, though in easy circumstances, allowed him very little money, and at twenty Henri Juge was obliged to give painting lessons. At twenty-four he married Mlle Eliane de Bazaugour, who, being very pious, persuaded him to return to his religious duties, and he became intensely devout. They travelled a great deal, principally in Italy, where he loved to paint. But in 1848 he lost his wife and new-born daughter. After this terrible grief he returned to France, and a year later entered the Seminary at Versailles. He thus fufilled a promise made long before to his wife; they had mutually agreed that the survivor should consecrate himself or herself to God. He was then thirty-nine years old. The catastrophe which threatened to ruin his life was destined to give it definite aim and true

blind nuns could be to the community, would only authorize the admission of one blind postulant to every two others.

*These details are taken partly from the pamphlet, "A Benefactor to the Blind," by Commander Barazar, partly from manuscript notes drawn up and preserved in the community, and partly from notes furnished by the Abbé Juge's family.

meaning, and to become the starting-point of a much higher and more fruitful existence.

Ordained priest on June 6, 1852, the Abbé Juge accompanied Mgr Bonamy to Rome, and then returned to Paris to seek an outlet for his zeal, not feeling drawn to parish work. It was then that the Abbé Lambert, chaplain to the Institute for Deaf-mutes, introduced to his notice the little community of Sister St Paul. He was much interested, and immediately offered to become her honorary chaplain. At his suggestion the money which he would have received was employed in keeping up the chapel and maintaining one more blind nun. On November 20, 1853, he said Mass for the first time in the humble chapel of the convent in the Rue de Vaugirard, and every day he walked three miles to reach it. From this time he gave himself entirely to the nuns of St Paul; intelligence, activity, fortune, friends, knowledge of the world—all he possessed was at the service of the community. He made an excellent spiritual and temporal guide, not only a chaplain, but a father, which he was always called.

The Abbé Juge's co-operation was a real blessing to the work. In order to thoroughly understand the feelings of the blind he made a point of doing as many things as possible in the dark, and in winter he dressed completely without a light. The Abbé Juge and Anne Bergunion had both arrived at their true destination by widely differing and unexpected paths. He was then forty-two and Sister St Paul forty-eight, the latter having but eleven years longer to live. During these eleven years they were to work together definitely at an enterprise looked upon as very novel and rather rash, a community of blind nuns.

Mgr de la Bouillerie and Mgr Sibour continued to interest themselves in the infant community. Pius IX encouraged it as early as 1853, and later formally approved it, saying that it "supplied a want in the Church." Sister St Paul having been miraculously cured of a serious illness by the intercession of our Lady of Victories, she made her first vows in 1855 at the same time as four blind sisters. The convent in the Rue de Vaugirard had for some time been too small for its inhabitants, and the founders looked about for more spacious premises in the environs of Paris. Trusting to the resources which Providence might send them in the future, and having a part of the Abbé Juge's fortune at their disposal, they purchased the little estate of Bourg-la-Reine, whither the community was transferred in 1855. It was spacious and airy, but the community had no special endowment. Sister St Paul's meagre savings had long since been absorbed, the Abbé Juge had not money enough to support the whole undertaking, and the work done by the blind brought in very little. The nuns who could see were employed in the work of the convent; the community were obliged to live on alms, and Bourg-la-Reine was too far from Paris for collecting or begging assistance. Hence a return to Paris was resolved upon. After much deliberation and discussion and many prayers, without ready money or tenants for Bourg-la-Reine, the founders bought a house and small park which had belonged to Chateaubriand, where he wrote a great part of the "Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe," and which he had sold to the archbishopric when he himself settled in the Rue du Bac. This property was 114 Rue d'Enfer, the street being already full of convents and charitable institutions.

They had to start building immediately. During the work Sister St Paul and the Abbé Juge came to Paris every day to organize and make plans. Then the community was divided: one half settled in the Rue d'Enfer, and the other remained at Bourg-la-Reine until the alterations were complete. The Abbé Juge said Mass at the two houses alternately. Finally the entire community reassembled in the Rue d'Enfer on November 11, 1858, to sing the "Magnificat" in thanksgiving. The congregation numbered forty-two persons; resources were extremely limited and debts heavy, and the strictest, severest economy had to be observed. Mother St Paul, who had all her life been in straitened circumstances, kindly yet firmly impressed on her daughters the virtue of "holy poverty." She gave them the example herself, never wasting a moment of her time, an end of cotton or a scraping of lettuce. She was said to be often troubled by intense anxiety, but she kept that between herself and God, and did not waste her time in melancholy. She was perpetually busy; she had trained herself to leave the chapel for the parlour, and could break off her intercourse with almighty God at any moment to talk to a nun who had need of her advice. She constantly repeated the watchword of Père Varin and Madame Barat, "God alone!" She had the most firm and living faith in the universal providence and guidance of God, and with the greatest confidence referred the success of all her efforts to Him. Timid as she had been in early youth, Mother St Paul had now acquired the art of governing with great firmness and authority. She was tall, cheerful and wholesome in appearance, and had made herself much liked. In reality she was very humble, and blamed herself

whenever anything went wrong in the community. "I ought to go away," she used to say, "and then the work would grow and everything prosper." This wish, felt by so many founders, was soon realized, for Mother St Paul died on September 7, 1863,* aged fifty-nine, after only ten years of religious profession. In fact, she only made her perpetual vows in 1860, although she had wished to become a nun ever since the year 1820. On August 27, a few days before her death, she insisted on the election of a new Superior, and had the consolation of seeing the community choose the one out of her daughters most fitted by her intelligence and necessary virtues for the post, although the latter was only twenty-six years old and had only been a nun for eighteen months.†

But though the Mother Foundress was gone, the Abbé Juge, always known as the Father Founder, remained; and for eighteen years he was to continue devoting himself to the Blind Nuns of St Paul, whose interests gradually absorbed his entire life. In 1870, during the siege of Paris, he transformed the convent into a hospital, with himself as chaplain, and the soldiers grew as fond of him as were the nuns and children. At the time of the Commune the house was several times in great danger, but he refused to yield to suggestions of taking down the cross from the door. "No," he would say, "it protects the house." On May 18, 1871, he was arrested in spite of his vigorous protestations and imprisoned at Mazas, being finally transferred with hostages to La Roquette. Luckily, in the latter place he found himself with some ecclesiastics, gendarmes and police, who barricaded themselves and were re-

* She was buried in the tomb of the community of Blind Nuns of St Paul at the Montparnasse cemetery.

† Mlle Marie Vaugeois, in religion Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart.

leased on May 27, so that on Sunday, May 28, he was able to go back to St Paul's.

The commanding officers who had been witnesses of the Abbé Juge's devotion to the wounded soldiers wished to decorate him, but his answer was, "I am waiting for a greater reward." He worked unremittingly for another ten years, and in 1876 Pius IX sent him the official Brief of Approbation for his undertaking. On October 24, 1881, feast of St Raphael the second patron of the community, he had an attack of congestion of the brain. For twelve years after, the once vigorous and active man was semi-paralysed. He died on December 25, 1893,* after years of vegetation, and the cruel physical and moral sufferings to which his life condemned him. This concludes the all too summary sketch of the lives of the founders of the Blind Nuns of St Paul, and we shall shortly be able to study their great and holy work

Many will doubtless reproach me with having been too brief in relating the lives of Mother St Paul and the Abbé Juge; they may think that I did not appreciate the true work of the founders, because their lives contained no extraordinary events. This reproach would be unjust; I am absolutely convinced that to do anything really great one must have a dominating personality and a strong and vigorous faith. Only such natures have the courage to found a community with the necessary authority to assemble, concentrate and govern their flock, however small it may be, since humanity only respects what surpasses it. But, after all, is it necessary to describe the whole of any life without

*He also was buried in the community tomb.

sparing our readers any details or a single one of those many dull, uniform, monotonous days, which the man who is living through them finds hard enough, and no more wishes to remember than the grains of sands on a hot, uncomfortable road? It has always been very bitter to me to see the carefully detailed lives of so many very good, and even holy, people thrown aside. The conscientious author, in his enthusiasm for his hero, has collected and related everything, thinking he can never say enough; the reader, on the other hand, always thinks there is too much, and wishes the line had been drawn at what was essential or characteristic. In reality we are only interested by those periods in the lives of others which we ourselves should have wished to live through. Still, you may say that, if important events are wanting, you have the psychological analysis or study. But is it not usually a difficult point to decide what special events or facts were of psychological importance? If we have not known intimately the man or woman about whom we are writing, we have to work more or less from fragmentary notes, and to use subjective, quite as often as objective, impressions of memory. In fact, the acts and words of people we have known affect us according to the mood we ourselves are in when we are writing, and it is this mixture of our own and others' thoughts which memory preserves. If this be so, as we strive to reconstitute a whole existence from recollections and descriptions, we must often be liable to emphasize as essential and important what was merely relative and accidental in the character or the life we are endeavouring to analyse. And, after all, apart from the tangible results, what do we know of the really psychological influ-

ences in life? People say: "Such a period was the happiest or saddest of his life." How do we know that this was so? I quite agree that appearances may have been in favour of it, and doubtless contemporaries and friends affirmed it, but what do we know of the man's innermost soul, as he lived through those happy years? Alas! perhaps while all the world was praising brilliant outward results, the poor wretch and his own conscience were playing out a grim tragedy which dominated all the rest. If it be idle, from a philosophical point of view, to put everything into words, is it not a little contrary to the spirit of religious humility to wish to hand down to posterity every action of some poor human being, with the most trifling episodes in his life, and each word and sigh that escaped him till the day of his death? David said long ago: "Our years shall be considered as a spider . . . For my days are vanished like smoke."* Although three thousand years have passed since then, with all their progress, our insignificant lives are still as unstable. Let us not try to retain the vapour; let it blow where it will. It is enough honour to say of any man what was written of our Lord Himself:

"He went about doing good."

* Psalm cii.

ℂ II. Preliminaries—Aim and Spirit of the Foundation

TO thoroughly understand the spirit in which Mlle Bergunion undertook her work among blind girls, it is useful to explain, though the subject be tedious, the exact position of blind women and girls in France, and Paris especially, between 1840 and 1850. Of course we can only approximately arrive at what public benevolence and private charity were doing for them, owing to the time which has elapsed since then, and the scarcity of statistics; but even Mlle Bergunion herself had only vague impressions rather than exact information on the subject. Her limited education and poor health, added to all the daily cares of the workroom in the Rue des Postes, did not allow of her taking very careful statistics or making very minute inquiries; she was therefore guided principally by what came under her own notice or was told her by her companions. Between 1840 and 1850, that is to say during the time Mlle Bergunion was pressed to receive blind workers, the situation of blind women in France was as nearly as possible the following: out of 35,783,170 inhabitants, about 30,000 were blind, and of these 13,000 were females. Paris, having at that time a population of 1,224,164, contained at least 1,500 blind, of whom 650 were females. There were few resources for so many people; the Quinze-Vingts Hospital, which any blind person could enter, had about 250 indoor patients, of whom 100 were women and girls, and

it paid a few hundred of outdoor female patients over the age of twenty-one a pension of 100, 150 or 200 francs.* The Salpêtrière contained about 300 blind females; in homes for incurables such as the one at Ivry, the Six-Vingts at Chartres, and the Rue de Jarente at Lyons, there were a few blind female indoor patients, but it is difficult to give the exact figures. Blind children living with their parents in Paris could claim five francs (4s. 2d.) a month from the local Charity Organization Office. For education there was the Valentin Haüy School† in the Rue St-Victor, reorganized in 1816 under the name of Royal Institute for the Youthful Blind, and installed in 1843 in a specially constructed edifice, 56 Rue des Invalides, which sheltered thirty girls between the age of nine and twenty-one.‡

After the year 1834 a dozen blind girls were added to the Deaf-mute Institute, founded at Lille by the Sœurs de la Sagesse. In the Refuge of St-Hilaire, a kind of home opened in Paris in 1846 by Dr Ratier in the Rue de l'Ecole Polytechnique, and afterwards transferred to 37 Rue de la Montagne-Ste-Geneviève, a few little blind girls were taught with the boys, from whom they were separated by a thin partition, as was the custom in the mixed schools of the period. Such was about the extent of the assistance given to the blind in those days; to help one thousand out of thirteen thousand blind women and girls is not a large proportion. From 1822 the Royal Institute, on the initiative of the director, Dr Pignier, began to teach religious music as a pro-

* £4, £6 or £8. † "Les Aveugles par un Aveugle," Hachette, Paris.

‡ In the session of 1848 the General Council for the thirty-six departments voted the sum of 49,825 francs as pensions for one hundred blind boys or girls from nine to twenty-one years of age. The departments of the Seine and the borough of Paris were responsible for 7,400 francs to be distributed amongst nine blind inmates.

fession. It offered to prepare a few youths and girls for the career of organist, and by 1850 several inmates had obtained situations. Those young girls who were not musically gifted, and who worked at knitting, netting, spinning, cork-slipper making and other very poorly paid trades, found themselves in a difficult position when the time arrived for leaving the institute. Those who had homes returned to them, but without always finding work; others knew not whither to turn, and, in spite of his robust optimism, Dr Ratier wrote that he could see no future for blind girls trained to manual labour. It was hard for them to be shut up in a hospital at the age of twenty, and sad to have to begin thus early a life of old age, helplessness and oblivion. Furthermore, a great many blind children lived in ignorance and misery, because there was no room for them in the Royal Institute. A few people who were interested in the blind realized the sad state of things; Mlle Bergunion's work-room in the Rue des Postes happened to be just in the neighbourhood where the interests of the blind were much discussed: it was near the Rue St-Victor, the Rue St-Jacques, the Rue de l'Ecole Polytechnique and the Rue de la Montagne-Ste-Geneviève; so that she was constantly brought into contact with the saddest cases. One day some one would tell her of a little girl old enough to make her first Communion, who had never heard of almighty God, and whose parents left her crouching in a corner of their garret or dragged her about the streets to attract pity. Another time she would hear of a poor blind woman left without food or fire in a filthy den, and sometimes they would bring her a grown-up girl, tall and handsome in spite of her affliction, house-

less and homeless, reduced to begging under archways. Anne Bergunion trembled at the thought of so much misery and danger. Towards 1842 an enterprise was started under the name of "The Society for Protecting and Assisting Blind Workers," its objects being to help those who had learnt a trade at the Royal Institute or elsewhere, and also to look after children old enough to go to school. This society was presided over by M. Portalis, first president of the Cour de Cassation, several parish priests and chaplains in Paris being on the council, together with Messieurs Dufau, director, and Gaudet, chief instructor, of the Royal Institute for the Youthful Blind. The general secretary, M. Edouard Morel, professor at the Deaf-mute Institute, in the Rue St-Jacques, was the soul of the work; M. Pélicier, a young government official, presided over a work-room in connexion with the same enterprise at 53 Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs; the latter was employing twelve workmen in 1844. The Society employed them in reseating cane chairs and weaving coarse linen, allowing them a few pence profit by way of encouragement. The enterprise was intended to help girls as well as young men, but this was not an easy matter. The men's work-room under the immediate supervision of the Council cost a great deal to support; the directors very rightly concluded that it would be better to find a place for the girls where they could board. Mlle Bergunion seemed just the person to apply to; so she was begged to receive the adult pupils of the Society above mentioned, and was also asked by Dr Ratier to take in the five or six blind children who were all that was left of the St-Hilaire Refuge in 1850. These latter were relegated

to the back of Mlle Bergunion's work-room. There is no mention of this amalgamation in the manuscript records of Mlle Bergunion, drawn up by the community of Blind Nuns of St Paul, but it took place, as the last pupils of M. Ratier* remember distinctly the final phase of the St-Hilaire Refuge, and their residence with Mlle Bergunion, where they slept in a kind of small dormitory adjoining the work-room. Dr Ratier appears to have been Mlle Bergunion's principal adviser at this time, which is doubtless the reason of the Foundress writing in the Constitutions that the community could take charge of little boys under nine and look after the blind in general. The want was greatly felt of an establishment whose very elastic rules should admit young girls past the age for admission to the Royal Institution—where there were very few vacancies—blind girls, women who could not get into the Quinze-Vingts, and quite young male and female children before their first Communion.

As I have mentioned before, Mlle Bergunion, in the beginning of her labours, happened to come across very troublesome girls, some of whom had been expelled from the Institute, and were therefore the dregs of the blind population, and very unintelligent. She set the cleverest of her first four blind workers to teach the little German girls belonging to the work-room. The success of this attempt gave her a certain amount of confidence in the possibility of employing the blind. Later on, in describing her efforts, the Foundress wrote: "From time to time we used to talk to the blind of their position. Accustomed always to hear that they were

* Many are still alive; one of them, M. Larchevêque, is an indoor patient at the Quinze-Vingts at the moment of writing (1901).

a burden to others, and utterly useless, the poor creatures had sunk into a state of the profoundest distrust and discouragement. God inspired me with the idea of trying to make them useful, and fortunately I was able to teach them to help me." They were employed in housework, cooking and attending to the dormitories. One of them cleaned Mlle Bergunion's room, another, assisted by a child who could see, was made portress. It was already a great step to employ such defective material without too much discouragement or too little confidence. Still, confidence seems to have been very limited. As the Foundress had had very troublesome characters to deal with among her first recruits, she fancied that they would all be alike and that her mission was bound to be very arduous. She imagined in all sincerity that it is far harder to educate blind girls than others, and that all work among the blind demands complete abnegation and self-sacrifice. When she heard one day in a sermon, that Blessed Peter Claver signed his vows with the words "Peter Claver, slave for life of negroes," she exclaimed enthusiastically, "And I will be the slave of the Blind!" in naïve ignorance that slavery does not mean one special form of work, but anything which absorbs our whole heart and strength. Besides, it is difficult to lose habits of mind, acquired in any one profession or occupation which we have followed for some time. For instance, charitable persons accustomed to deal with the poor, when they begin to help the blind will only look upon them as paupers to be relieved, and will find it very difficult to believe that many of them—especially children—may be put in the way of earning their own living. Anne Bergunion herself had been accustomed

from childhood to steady, elaborate work; her work-room was celebrated for fine needlework and supplied the best shops; she knew by hard experience how little the expertest and quickest women make by their needle. Naturally she saw that blind girls either could not sew at all, or very clumsily; knitting alone seemed possible to them, and doubtless no idea had yet dawned on her of more lucrative employments in which blind and other women could combine. It is therefore only natural that she should have looked upon blind adults as merely a heavy burden on the establishment. The Society for Helping and Assisting Blind Workers helped her by paying 250 francs (£10) for the board of each of her pupils, but the Society's own existence was then precarious, and it soon after came to an end.

Mlle Bergunion's idea of her community and its work was to offer a life-long home to blind young girls and adults who would work enough to keep themselves occupied; the inmates who could see would practically support the blind and, if they could not make enough, would collect alms. This, alas! was all that could be said for the old spinsters and widows who lost their sight late in life or people under forty who were blind from some local affection and too delicate for continuous hard work. A life-long home is almost always a necessity in such cases. But when it comes to the education and training of blind children of either sex, it does harm to bring them up with the idea that they must inevitably enter a Refuge after school, for neither master nor pupils will make any efforts or work with energy and hope. The Founders of St Paul had very little, if any, hope in final results. They were too apt to

confuse all classes of blind people, and could not believe, for instance, that intelligent children, with a gift for music, could profit by good technical instruction, and in time make a living. Still, there were several former pupils of the Institute for the Youthful Blind engaged as organists in different towns in France. From the year 1858 a great number of young girls were successfully trained there to teach music, and provided with situations in different religious communities, where they could gain a small but certain livelihood. The founders of St Paul did not keep abreast with what was being done in this way; they taught music, but only with a view to chants, choruses and harmonium-playing in church, with an occasional piece performed on the piano during a benefactor's visit. Gradually they enlarged their outlook, as we shall see in studying each section of the convent. Mlle Bergunion and the Abbé Juge seemed to have acted on their personal impulses rather than studied and profited by what had been done for the blind before their time. Doubtless there are drawbacks to rushing into action insufficiently prepared, or without a thorough knowledge of the ground to be covered; Mother St Paul and the Abbé Juge might have avoided many false starts and much waste of time by studying what had been already done for the blind. But, putting one drawback against another (since we can so rarely work without any), the best thing is to follow St Francis de Sales, who says, "Simplicity is strength, because it acts without waiting to understand." And truly, whilst we are busy studying statistics, philosophizing on abstract and original causes of distress, and looking for organizations and universal cures, perhaps we are allowing those

around us actually to die of cold, starvation and misery. The learned philanthropist sitting after his good dinner, in his warm, closely-shuttered study, compares his statistics, and seeks a solution for the general problem of starvation; while some wretched man is shivering outside (for though we are always being told of sham beggars, we must not forget that real ones exist), or a miserable woman cowers in a cotton dress in the December wind. Would it not be simpler, even at the risk of being deceived, to go down into the street, and help some one, or do something, instead of seeking abstract and impossibly complete solutions? Anne Bergunion and the Abbé Juge were among those who acted thus, and who will blame them?

ℭ III. The Constitutions—The Rule

THE Rules and Constitutions of a Congregation are not drawn up in a day; and the best have only been put into writing after being practised for some time. St Vincent de Paul, when he gave his rules to his mission priests, said to them, "Gentlemen, my brothers, you have waited for them some time, and we have been slow in giving them to you, partly to imitate our Lord, who workd before He began to teach: 'Cœpit Jesus facere et docere.' He practised virtue for the first thirty years of His life, and only spent the last three in preaching and teaching. Therefore, in your Constitutions you will find nothing that you have not put into practice with great edification for several years past. If we gave you rules that had never yet been followed, they might be difficult, but as we are merely giving you what you have practised for so many years with fruit and consolation, you can find them useful and easy in the future. If we had given rules in the beginning, before the Company was in working order, you might have seen more of the human, and less of the Divine in them, a humanly designed and conceived plan, instead of the work of Divine Providence; but, my Brothers, I could not tell you how the rules or anything else in the Congregation were planned, for I never thought about it; everything has come into practice little by little, and with no visible origin. It is one of St Augustine's maxims that when we cannot discover the cause of a good thing, we must refer it to God, who inspired its author. According to this,

God must be the author of our rules, which were introduced spontaneously and in a way we cannot define. . . . And if you ask me how the practices of the Congregation were introduced with the plan of our exercises and our work, I must answer that I have not the least idea. M. Portail here, who watched the beginnings of the little company, can tell you that we were not thinking of anything of the kind; everything seemed to come of its own accord in due rotation. Our numbers increased, and each of us worked at his own improvement, and as our community grew, so good practices sprung up to enable us to live together and get through our work in harmony."*

These words of the "good Monsieur Vincent," full of piety and practical common sense, apply equally to the position of Sister St Paul. It would have been imprudent to draw up Constitutions and a definite Rule, in the early days of a Congregation with such special and novel aims. Besides, if even the founders could have sought precedents and examples for the education, training, and work of the blind, in what had been done in France and elsewhere during the preceding fifty years, there was nothing to guide them in writing the Constitutions of a community half composed of Blind Nuns. The members of the Quinze-Vingts used to call each other Brother and Sister, as did those of St Mary's Confraternity for the Blind in Padua;† but took no religious vows. In these Corporations, which were rather associations than communities, the aims were far more material than spiritual: the sanctification of souls was subordinated to the struggle for daily bread, and the difficulty of preventing individual members getting

*Abelly, "Vie de St-Vincent-de-Paul."

† See the pamphlet: "Memorie storiche sui ciechi ed in particolare sulla fraglia e sull' Instituto di Padova, 1882." Institut des Aveugles de Padoue.

more than their fair share.* Many prayers were said and offices recited and sung, but this was in fulfilment of handsome endowments for pious intentions.†

* "When they had occasion to dip into the general purse, to seal mandates they had drawn up, or to consult documents in the archives, they went to the Treasury little cabinet containing the hospital's most precious possessions: Church relics, jewels and plate, money in cash, the leases of the house, and the official seals of the Congregation. The room containing all this wealth was protected by a lock with three keys; one was given to the Superior, one to a professed, and one to a lay-brother. This placed the key-holders above suspicion, and the Chapter directed that when anyone went to the Treasury to take out 'money, seals, or letters,' a bell was to be rung summoning the Brothers to superintend operations."—Léon Le Grand, "Les Quinze-Vingts."

† "The Quinze-Vingts were not true religious, they did not take vows of poverty or chastity, but they describe themselves as living together under rule, after giving themselves and the use of their possessions to the house; it is easy to understand that their Congregation came to be looked upon as a quasi-monastic order; for instance, benefactors would ask to be associated with the 'good deeds and prayers of the blind,' as they would have done in the case of a convent. Furthermore, their resemblance to a hospital caused them to be considered a monastic establishment, at a time when all 'Maisons-Dieu' were of a religious character. They were often called 'Eglise et Hostel des XV-xx.' . . To repay royal benefits, the blind had recourse to prayer, the wealth of the poor. Every day, as soon as the bell rang for rising, they were bound by the statutes of Michel de Brache to say five 'Our Fathers' and 'Hail, Maries' for the King, Queen and Royal Family and the honour and prosperity of the Kingdom. To these individual prayers were added the solemn offices celebrated in church in presence of the whole community, Benedictions, Masses and processions, to implore the protection of God for the King, and peace for France. When a member of the royal family was ill, the Quinze-Vingts never failed to join the processions formed to beg his restoration to health. . . . We cannot better explain the motives which often inspired this generosity than by giving the exact words of Jean de Ferrière to the Congregation in 1309: 'Attendant et considérant les bonnes priéres et oroisons de Deu aprez son décez pour l'âme de lui, et especialement pour les âmes de son père, de sa mère, et de Marguerite, sa première fame, que le 300 povres de la meson des aveugles de Paris et leurs successeurs puent faere, font, et ne cessent de faere nuit et jour, et en son cuer pensant la grant povreté d'iceux, le bon loz, la bonne renommée, et la fine probité d'iceux.' The wish to be associated with the prayers of the Quinze-Vingts is specified in several manuscripts of the time; and we have met with the phrase (so familiar to benefactors of religious orders) in no less than seventeen papers: 'Pour estre acceuilliz ès prières, biens fais, et oroisons d'icellui hostel.' This idea, joined to pity for the poor blind, is evidently the intention of all the donations which are not expressly left for other purposes. . . . The prayers asked by benefactors were not always Masses. Thus, Pierre Poiré ordered a weekly recitation on Saturdays of the anthem 'Inviolata,' in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Nicholas Flamel, the celebrated scribe, imposed quite a complicated ceremony on the Quinze-Vingts. Every month thirteen blind men with priest, surpliced deacon and cross-bearer, were to walk in procession to St-Jacques-la-Boucherie. They assisted at a solemn service for the repose of Flamel's soul; the priest then said a Low Mass, and the churchwardens of St-Jacques gave them each time 47 s. p. According to an agreement made in 1473 the factory of St-Jacques only paid the Quinze-Vingts 28 s.p. a month, and 3 s.p. a year. This clause

The blind Quinze-Vingts, like their contemporaries in Padua, called each other Sister and Brother, because, according to the custom of the time they formed a Confraternity, but these confraternities were merely guilds or, to use the language of to-day, mutual associations or charitable unions, and not, strictly speaking, religious communities. The Rule of some orders, such as the Visitation, admits a blind postulant under certain exceptional circumstances, each convent being only allowed to contain one. The idea of a convent specially intended for blind nuns—intended principally for them, even if not entirely composed of them—seems to have originated, as I have said before, with the humble directress of the Rue des Postes work-room. The idea was so novel that the ecclesiastical authority, Mgr Sibour, then Archbishop of Paris, recognizing the duty of extreme prudence, was very distrustful. He feared that Anne Bergunion might be one of those visionaries who are always imagining themselves called upon to do something out of the common: it seemed extraordinary to him that anyone should found a convent for blind nuns, and still more so, that blind women should have a vocation to the religious life. Mgr Sibour distrusted the scheme completely, but the Vicar-General, Abbé de la Bouillerie, who knew and approved of the work from its birth, warmly defended it; he said to the Archbishop: "When we have been to Holy Communion, and we bury our head in our hands, becoming blind, the better, so to speak, to recollect ourselves in the Divine Presence, does this attitude

in Flamel's will was faithfully observed, and in 1613 we find the Chapter directing that in conformity with the ancient custom, those who assisted at this Memorial Service 'seront tenuz d'aller et revenir avec la modestie joyeuse' suitable to such an occasion."—Léon Le Grand, "Les Quinze-Vingts."

prevent contemplation? If voluntary blindness be a powerful help to persons with eyesight when they unite themselves to God in prayer, why should blind women be unable to form a congregation of contemplatives? With your approbation, Monsignor, I will give them my daughters of the Visitation to train them in the religious life." *

Thus a specially appropriate spiritual and temporal organization had to be planned. Under such circumstances any precipitation would have been very imprudent, and could have produced no lasting results; time and experience were needed to bring the work to perfection. Mother St Paul gradually composed her Rule, and accustomed her first daughters to it by degrees. Father Petit, a Jesuit, spent a great deal of time over the Constitutions and the Rule; later on two nuns who held important posts in the Visitation convent of the Rue D'Enfer, came, as their Superior the Abbé de la Bouillerie had promised, to examine the Rule, and spend several years in the convent of the Blind Nuns of St Paul, where they inculcated the good traditions of the religious life.† Hence the Rule is impregnated with the Spirit of St Ignatius and St Francis de Sales. Doubtless my readers know that all religious rules are derived from the two great ones of St Augustine and St Benedict. The former is mixed, and applies to both active and contemplative orders; the latter is intended for contemplative orders only, its chief feature being separation from the world. St Benedict's rule enjoins perpetual abstinence from flesh meat, daily fasts except between Easter and Whitsuntide, night offices, etc., etc. St Augustine's rule enjoins no

* Extract from a MS. of the Institute of Blind Nuns of St Paul.

† Mother Marie-Hyacinthe, Visitation nun, lived at St Paul's from 1853 till 1863.

special austerities or enclosure, and is adapted to all needs. The Rule of the Blind Nuns of St Paul is derived from St Augustine's, the Congregation being more active than contemplative. We read in the Constitutions: "The aim of this Congregation is to work for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, in the exercise of the most entire devotion and charity, by admitting to the community young blind girls, who can, like those with eyesight, embrace the religious life, following the rule and the exercises, and qualifying themselves for educating the blind. Furthermore this Congregation proposes to receive as boarders, under rules for work and study, first, adult blind girls who have no settled homes; secondly, to receive little girls from the age of four, and to keep them in the home for life, if they desire to stay; thirdly, to give a Christian education and teach a trade to those young girls with eyesight, who will be the companions and guides of the blind; fourthly, to receive and wait upon blind ladies, who pay a modest sum and choose to board in the convent, as being a suitable place for them to lead a peaceful life with the care needful for their infirmity; fifthly and finally, to undertake in succession and in proportion to the means at the disposal of the convent, any work conducive to the intellectual, physical, and moral well-being of the blind, of whatever age, sex or antecedents." These last words are of the greatest importance; they open up an unlimited field to the zeal of the Congregation, in everything regarding the welfare of the blind. The community is composed of blind and others, obeying the same rule and making the same vows. There are no lay sisters, or, to speak correctly, there are no more of them. They used to be familiarly called "little-

bench-sisters," owing to the dimensions of their seats in chapel. All the nuns are of the same rank, and wear the same dress. Since 1876, in conformity with the wish of Pius IX, when he gave his "Brief of Approbation," * it was decided to receive one blind nun to two others. The latter must always leave anything to help a blind sister, they are always together, and in going to the Holy Table a blind nun is always accompanied by one who can see. The Congregation is governed by a superior with eyesight, elected for a term of six years by the assembled community, with option of re-election. She is assisted by four counsellors of whom one is blind: all are chosen among the professed, who have made their perpetual vows. As a rule no postulants under eighteen or over thirty-five are admitted. The only things expected of the future nuns are piety, good will, fair health, a little talent, and, if possible, a small dowry.

* Most Eminent and Reverend Lord,—In your letter of March 29 last, Your Eminence sets forth that in 1850 there was formed in Paris a pious Society of Virgins called the Blind Sisters of St Paul, not only because in addition to their own sanctification, they undertake the religious and secular education of blind girls, but because they receive blind virgins into their pious society. Your Eminence adds, that the blind nuns of this pious society, being able to read and chant in choir, as well as employ themselves in feminine occupations suitable to their condition, are eligible to profess the simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, under the authority of a superior, who must never be chosen from amongst the blind. Your Eminence further declares that in spite of obstacles at its commencement, this pious Society has already done a deal of good, and that all the sisters, blind and otherwise, most fervently wish to persevere in the life they have chosen. Finally, Your Eminence begs for a recognition from the Holy See, so as to proceed in the affair with full security. The undersigned, Secretary of the Holy Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, having informed our Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, of all that the preceding details, in his audience of April 21, 1876, His Holiness orders the above-mentioned Pious Society be proclaimed by these presents, a charitable work deserving of the highest praise, and that your Eminence be recommended to continue the enterprise with that confidence, prudence and zeal for souls, which personally characterize Your Eminence. Having lost no time in obeying the orders of our Holy Father, the Pope, I humbly kiss Your Eminence's hands, and remain,

Your very humble and devoted servant,

CARDINAL FERRIERI

Rome, April 29, 1876. (Enée Sabaretti, Secretary.)

Duplicate copy for H. Lagarde, Vicar-General.

The postulants are absolutely free, they merely come to "know and be known." After the postulantship, the novitiate begins with the ceremony of clothing, and lasts two years. A retreat of eight days prepares the novice for her annual vows, which she renews five times. She must be at least one-and-twenty to be professed, though profession at first only binds her by the year; the sisters admitted to profession must solemnly express to the ecclesiastical superior of the Congregation, their firm determination to remain all their lives in the service of God in the community. After five years of annual vows, sisters can be admitted, if they are worthy and desirous, to perpetual profession. The rules of the Congregation are principally borrowed from the Society of Jesus: "Community life seems more conformable to the aims of the Congregation." The rule enjoins no austerity or special penance, and no fasts beyond those of the Church; but any sister can practise any special act of mortification which, under the approbation of her superior, appears the most likely to further her spiritual advancement, or any which the superior may impose on her, with the same object. As regards the furniture of community rooms and cells, food and dress, the Superior undertakes that all shall be suitable, modest and in accordance with religious poverty. To no one whomsoever in the community are any distinctions made, exemptions or privileges allowed; although high functions, age and long service, may entitle certain sisters to the regard and deference of others.

As piety is the source of all real good, the tie which binds us to God, the principle of peace and order in religious houses, and the only foundation capable of upholding them, the sisters will do their

best to acquire it; they will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, being assured that the rest will not be wanting. The sisters make two meditations a day; morning and evening, they sing the Office of our Lady, say the Rosary, and hear spiritual reading in community; communion is frequent. A triduum or retreat, prepares them for the two feasts of St Paul, when the professed sisters renew their vows. There is no enclosure. With the superior's permission, all the sisters can go out as much as is really necessary for the spiritual or temporal needs of the community: they can go wherever it is useful or suitable for them to be, but great discretion is expected on this point. The nuns keep silence: they are not supposed to speak unless it is necessary except during recreation and on Sunday afternoons. From half-past eight in the evening till half-past seven next morning (after Mass and thanksgiving) they keep perfect silence, that is to say that excepting for some absolute necessity they do not speak a word; this is known as "the great silence." In the epistle where St Augustine* gives his daughters their rule, we read: "Let there be nothing sumptuous in your apparel; try to please by virtue and not by appearance. Your veils must not be so transparent as to show the cap beneath. Let your hair be completely hidden: it must neither escape in negligence nor be arranged with art. . . . Your garments must be kept in one place, in charge of one, two or even more persons, if necessary, to keep them clean and free from insects. As your food is paid for out of a general fund, so your garments must all be kept in one robing room. When you have to change your habit according to the season,

*Epistle 109 (211 in the Benedictine Edition).

pay as little attention as possible to what is brought you, and do not notice whether you have worn the garments yourself, or they have belonged to another; all that matters is that each should have what is essential. If any discussions or complaints arise amongst you, one sister murmuring at receiving a poorer habit than she had before, and declaring that she does not deserve to be worse clad than others, you will understand how much must be wanting of sanctity in the inner garments of your souls, if you can pay so great attention to the garments of your bodies. Still, if you are so much considered as to have your own garments returned to you, you ought to put back those you are wearing in the same wardrobe, under the charge of the same persons: so that none of you may be busy with her own concerns, clothes, bed, girdle, veil or coif; but let all be done for the community with more care and exactitude than as if each of you were working for yourself, for charity, it is written, 'seeketh not her own,' and must be practised by putting the wants of others before your own." These injunctions were all followed at St Paul's. After several essays the costume and the rule were settled: the nuns were to wear black habits with wide sleeves, over tight ones;* a floating dress held in by a cord round the waist, tied with three knots representing the three vows of religion, and omitted in the novice's dress; a white headband with lappets, a starched white veil worn quite short over the forehead, and over that a long black one, and on the breast a silver crucifix with a medal, in relief, of Our Lady of Consolation. On the right side is carried a copper rosary with six decades, and

*The sisters who do hard work wear a blue bib and apron, which they leave off to go into the chapel or parlour.

a crucifix in the same metal. Novices wear the white veil, and on great occasions it is made of nainsook muslin. Sisters who have made perpetual vows, wear a silver ring on the fourth finger of the left hand. In this costume, blind and normal nuns go through life, constantly meditating the words of their patron the great Apostle, which are the motto of the community: "For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk ye as children of the light."*

Ceremonies of clothing, and of annual or perpetual profession, mark this transition from light to darkness; and allusions to that spiritual light which is to enlighten and transform the life of the blind nuns and the sisters devoted to their care, occur frequently in the ritual of these ceremonies. The rites and words are especially moving, and take a mystic meaning when addressed to such a community. When the habit is received, the celebrant says to the postulants, "My daughters, what do you ask?" They answer, "We ask the happiness of being admitted as novices into the community of Blind Nuns of St Paul." The celebrant continues, "Do you promise to practise daily the evangelical counsels in the observation of community rules, and to be faithful to the duties imposed by the care and education of the blind?" After the engagement of the postulants, as he blesses the white veil of the novices, he says, "Vouchsafe to turn Thy servants' eyes from vanity, to love of Thee." And as he gives them the taper: "Receive, my dear daughter, this earthly light as a type of the spiritual light with which we pray God to enlighten you, that with the

*Eph. v, 8.

fervour of the Holy Ghost you may some day dwell for ever with the Church's sacred Spouse, our Saviour, Jesus Christ." And he adds, "Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the World, Splendour and Glory of the almighty Father, look with favourable eyes upon Thy servants here present, that enlightened by the light of Thy countenance, and inflamed with the fire of Thy love, they may know Thy holy will and make it their happiness to obey it." While the novices put on the habit, certain particularly applicable verses of the psalms are chanted. When the novices return, clothed in the religious habit, the choir chants :

Preserve me, O Lord, for I have put my trust in Thee ! I have said to the Lord, Thou art my God, for Thou hast no need of my goods.

To the saints who are in His land He hath made wonderful all my desire in them.

Their infirmities were multiplied : afterwards they made haste . . . The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup ; it is Thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me.

The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places ; for my inheritance is goodly unto me.

I will bless the Lord who hath given me understanding ; moreover, my reins have corrected me even in the night-time.

I set the Lord always in my sight : for He is at my right hand that I be not moved.

Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced, moreover my flesh also shall rest in hope.

—Psalm xv.

How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of God.

My heart and my flesh hath rejoiced in the living God. . .

Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord ; they shall praise Thy name for ever and ever.

Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee, in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set.—Psalm lxxxiii.

Who is she that goeth up by the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved ?

Thou art all fair, O my Love, and comely my dearest, in delights.
Come from Libanus, my spouse, come, thou shalt be crowned.—Canticle of Canticles.

At the annual profession, when the sisters are kneeling at the foot of the altar, the celebrant says to them : " It is true that it will be very pleasing to God, and very good for your souls, for you to live and persevere in your holy state of life. You will receive the blessing of the Lord, and the mercy of God, our Saviour, for of such is the generation of them that fear Him, and seek the face of the God of Jacob." Then, joining their hands, the sisters offer this touching prayer: "O Lord God, confirm us in this hour, that we may do what we know can be done by Thy grace. We come to Thee, O God, because Thou hast called us. Receive us according to Thy word, and we shall live; Lord, let us not be disappointed in our hopes." Then the choir chants: " May the Lord have pity on you, and bless you, may He look favourably on you, and shew mercy unto you. May He direct your steps on earth, that you may find the way of His commandments and keep without sin." When the Superior has declared that she and the Council desire the sisters to make their vows, the celebrant says : " If this is your desire, my dear daughters, come to God, your Creator, and be enlightened, and you shall not be confounded. Offer Him the sacrifice of the righteous, and He will shew you goodness " ; and in giving the black veil : " Receive, my dear daughter, the veil of religion. It will be a rampart between you and the world's dangers, and a sign that your heart is renewed in justice and truth. May you carry it without spot to the judgement-seat of your heavenly

Spouse." At the perpetual profession the ceremony of the funeral pall takes place, after which the celebrant says: "Arise, ye that sleep, arise from the dead, and Jesus Christ shall give you light."

The following dialogue then takes place between the Choir and the professed:

Choir.—The kingdom of this world and its joys I have despised for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom I have seen, loved and chosen, in whom I have believed.

Prof.—My heart has proffered a joyful word, and I sing to the King.

Choir.—Whom I have seen, etc. (as above).

Prof.—I have chosen to be despised in the house of my Lord Jesus Christ.

Choir.—Whom I have seen, etc. (as above).

Prof.—Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, etc.

Choir.—Whom I have seen, etc. (as above).

And, lastly, as the celebrant gives a taper to each of the professed, he repeats the last invitation and supreme exhortation to the religious life, "Walk ye in the way of the just, like the shining day-spring, striving to grow unto perfection."

BOOK II. The Convent

AS we did not stop to go into every detail of the founders' lives, neither shall we dwell upon each of the slow but regular stages in the development of their work; we shall merely study it in its present form. The convent is now situated at no. 88 Rue Denfert-Rochereau; at the right is the Children's Hospital, at the left and behind it is the Marie-Thérèse Hospital for aged and infirm priests. The total area of the buildings, courtyard and garden, is 8,000 square metres. There are five buildings of varying size, and excepting one which contains laundry, community room, novitiate, and nuns' dormitory, they have only two floors, and are very insignificant-looking. In the centre of these is a courtyard, entered by a double gateway, and behind stretches a comparatively large garden full of fine trees. The house is strikingly clean, neat and tidy. "A place for everything and everything in its place," was one of the Mother Foundress's favourite maxims; everything is used, cleaned and put away with the most scrupulous care. Garden, kitchen, laundry, class-rooms, work-rooms, printing office, all are interesting to investigate, because of the very ingenious contrivances which are to be met with at every step, for utilizing things and people. The Little Sisters of the Poor are celebrated for allowing nothing to be wasted, and for getting good out of all the human and inanimate débris cast up at their blessed gates; the Blind Nuns of St Paul, though less well known, are equally ingenious.

The sting of poverty was felt by them so sharply in the beginning of their foundation, that it has become second nature. To anyone who loves to seek beneath the outward appearance of things, for the ideas which represent them, it is a pleasure to trace the wonderful order that God has established in nature, by which nothing is lost. Each living thing, each leaf, each grain of dust, after playing its part as a complete whole, disintegrates, and mixes again with other living things and inanimate objects. It is a pleasure of a like kind to investigate a charitable institution conducted by nuns having the real spirit of poverty. Indeed the process by which objects and persons are received, assimilated and regenerated is analogous to the transformations of Nature. It is quite possible that these holy women have never drawn such comparisons, or thought of themselves as factors in such elaborate fusion; in fact it is certain they have not; but what of that? Do the trees, the flowers, the birds, that we love and admire more for their beauty than their utility, understand their part in the great scheme of things? Their rôle in Nature is the same as that of the dear Sisters in the world; they too play their part simply, doing good instead of theorizing, as unconscious as the birds and flowers of the social transformations which they effect, and we profit by.

ℭ 1. Material Occupations

IN each branch of work or service, to use conventual language, blind or nearly blind girls with varying sight are judiciously interspersed with others who can see; all doing the principal parts of the printing. The blind are utilized at St Paul's on principle, and of necessity; on principle they are employed everywhere, and in every way that is not absolutely impossible; and of necessity, because there are not enough nuns who can see for all the work. Furthermore it is always a good thing, as the founders of all the orders well knew, to enforce moral obligations by real, tangible necessity. As we have seen, when the founders of St Paul started they had very little experience of the blind, and though most charitably desirous of helping them, were rather distrustful of their skill, and thought them incapable of many things which experience has since proved can be done without sight. It was therefore even more from necessity than logic, that by degrees they confided certain work or portions of work to the blind; and it is quite certain that fresh possibilities will continue to be discovered in this direction, as time goes on. During the first years blind nuns were set to teach prayers to sisters who could see but were uneducated, while the latter were employed in housework or sewing. They played the part of piously edifying phonographs, but it shews how little was known then of the capabilities of the blind; nowadays most of the blind nuns have every moment of their time so

completely filled up, that they certainly could not spare any to sit with novices and be so passively employed. The great achievement of any organizer is to get as much as he can out of a man or a piece of money; in a convent this is imperative, and if persons or objects are not placed where they will give their maximum returns, there will always be a want of balance and a sense of incompleteness in people and things.

The large three-cornered garden is bordered on each side by wide paths and fine trees, and the nuns and children take their recreation there. The middle is all vegetables, looked after by a hardy Auvergnate sister; she came from Auvergne when the convent was first started, and can weed and water as well as any man, despite her sixty years. In summer she is at work from three or four in the morning until nightfall, and seldom leaves her precincts; she says her prayers all the time she is raking, weeding, and carting away the specially unpleasant manure in a wheelbarrow! . . . Utility and economy reign here as elsewhere; nothing is wasted that is obtained from the farm, where fowls, goats, cows, pigs and rabbits are kept and no manure or vegetable compost is bought. Sœur Marie-Julie has assistants with weak sight or none, who help her to pull up weeds in the lettuce patch. Digging and watering do not require very good eyesight, nor indeed sight at all, if the person employed is allowed to go slowly, and her allotted task is inspected when finished. A blind woman milks the goats, feeds the rabbits, etc., etc. Honest country girls who used formerly to do this all by eyesight and who have nearly or entirely lost it are thus employed in a way thoroughly suitable to their tastes and aptitudes; what

they could not do amongst strangers on a large estate, they can manage quite comfortably on this limited plot of ground, surrounded by well-disposed persons who overlook their work, not to criticize it unkindly, but to point out, if necessary, what has to be gone over a second time.

Sœur Marie-Julie's domain supplies fresh eggs, choice vegetables and fruit, not to the whole community by any means; but to the infirmary and the lady-boarders all the year round. Nothing is wasted in the kitchen either. I really believe that each utensil and piece of furniture has it pedigree. For instance, in a corner of the larder, lettuces and cabbages are kept in two gigantic stands made out of old soap and candle boxes given by a friendly grocer. The sisters have put them on four legs, after piercing the lower parts like a coarse colander, so that the air can penetrate and moisture drip through. Near by stands a table that is made from the ruins of an old square piano. The sisters who make soup can see, but all accessory work such as grinding coffee, cutting bread, etc., is performed by the blind; and naturally it is the latter who wash and dry crockery in the scullery and kitchen, where plates are piled up as they come out of the refectory. This underground pantry is not a palatial apartment, but it contains a statue of Our Lady on a bracket, flanked by two little vases which all through May, the month of the Blessed Virgin Mary, are kept filled with flowers, and many rosaries are said whilst the washing-up goes on. Good humour reigns there as everywhere else, and there is great animation on feast days, when the menu is more plentiful, and the scullery and kitchen busier: the sisters from other departments, who are off

duty on those days, delight in coming down into the kitchen, where they borrow large aprons and help the cooks. Thus the class-room and printing-room nuns, that is to say the most intellectual in the whole community, come on days like Easter and Ascension with the greatest cheerfulness and good fellowship to help their working sisters. Love and faith will transfigure the meanest work; it is related of a certain St Bridget of holy memory, a refined and lovable creature, that when she was employed in the kitchen she took to herself the words of Martha to Mary, "The Master is there and hath need of thee." When she was constantly called from her work by first one and then another, she would say to herself each time: "The Master hath need of thee," and would obey with the same joyful alacrity as if her Divine Lover had called her. Is this not the secret of the ever-radiant faces and the pervading peace which are the portion of nuns? They always impress us, however humble their exterior. Amongst persons who speak of convents without knowing much about them, it is the general custom to repeat that communities delight in employing well-educated and intellectual people in cooking, sweeping, etc., etc., in order to mortify and humiliate nature. This is rather an absurd idea; doubtless it sometimes happens that, either to fill a momentary vacancy or to test a disposition, nuns may be sent to the kitchen, the laundry or the farm who are fitted for something much higher, but it would be a great mistake to imagine a superior taking a delight in reversing tasks, without some serious reason; as a rule such cases are accidental and temporary. Superiors who are so careful that "everything shall have a place, and be kept in

it," are still more anxious that each individual shall be placed where his or her aptitude and talents can be employed to the best advantage. But if a sudden vacancy occurs, and some outwardly humble occupation has to be reorganized and started afresh, it is quite possible that a nun who has been destined for much higher things may be asked to fill the gap; it is for her to understand and love her task, and submit herself to a provisional arrangement which at the time she may even believe to be permanent. In the first place it is her duty to obey; then, since nothing is so valuable as personal experience, it may be very useful to her to gain practical knowledge, and perform with her own hands those tasks which she may have one day to direct, and, last but not least, our daily happiness ought not to depend upon whether we are washing-up crockery or teaching literature, managing a farm or instructing novices, the sole and real importance of life consists in having an aim and an ideal which we do our best to realize.

Carlyle's wife, obliged by circumstances, and still more by her husband's vile temper, to bake the great man's bread when she could have written books, writes half whimsically: "It was then that somehow the idea of Benvenuti Cellini sitting up all night watching his Perseus in the furnace came into my head, and suddenly I asked myself: 'After all, in the sight of the upper powers, what is the mighty difference between a statue of Perseus and a loaf of bread, so that each be the thing one's hand has found to do? The man's determined will, his energy, his patience, his resource were the really admirable things of which his statue of Perseus was the mere chance expression.

If he had been a woman living at Craigenputtock with a dyspeptic husband sixteen miles from a baker, and he a bad one, all these same qualities would have come out more fitly in a good loaf of bread.'"* And the female philosopher who quotes Mrs Carlyle, adds these words: "How much talent is wasted, how many enthusiasms vanish into air, how many lives are spoilt for want of a little patience and resignation, or because we have not understood that it is not the grandeur or littleness of our tasks which make them noble or trivial, but the spirit in which we accomplish them."

Yes, happiness is subjective and not objective: it depends, not upon our surroundings, but on our own disposition. Perhaps the dear sisters themselves would not understand this rather pedantic axiom; but what is far better, they realize the meaning of those verses from "The Imitation," which put the same thing into different words:

"The Cross, therefore, is always ready, and everywhere awaiteth thee. Thou canst not escape it whithersoever thou runnest; for wheresoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee, and shalt always find thyself. Turn thyself upward, or turn thyself downward; turn thyself inward or turn thyself outward; everywhere shalt thou find the cross. And everywhere thou must of necessity hold fast patience, if thou desirest inward peace and wouldst merit an eternal crown."

It is indeed folly to be for ever seeking different occupations in the hope of finding happiness. It is true wisdom to obey the superior, to bow to those

* Miss Jewsbury's "Recollections of Mrs Carlyle," quoted by Arvède Barine in "Portraits de Femmes" (La femme d'un grand homme).

circumstances which are the "superiors" of every one, and manifestations of Providence, and to make ourselves happy in whatever "department" the Great Overseer has placed us during this life. People living in the world rebel and revolt, because they are too apt to forget that an infinitely good and powerful "Superior" watches over us: but in the convent, a nun feels that her "Reverend Mother" is close beside her; she knows that her superior is in the place of God, and that she is as affectionate and careful over a cooking nun, as over one who is preparing girls for an examination, because the same motive guides both: they are working out their own salvation whilst serving others in soul and body. When once women have in all sincerity consecrated their poor life to Jesus and to their neighbour, and have given up their own will to their superior in the hope of being more useful to their fellow-creatures, when they have realized that they have complete control over their time and their faculties and that they accept this responsibility, they may rest in peace. It is therefore with hearty and joyful alacrity that they throw themselves into the "employment of the moment," knowing and feeling that every action is transformed and idealized according to the spirit in which it is undertaken, and that when duty points the way, watching a loaf of bread baking is as soul-satisfying as waiting for the clay of a Sêvres or Tanagra statuette to harden.

A blind nun is told off to carry the meals to the lady-boarders and infirmary patients; plates ready filled and bowls of soup are placed on trays, the whole is covered by a napkin, and the waitress settles the tray firmly on her left arm, leaving her

right hand free to open doors. A great many doors, staircases and courtyards have to be passed on the way from the basement kitchen to the lady-boarders' wing, the distance is too great, and in winter the dishes must arrive almost cold. But in spite of distance, winding stairs, doorsteps and turnings, the blind waitress never upsets her tray, however quickly she walks. It is needless to say that she knows her way perfectly all over the house; with her foot she calculates the exact distance from door to stair, every worn paving stone and projecting step, each angle in the courtyard walls, are so many landmarks which spare her the least faltering or hesitation. It is also a blind nun who fills with hot water the collection of jugs which she afterwards carries to the refectories and boarders' dining-room, for the washing-up. She cleans and polishes the cans of beer, which is brewed in the convent from a treasured recipe; she takes them to the refectory, and hands them over to a blind but equally handy colleague, who lays the places on the long row of tables. The latter carries a heavy pile of plates on her left arm, and with great precision places them with her right hand at each person's place, afterwards filling the little pitchers belonging to the different tables, from the large jugs of beer that stand in a corner of the room. Liquid falling into a rather shallow receptacle produces a very distinct sound, which varies in tone as the liquid rises; every one knows this, but people who can see pay no attention to it, as they can measure conveniently with the eye: the blind waitress is guided by this sound, and unless her attention is wilfully allowed to wander, she never spills any of the beer. After each meal she removes the plates, wipes

the tables, etc. All over the house the blind dust furniture, clean windows and sweep stairs; the cleaning of the large staircases is the only thing done by a woman with sight, because people pass constantly over it during the sweeping, and brush the dust from one side to another, which would render the blind woman's task as unending as Penelope's. Long distances and long-handled utensils are very confusing to blind workers. There is little to guide them in a plain surface, and a blind woman will always prefer a broom, spade or saucepan, with a short handle, so that her hand being as near as possible to the working end of the utensil, she can have full command over it. Blind women clean stairs with a brush without a handle, which they hold by the wooden back. Their methods are simple; beginning at the top, they sweep kneeling down: they hold the dustpan in the left hand, placing it at right angles to the wall exactly above the step they are at work upon, and sweep regularly from banister to wall, as they gradually reach the bottom. Brooms in the form of gigantic nail-brushes with straight handles have been tried, but the handless broom is always preferred. "We get a better grip of it" ("On l'a mieux dans la main.") After the broom comes the duster, but the process of dusting is naturally much slower for the blind than for others. Nearly a minute is spent over each tread, for naturally when the hand is not controlled by the eye, it does not move so quickly. Hence it is impossible to recommend the blind to go out for the day as charwomen in houses which are unfamiliar to them, but in their homes, or as we have seen in the convent, handy, active, blind women can get through a good deal of work. In fact, if they are very inge-

nious, there are few things which they find it really impossible to do.

At St Paul's cleanliness equals economy, which is no light thing to say. . . Linen being constantly changed, washing is considerable, and is all done in the house as the blind can be largely employed in it. For the last few years the convent has possessed a modernized laundry with steam machinery, etc. On Tuesday, which is washing day, Sœur Marie-Geneviève, who is not blind, lights the fires and prepares everything ; she is in charge of the machinery, and never leaves her post. She regulates the pressure, sending great jets of steam into the large copper full of linen and into the different compartments of the laundry, where a squadron of blind and half-blind women rinse the linen after it has boiled in the copper and been soaked in a mechanically drained receptacle. The blind also wring out all the pieces which have been through clean water ; they heap them on to little trucks, and then blind and half-blind join in wheeling them to the garden, where the linen is dried in fine weather, or to the drying-room in wet or wintry days. Eyesight is not necessary in spreading articles out to dry : the baskets of wet linen are ready on the trucks and nothing is easier than to take up a piece, shake and spread it on the line which hangs across the path from one end to the other. The drying-women know the geography of the garden by heart, their infirmity is no hindrance to them in walking along even rows of hanging linen, and at this work they can even, to a great extent, conquer their slowness. Only women with eyesight are employed to mend or make new linen articles, and to take care of clothes in general. But some of the blind can

sew, especially those who have lost their sight as adults after being very good needlewomen : the latter keep up their needlework whether in mending or making new. Special needles are to be had with very large eyes which allow of the thread passing quite easily, but blind people can sew with ordinary ones by using their lips and tongue. The thread is held in the right, and the needle in the left hand ; tongue and lips discover the exact place of the eye, then the right hand introduces the thread which the lips draw through by suction, and the same hand receives the thread when it has passed. In this, as in all other work, habit gives skill to the blind.

A kitchen sister whose sight has gradually gone has a curious employment : she makes out of cuttings of cloth excellent slippers which are called by the apt name of "silence-shoes." The sole is composed of seven or eight thicknesses of cloth one over the other ; these the sister stabs with a long stout needle, in very close stitches, so that they make one substance. It was in the large community room that I first found this humble sister on a hot June day working at her "silence-shoes." She explained her little industry and gave me her short biography with the simplicity of a nun and the gentle sadness of one who is resigned, but not yet accustomed, to recent blindness. The sun streamed through the large west windows, she could no longer see it, but something of its warmth and brilliance seemed to cheer her, and fill her with reflected life, strength and contentment.

ℭ II. The Community Room. The Chapel

IN a convent the community room is of special importance. Next to the chapel it is the nuns' favourite place—they take a pride in it as their true home and the centre of all the family life they can ever know. In the dormitory or her own cell a nun merely has her bed, she only spends there the time strictly necessary for sleep, and never returns during the day; the refectory is still less of an abiding place, and the department where a nun works is not always her favourite spot; sometimes the space is very limited, and when it happens to be the wash-house or the cellar, it cannot be considered pleasant, and she is merely sent there to work. The community room is open all day; and all the sisters make it a rendezvous. In very severe orders it is the only room with a fire, and from time to time the nuns go there to warm themselves. Nuns go to the community room for recreation when bad weather keeps them from the garden; it is there that they hear spiritual reading, and and some kind of instruction, and go whenever they have a free moment. Each sister keeps her little box containing her work and writing materials there; in fact it is her home. As it does not belong to her personally, and as she has not the right to own anything, she may become attached to the community room with her whole heart, and even embellish it, as being the property of the Congregation as a whole; and this without disobeying the rule of "holy poverty."

At St Paul's the community room is very spacious and holds a hundred nuns comfortably; it is ventilated by large windows through which those nuns who are not blind can see in the distance the Sacred Heart Basilica of Montmartre towering over Paris. The parquet floor is carefully waxed, it is pleasant to the eye and very comfortable to the feet of the blind people who like shiny, even surfaces, on which they can easily detect the slightest speck of dust or mud. Chairs stand all round the room in front of the cases or cupboards where each nun keeps her work and her tools, or rather the tools she uses, as nothing, strictly speaking, belongs to her personally. Here the daily reading takes place, during which all the nuns are busy at some mechanical employment, such as trimming vegetables or cutting up bread for soup. Before sitting down to the reading, several sisters go to the kitchen for large baskets of beans, lentils, potatoes, carrots, bread, etc., which they carry up two by two. Near the community room is a lavatory where they carefully wash their hands, after which blind and others silently commence their work. Those who can see usually sew. On Wednesdays there is the sorting and folding of the linen washed the day before, which is piled up in a closet, from which each sister, as she passes, takes out an armful to fold. The community room must really be an interesting sight when the sixty blind and normal sisters are grouped round the little pulpit which the Superior occupies while she reads aloud. Some are sewing, others sorting lentils, others peeling potatoes, cutting bread, folding linen, etc., while the sister who directs the printing, sits on the pulpit steps, folding large sheets of paper and fast-

ening them together in book form. The blind being interspersed among the others, the latter can overlook the work in case of need, but this is seldom required, for it is not necessary even to have a very fine sense of touch to pare vegetables and see that no peel or skin remains behind. Great attention to details is the secret of the nun's success; she works conscientiously, believing that He of whom it was said, "He did all things well," will not leave the smallest action unrewarded which she has done with all her heart for love of Him. A large statue of Our Lady, and two full-length pictures of Mother St Paul and Abbé Juge, adorn the community room like portraits of ancestors; each new-comer is told their name, their history and their achievements, the lives of the founders are related in their smallest details, as examples to love and imitate.

There is a great charm about the young girl of eighteen who comes with unimpaired powers of loving, making a free gift of herself to the religious family she is entering; she is affectionately received for her own sake, for she is often charming, enthusiastic, loving and full of good will, and because she is yet another "sister" or "child" sent by God to the community family. . . . Above all, the nuns feel a mystic, supernatural joy in her coming, they see in her one of the elect, chosen and called by the Lord, who has shown her the goal from the beginning of her life's journey. A chapel and a community are the real foundations of a convent. In the chapel a nun at any moment can find her Master, to whom she has given all her heart and life; He is ever present to hear her thanksgivings or her complaints, to fortify and comfort her by those words which he speaks to her soul, bringing it the only

real and efficacious consolation. She finds in the community room, the human influence which corresponds to a woman's innate longing for family life; the community family is never dispersed, nor entirely dissolved by death; time cannot affect it since it is constantly growing, and its youth is perpetually renewed in the person of each fresh novice who enters.

If the community room of a convent is so important, the chapel is still more beloved and embellished. There, indeed, is concentrated all the supernatural life of the soul, and as the actions of each nun, be she young or old, cultivated or ignorant, are regulated by this supernatural life, it is not too much to say that the chapel is really and truly the centre of the convent's vital principle. Sometimes a community will incur debt to get an imposing building, sacrificing everything to its decorations, and this to the great scandal of people living in the world who forget our Lord's words to His disciples: "Why do you trouble this woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon Me." But if the Master checked those who had rebuked the Magdalene for breaking the alabaster box and pouring the spikenard over His feet, saying that all posterity would praise her for so doing, He did not command us to imitate her, nor say, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, "Go ye and do likewise." Hence many great servants of God, such as St Francis of Assisi and St Vincent de Paul, felt justified in placing the tabernacle on altars and in sanctuaries of such extreme poverty as to recall the stable of Bethlehem rather than the house of Simon the Pharisee, or the guest chamber of the Last Supper. It is related of St

Francis that, when he heard of a poor old woman being cold and hungry, when there was nothing left in the convent but the choir psalter, he said: "Give her the book, God will be more pleased with the good we shall do her than with our choir-singing." At St Paul's they remember this pretty story from the "Fioretti," and every time any money is sent, one more blind child is admitted and offered to the God of the poor. This is the reason that the chapel, though not so bare as the Portiuncula of Assisi, resembles it more than it does the Abbey of Fontevrault. The chapel is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin under the title of "Our Lady of Consolation," in honour of an Italian pilgrimage which the Abbé Juge loved to make. It stands on the grounds of the humble house occupied by the author of "Le Génie du Christianisme"; Mme Chateaubriand's drawing-room is part of the choir. The famous author's memory is held in great honour, visitors hear a great deal about him, and are shewn what used to be the bedroom of his venerated wife. In 1860 it was necessary, in enlarging the chapel, to cut down a magnificent cedar tree under whose shadow the community, when in its infancy, used to assemble: this cedar is said to have been brought back and planted by Chateaubriand on his return from the Holy Land; its wood was used to make choir-stalls. But the enlargements were made forty years ago, and since then the community has greatly increased. There is a great crowd round the tabernacle on the days when nuns take the veil or a First Communion is made, and, as relations must be admitted, the congregation overflows almost into the courtyard. The nuns are seated in small stalls, each blind sister alterna-

ting with another. They go to the Holy Table in the same order, and the nuns who have no blind to lead follow after by themselves. Children and young girls sit on the benches. A nun with partial eyesight sits at the end of each row to marshal the ranks, and the children, who sit hand in hand, are most orderly. For blind people who are devout chapels are far preferable to large churches, for in the former they can hear the priest's words at the altar, which is impossible when a large nave separates them. And how is it possible to follow Low Mass by the ear, when it is celebrated at the high altar? All is intended for sight, and hardly anything for hearing. It is true that the bell announces the Sanctus, the Consecration, the two Elevations and the Communion. The noise made by the faithful on rising for the Gospel and sitting down at the Offertory, indicates these two parts of worship; but that is all, and it is not enough. In a silent chapel it is possible not to lose one word of what the priest says out loud, and when he is praying in a low voice, if his movements cannot be seen, a few words may be caught: sometimes the server can be heard moving the Missal, or taking up the cruets, the priest pouring water or wine into the chalice at the Offertory or making the last ablutions. Sometimes even the priest's genuflexions, the fluttering of the leaves of the Missal, the breaking of the Sacred Host, the placing of the pall on the chalice, etc., are audible.

Under such conditions, when familiar with the liturgy, it is quite possible to follow the celebrant minutely, and thus the attention is riveted and sustained. Recollection, too, is easier in a secluded chapel, where there is no disturbance of people

coming and going as they constantly do in large churches, especially on Sunday mornings: not to speak of Sanctus bells ringing at side altars, baptisms, funerals, catechism, the commotion of chairs being moved, beadles whispering and the faithful entering and leaving. People with eyesight find it easy to shut out noise; they look at the altar, concentrate their attention on what they see, and abstract themselves from all outer sounds. Hearing is a great cause of distraction to the blind, they are even less disturbed by a great deal of movement going on around them; people can close their eyes, but not stop their ears; by keeping perfectly still they only see what is immediately in front of them whereas sounds can reach them from every side; they may not be listening, but it is impossible not to hear. Hence blind girls prefer peaceful, silent chapels; silence represents to them something like the impression produced by the half-light which filters through church windows. From time to time, distant sounds penetrate from outside, but not distinctly enough to be disturbing; they only seem, as it were, an echo of that outer world which has been left behind for a few moments. On great feast days in summer the blind delight in the flowers which dress the altar and sanctuary and perfume their chapel; and when clouds of incense fill the air while triumphal hymns are sung by the whole congregation, they feel themselves plunged into an atmosphere of happiness and mystic joy. They love their dear chapel too, when coming back at the close of a feast-day to look for a book or make a short adoration, they find it warm from the flame of tapers, impregnated with incense, and as if still thrilling with the chants that have just ended. If we have the patience or

devotion to spend a little time in a corner of St Paul's chapel, we shall see many interesting types of blind women: sometimes a sister enters by the nuns' door; she walks quickly and unhesitatingly to her little stall: sometimes an old woman dressed as a "lady" comes in very slowly and almost on tip-toe, with much hesitation and faltering, keeping close to the wall so as not to lose her way, and touching each row of chairs to count them and discover when she reaches her own seat. This will be a lady-boarder, who has recently lost her sight; in her own home she would not have ventured out of her room or down-stairs without a guide. Here, example has emboldened her, she knows that she is surrounded by other blind people who make every allowance for her and are kind instead of critical; she does not feel set apart, she has taken confidence and tried her best ("essayé de pouvoir") and has succeeded; each day she has made a little progress and has gradually recovered more and more independence. The next moment another blind woman enters, also dressed with a certain amount of care; she walks quite steadily if slowly, and finds her place without feeling for it; she is an organist and teacher of music who, brought up in a blind school, has retired to St Paul's after forty years of work; she pays for her board out of the little income which her savings produce and the few hundreds of francs left her by her parents. Later a group of young girls come in together to pay their visit to the Blessed Sacrament; these also are quite unembarrassed and walk with great precision; they are Children of Mary, and have been for some time in the house. Finally, an old blind nun quietly enters, leading a very young blind child, almost a baby, to

pray to the Infant Jesus, and she teaches her how to make the sign of the Cross. On Feast days, when the Church exultantly invites the faithful to form out-of-door processions as a manifestation of their faith in the Blessed Sacrament or their devotion to our Lady, and leads them through city streets and village roads decorated for the occasion, the family of St Paul's refuses to be behindhand. Processions in honour of Corpus Christi, the Assumption and the Rosary are specially dear to the Community. They take place in the garden, under the avenues of lime trees, and on Corpus Christi a humble Altar of Repose is erected at the far end of the garden. Little children, students, work-girls, Children of Mary, lady-boarders, blind and normal nuns march along singing:

> This is day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein.
>
> O Lord, save me, O Lord, give good success.
>
> Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and He hath shone upon us.—Psalm cxvii.

and

> Jesus, whom for the present veiled I see,
> What I so thirst for, oh, vouchsafe to me,
> That I may see Thy countenance unfolding,
> And may be blest Thy glory in beholding.*

Each section is headed by its banner. The one of St Joseph, under which all the work-girls are assembled, recalls a sad memory. On the banner staff is inscribed: "To Sister Mary Magdalen, from the Valentin Haüy Association for the Welfare of the Blind, May 4, 1897." Dear Sister Mary Magdalen was one of the victims of the Bazar de la Charité, and had charge of the apprentices and work-girls, to whom she was perfectly devoted; this section was placed

* "Adoro Te."

under the protection of St Joseph, but they had no banner, and Sister Mary Magdalen had set her heart on getting one. After the catastrophe the Valentin Haüy Association,* in accordance with the rule of the Community, placed no wreath on the holy victim's coffin, but gave a durable and tangible memento to be preserved among her work-girls in memory of the dear dead nun. On feast days devout ardour must light up all these sightless faces, for it surely fills their hearts. Sometimes a shade of sadness comes across them. May not some blind sister, as she sings under the lime trees of Chateaubriand's garden, remember the beautiful Corpus Christi feasts of her childhood when she was a pretty black-eyed child? Dressed in white under her big muslin veil, far, far away, in her Southern village home, she followed solemn processions under the plane trees, while the tall Sodality girls whom she envied, sang Lambillotte's "Lauda Sion," so beautiful to her childish ears. She must "see" it all yet in the brilliant colours of her imagination and the romance of distance; the town decked for the holiday, houses festooned with white, Altars of Repose covered with the most precious treasures the people possessed, carpets, curtains, lace, vases, baskets of flowers, lustres and silver and gold candelabra. The June morning is warm, and the sun already blazing, but the trees give a cool shade. The great bell rings, the lesser ones sound a peal, the air is full of festal sounds. A light, tiny breeze just stirs the leaves, enough to make them rustle, and wafts from the big garden yonder the scent of orange blossom, pink oleander and verbena. The

*See chapters on brush-making and printing for the connexion between the Blind Nuns of St Paul and the Valentin Haüy Association for the Welfare of the Blind.

procession is in sight; the tapers are hurriedly lighted, the Blessed Sacrament is coming, and the birds sing in the highest branches of the plane trees the same songs they sang in the plane trees of Judea. Instead of keeping silence, they join in the chant of the "Pange Lingua." On the lace-draped altar the monstrance is placed for a few moments on a red velvet pedestal covered with sparkling jewels, there in the open air, under the arching branches of the great trees. The white-haired priest is kneeling on the altar steps, and all round him a crowd of white-surpliced, red-cassocked choir boys, holding baskets of roses and golden thuribles, strew flowers as they incense the Blessed Sacrament. She is too young to belong to a sodality, but not too young for deep feelings or to wish with her whole heart to consecrate herself to the Lord Jesus, and still naive enough to say her wish out loud. Years have slipped quickly by, they say the processions under the plane trees are less gorgeous than of old; and the little girl in the beautiful white dress, whose brilliant black eyes were hidden under her white veil, has become a nun, a blind nun. Her childish vow has been fulfilled: the Lord Jesus has taken her entirely to Himself, only leaving her the memory of the past.

ℭ III The Classes

THE time has long since gone by when the blind were received at St Paul's merely to give them a home, and with no idea of setting a definite aim before each one. Now, the greatest care is taken to educate every child or young girl in the way that will best bring out her aptitudes. Blind women of all ages are received, from children of three to septuagenarians. But though inmates of all ages are under the same roof, they do not clash with each other; and in spite of the smallness of the buildings, it has been cleverly arranged that different categories of boarders shall take their turn to occupy the garden or refectory. It is a general rule everywhere that children shall not mix with adults, and in this case it is even more necessary to separate those who have led, or are to lead, different kinds of lives. There are five distinct categories in the establishment:

1. Children from three to eleven.
2. "Big" girls or students.
3. Children of Mary, workwomen of all ages who are employed in the work-room and will spend their lives there.
4. Lady-boarders (in the "Home"), and
5. Brush-makers, apprentices and workwomen of all ages (an industry created by the Valentin Haüy Association).*

* The Valentin Haüy Association for the Welfare of the Blind was founded in 1889, and recognized as being of public utility in 1891. The Association will take up, as far as its still very limited resources permit, the case of any blind person indicated, be he child, apprentice, workman, aged or infirm; it assisted more than sixteen hundred in 1900. Its two offices are in Paris at 31 Avenue de Breteuil.

If my readers remember that in addition to all these there is a class of young girls whose sight is not strong enough for them to go to any school or ordinary work-room, and who are not blind enough to go into a Blind Institute, they will realize that the whole establishment is very varied and interesting.

There are some Blind Schools, not of the highest class, who in their anxiety for municipal, departmental or government favour, catch the "certificate mania." To those people who know nothing of the blind question, as is the case with most town councillors, generals, deputies, senators, mayors and prefects, the enumeration of a few certificates and honourable mentions obtained is a manifest and undisputed sign of the superiority of a school. This is an error. The object of schools for the blind is to render the pupils as competent as possible to gain their own living; and dependence on certificates, precarious enough for those who can see, is absolutely useless for the blind. During the last sixty-five years, one hundred and twenty blind have obtained certificates or university diplomas, and deducting those who have become teachers in blind schools, I do not know of a single person whose certificate was of any use to him in his profession. The Blind Nuns of St Paul, who neither receive any departmental or municipal favours, very wisely subordinate intellectual to technical education; and this does not hinder them from successfully coaching an occasional pupil for certificates, when aptitude and circumstances permit. Five have already obtained them. Two rooms, quite large enough for the pupils, who only number forty, suffice for intellectual studies, and are successively used for classes and preparation, space, like all else,

having to be economized. The Junior Class takes in little girls from three to eleven, and the Senior, girls from eleven to eighteen. The little ones do not spend much time over preparations: lessons are the great thing, and the mistress is constantly with them. She is a semi-blind nun, formerly a pupil in the convent; she obtained the certificate of first-grade teacher, and now devotes herself entirely to the education of blind children. She has a class of babies, the youngest being three years old, and they must be taught everything. Not only have they never learned anything, which is only natural at their ages, but most of them have never seen, that is to say, have never touched anything, and so are in complete ignorance. Tender and cautious parents have kept the blind child in one corner of a room, with no freedom, giving her more sweets than toys and more caresses than liberty, imagining that the poor little thing can take no interest in anything, and perpetually dreading accidents. So when such children, even at ten years old, first come to St Paul's, they are ignorant of quantities of things which much younger children know of from seeing them in their homes or out of doors.

So everything has to be taught these little creatures, some of whom are quite torpid, while others will be lively and inquisitive, always trying to touch everything within reach. If "object lessons" did not exist, they would have had to be invented for blind children. Sister Mary Emmanuel minutely explains all the words occurring in fables, such as house, palace, mouse, tree, branch, etc. All is material for information, remarks are freely made, and questions asked when the teacher is not explicit enough. A blind mistress who has been well taught is per-

fection for this class of work, having had so many things explained to her, she has learnt to explain them to others; she knows by personal experience exactly how and what to teach, when to dwell on a subject, and when to go over the same ground again. She is careful to allow no unusual sounds to pass unnoticed, which may be heard in class-room, house, garden or street; she will interrupt the repetition of the verb "to be" or the fable of the crow to explain the muffled rumbling of the Sceaux train in the tunnel under the Rue Denfert, to speak of the drum of a passing regiment, the ringing of the knife-grinder's bell, bird-notes in the garden or the carpenter sawing as he mends the landing floor. Little Cécile, who comes in awkwardly shuffling her feet, is gently but firmly checked; the blind mistress is not expecting any more of her than may be perfectly well obtained by care and firmness; she must walk like other people, and find her way through the class-room without feeling. A mistress with eyesight would be less exacting, having always the idea in her mind that "without sight people cannot do this or that." Little Sister Mary Emmanuel is charming, in all the zeal and energy of her twenty-six summers. She devotes herself so thoroughly! As she speaks to her "very little ones," you feel she loves the tiny girls confided to her care as if they were her own. Nuns and women resolved on single life are marvellously adapted for teaching; it is surely very superficial to say that mothers are preferable, because they love and understand children better than spinsters. Is there not in all women a powerful maternal instinct, a great longing to devote themselves? Nuns and old maids have at the disposal of the children of others treasures of self-abnegation which married women

have generally used, if not exhausted, on their own husbands and children. In mothers the maternal instinct and attraction are satisfied, in the unmarried they are still unquenched, and those who are so fond of ascribing all acts of devotion to the impulses of instinct ought to have no difficulty in seeing the truth of this theory.

Then, in the case of a nun, beyond this very natural feeling is the supernatural obligation of her duty, a duty on which she has to examine her conscience twice a day in preparation for her weekly confession. Can anyone doubt that such obligations impress her professional responsibilities on her in an exceptional way? But we must not linger, the time has not yet come for discussing such serious questions.

There is an intelligent elasticity about the baby blind class; the pupils are not strictly kept in their seats; they are often allowed to run about as in maternity homes or children's refuges, where they can go up to the Sister and speak to her with the greatest confidence. As we enter, every one rises, and in a moment many little hands seek ours, and feel curiously for our hat and umbrella. The children are accustomed to be played with and petted; they are allowed, and wisely, to touch and examine everything, it is the only way to lighten their darkness. The technical instructions begins with the Braille alphabet, formed on the system of raised dots, from B.A., ba.*

A blind child can learn to read from four years old, and will often learn quicker than an ordinary one, owing to the extreme simplicity of this alphabet. It is the same thing with writing which is purely mechanical. In six months, with an hour's

* See further on, "Printing the White Books."

teaching every day, a little girl will learn to read and write. They read with the first finger of the right hand, that of the left follows to regulate, and to save time is placed at the beginning of a fresh line, while the last is ending. The Braille characters are so tangible and easy to remember that children of eleven or twelve can fluently read ninety-nine words a minute of matter quite fresh to them. Very wisely these babies are only given the most elementary notions of arithmetic, abstract figures being replaced by concrete and well-known objects. According to the time of year, they add up apples, chestnuts or cherries, and try to calculate how much Lucie's two apples, Cécile's three pears and Clotilde's four peaches make together. Sister Mary Emmanuel complains with reason of the dearth of objects for these lessons; she has hardly anything to work with, she ought to have all kinds of things, toys, patterns of material, leather, minerals, leaves, seeds, dried fruits, etc. Friends of the convent could easily send her those odds and ends which are so useful in school museums, particularly when intended for the blind. Even a very dilapidated toy would be most valuable for demonstrating, and a cardboard sheep with only three legs, would make the fable of the wolf and the lamb quite life-like to the little blind girls of the Rue Denfert, who have never seen nor touched a lamb of flesh and blood.

The senior class-room is next to the junior, into which it opens, and both are furnished alike. They contain the usual desk-tables with benches and a raised desk for the mistress. The two large windows of each class-room, which remain open all day for health's sake when the weather permits,

look on the recreation ground. About twenty pupils from eleven to eighteen are divided into different sections, and receive very varied instruction ; there are no hard and fast rules about the age for receiving children, and blindness from accident or illness may fall on a girl of fifteen as well as on one of six or eight. Parents often do not make up their minds to send a child till rather late to a blind school, and in such cases teaching is required which will dovetail with very rudimentary knowledge ; sometimes nothing in the regulation programme will serve the purpose, and it becomes a question of good will and good management on the part of mistress and scholar. The objects used in the school are interesting and repay investigation. There are first the unmistakable Braille or White Books, which I will not describe at present, as I am devoting a whole chapter to them in connexion with the printing department. Then come the tablets for writing in Braille character: they consist of an octavo zinc tablet two millimetres thick, scored horizontally with perpendicular grooves of two millimetres and a half wide. This tablet is set in a zinc or wooden frame on hinges ; the two upright sides of the frame are pierced with holes corresponding to the grooves, in sets of eight; in these holes are placed the hooks of a strip of copper, which is pierced evenly with horizontal rows of upright squares; each square is deep enough to hold three grooves measuring seven millimetres in depth; in width it can hold two dots side by side, which allows of making six dots in each square.

An empty groove runs under each row of squares to make the divisions even. A sheet of rather thick paper, such as artists use, is placed on the grooved tablet and held down by the frame and paper-clips. The tablet and the punch specially adapted to the use of the blind, are manipulated by them with a speed and precision guaranteed by no other system. At dictation each pupil takes her tablet and punch, and all start working vigorously ; the punches driving the paper into the cavities of the zinc tablets make a peculiar noise rather like the rhythm of the Morse telegraph ; you hear little sharp strokes, sometimes made very quickly, sometimes interspersed with short pauses, while the writer is reflecting ; and sometimes in groups of two or three according to the characters formed. There is no fear of blots or upsetting inkstands, here all is done in "the dry," but not on white paper, out of economy the pupils do their exercises on any paper; pamphlets, old copy-books, indexes, announcements of deaths or marriages, etc. When the paper is strong, such as is used for indexes, or elegant invitations, the sheet is used single ; if too thin, it is folded twice or even three times. Thus a theme on "The Burial of Charles-Quint"—for this remains a popular subject for development—will cover an invitation to a wedding, while a little way off a pupil in another section is writing from dictation "The Spring Morning," on a mournful black-edged card. But this matters little. Were these coincidences still more incongruous, they in no way disturb the pupil, neither will the finger of the blind mistress who is shortly going to correct the exercises. In familiar school-room parlance all paper that is not covered with Braille dots is called

"white," but the really blank paper is reserved for the books printed in the convent. The Braille alphabet has been an inexpressible boon for reading and writing, but we must not forget that it is in cypher, and that educated blind people have to become acquainted with ordinary characters to be able to correspond without an intermediary with all who can see. About a hundred different inventions and machines exist by which the blind man can write or print the ordinary alphabet. A certain proportion are impractical, others have more or less important drawbacks and advantages, according to the age at which the person became blind, his aptitude and dexterity, his circumstances in life and the uses to which he may have to put his writing, etc.; no special one appeals to all or has been universally adopted. Many inventions have been tried at St Paul's, and at the present time ordinary letters punched in relief are most used.* They consist of letters formed by blue dots in relief. Lessons are learnt in Braille books, as normal children might learn them in volumes from Hachette or Belin; recitations, explanations and lectures, go on as in all schools; the mistress, sitting at her raised desk, asks questions and is answered by pupils from their places. Geography is taught by maps in relief, which the pupils have under their fingers while the teacher describes the part they are studying. Terrestrial globes, also in relief, are made for the use of the blind, so that they can understand the relative positions of the different countries of the world. Maps are printed on very stout paper, having the outlines of land and sea in-

*This writing is derived from the Braille system, a blind inventor, Monsieur Ballu, perfected it by reducing the number of dots composing the letters and introducing the use of a pocket rule.

dicated by projecting ridges ; rivers and railways are traced in raised lines or a succession of dots, and the initial letters of the principal towns, capitals and important stations, etc., are marked in Braille cypher. Thus the blind can easily attain a reasonable knowledge of geography. When too many details are accumulated on rather a small map—for large ones are difficult to hold, and very expensive—the finger of the blind girl goes astray ; therefore the best maps have as few outlines and details as possible. In arithmetic an invention called the "cubarithme" is used ; the figures are formed in Braille on little cubes resembling dice, with the difference that the dots are raised instead of hollow. To set a sum the metallic cubes are placed on a tablet divided into hollow compartments. The pupil has beside her a box of these cubes, which she uses indiscriminately, as they are all alike. It is only necessary to turn the little die in her fingers, to find the front and the side with the cypher or number required. When the sum is finished, she turns the tablet over and replaces the cubes in the box without any sorting. It would be a mistake to think that a class of blind girls is quieter than one of normal school-girls ; the former are very talkative and restless, the more so that the longing to speak, move, touch, hear others speak and nudge with their elbows is very great in blind children ; and they are always inclined to press up against each other. They do not "watch flies" ("ne regardent pas voler les mouches") but they listen to every noise which distracts their attention. Among blind, as well as normal girls, the well-known types appear ; there is the "good child" who never needs scolding, the noisy girl, the disobedient girl, the

lazy girl and the sulky one who is always being remonstrated with. Here the blind teacher who aspires really to educate finds great though not insurmountable difficulties. It is always difficult to say no less and no more than is necessary; the teacher with eyesight is guided by the expression on a child's face, which rarely remains impassive; but when a blind teacher comes into conflict with a sulky child who says little, she finds it very hard, especially in rather a large class, to grasp the impression her remonstrances have produced and to regulate her remarks according to the degree of feeling she has aroused. She has only general principles to go upon, and these may mislead her. Matters are simpler when she is alone with a child who is sitting close to her, and a wise mistress will contrive to get a child alone after lessons, when she has anything serious to say. Then when they are by themselves, she will put her arm on the girl's shoulder, or take both her hands, and try to conquer her sulkiness. The scolding is done by questions; the child's answer, short, angry or tremulous, her movements, her gestures, the sound of her voice, will shew what the little heart is feeling. The sound of the voice has an extraordinary influence on blind scholars. To have real authority over a class of blind girls a mistress needs very remarkable qualities of heart and intellect if she have a defective or ridiculous habit of speech; on the other hand, physical deformity or great ugliness, which would tell against a teacher in a class of girls with eyesight, would be no drawback at all with the blind. Even if the pupils discovered (as such things always leak out sooner or later) that their teacher was deformed or ugly, they would

soon forget it, and only remember what they got from her. Music, which is a dominating influence in blind schools, and practically of greater importance than intellectual training, is always in the minds of scholars and mistresses. The class-rooms adjoin the study cells, and in spite of a solid partition and double doors, the geography and history lessons are always accompanied by a distant confused murmur of scales, exercises, chords on the harmonium and vocal solfeggi. This musical buzzing, so familiar to frequenters of conservatoires and schools of music, is far less unpleasant and distracting than the near neighbourhood of a single pianist, playing in desultory fashion a pot-pourri from "Mignon" or "Carmen." We will now follow these sounds, and turn our steps in the direction of the music rooms.

ℭ IV. The Musical Section

THE music rooms consist of seven apartments varying in size, which lead from the educational class-rooms; one rather large one is kept for lessons; the others are only cells where pupils practise alone and contain nothing but a piano or harmonium and a music stool. These cells look out on the Rue Denfert, and are lighted by narrow windows high up in the wall, which air the cells but are depressing to look at, whereas the windows of the other class-rooms are wide, cheerful bays, admitting sunshine, scent of flowers and songs of birds. It would seem that music is fascinating enough to make pupils forget the ugly cells. The blind are enthralled by it; ask the intelligent responsive girl who is practising the Allegro from the "Pathétique" if she is fond of music, and hear her enthusiastic answer, "It is my dream, my very life!" But she is more than a child, and before being able to interpret a sonata there are many stages to be gone through of exercises, scales and uninteresting studies, although the mistress intersperses them with musical recreations in the form of well-known and very melodious chants. These are often heard in chapel, and the girls are very proud of being able to play them. Children who enter very young have their hands put on the piano from four years of age—Sister Thérèse-de-Jésus, the blind nun who directs the musical studies, tells us that of course these babies do not learn much till they are seven or eight, but they get to know their notes,

and that is better than nothing. No particular method is necessary in teaching blind children to play the piano. The usual terms of black and white notes are used, though to many of the girls who have never had the use of their eyes these words have no objective reality, but as they may have, later on, to teach others with eyesight, it is useful for them to familiarize themselves as early as possible with current expressions.

At the age of seven or eight blind children commence the study of music in Braille cypher simultaneously with theoretical and practical instruction. The theory of music is even more important to the blind than to others, because of the special musical characters; these have to be deciphered one by one with the fingers, which implies analysis, whereas ordinary written music is synthetic. The eye can take in a group of signs, but the finger cannot; the result is that a beginner with eyesight executes almost mechanically what he sees written on the score, all the notes intended to be struck together being placed one over the other, and it is not indispensable for him to remember the exact value of each note in the bar; but all this is quite different for the blind, they cannot read or play till all is made quite clear to them. The Braille musical characters composed of the same signs as the alphabet are merely mechanical helps to memory, like the system known as "Galin-Paris-Chevé." The form of a note does not merely indicate its duration or value, but its rank and intonation in the scale, and the notes and signs corresponding to it, are therefore written on a horizontal line like a row of words. Eight signs named "keys" indicate the eight octaves of the musical scheme, and shew to which

octave the notes belong. In concerted or part music, the signs called intervals represent the notes which are to be played simultaneously with the principal theme, when they have the same value; a sign specially named "copula" unites the parts intended to be played simultaneously even when of unequal value. In piano and organ scores the parts to be executed by the right hand are written in the interval of a phrase of say twenty bars; then those for the left hand follow for the same phrase, also making a break; these phrases are marked with signs indicating right or left hand. Except in vocal, or very special kinds of instrumental music, blind people cannot play what they have not learned by heart; and young girls practise and commit to memory with the right hand, what they read with the left. Later, when they are perfect in the right-hand part of a more or less long phrase, they begin to read the four, eight or sixteen corresponding bars for the left. Then they combine the two with both hands on the keys, stopping from time to time to compare the written score and test their memory. All this becomes quite exact and dexterous with continual methodical practice; subsequent profound study of the scale, harmony, and later on the elements of composition, teach the pupils to analyse what they have learnt. They grasp the idea as a whole, and with deeper comprehension, the memory is strengthened. The study of the scale, or what is practically musical dictation, is of the greatest importance; the blind musician's ear must be perfectly accurate, and this needs a great deal of practice. Exercises in harmony on given themes are more often worked out at the piano or harmonium than with mechanical tools, because the blind person

of necessity writes music synthetically, and not analytically, and he cannot, like the man with eyesight, take in the whole in a glance. Piano-playing presents no special difficulties except perhaps in those long stretches and intervals, which are not easy for the blind to calculate.

Pianos and harmoniums for practice are scarce, ten to thirty-four pupils, and mostly half worn out. It may be imagined that those habits of holy poverty and the utilization and preservation of everything as long as possible, which we noticed as regards the humble utensils of cooking and housework, reach their highest expression where musical instruments are concerned. These last are costly, and I believe that a new piano or harmonium has never passed the convent gates. Those we saw in the music cells were gifts, after being used for many years; but if cleverly repaired they can still be useful for some time to come. The convent possesses an ancient concert grand piano which was originally a very good instrument; it was mended, and now delights teachers and pupils alike. It nearly fills the room it stands in, and they are obliged to walk round it sideways. There are seven more or less venerable upright pianos of different makes, one grand and two square. Alas! some notes on the latter are absolutely dumb, and if one day some generous soul is inspired to replace them, the poor invalids will be transformed into tables to the satisfaction of every one concerned. The giver of the new piano will be acclaimed by the little girls who try to hammer out their exercises, and the big ones who work at their harmony on the wretched square pianos whose notes are as hollow as tin labels. It is impossible to mend an instrument without having one to

replace it; it is already difficult enough to see that each pupil gets in, according to her powers, one to three hours' practice a day. In the room containing the best instrument a blind nun gives music lessons, and follows the player with both her hands employed on a heavy volume of Braille music lying in her lap. When the pupil stumbles in a sonata, as will occur, the mistress rectifies the mistake from her score.

The part-singing class is about to begin. Pupils, work-girls, novices, professed, all the inmates of the house with any pretensions to voice assemble in groups of three or four. They are rehearsing a sung Mass for Whit-Sunday, and Sister Thérèse-de-Jésus, who directs the church singing, has gathered together her full choir, thirty in all. They are not equally gifted, and some have to sing by heart; but the real musicians of the assemblage sing and read their parts as they go, following the notes with the right hand and the letters with the left, as the custom is in blind choirs formed of trained singers. The conducting sister has the real "feu sacré," she is a true artist and her enthusiasm is contagious. She sits at the harmonium in the midst of the singers, the soprani on her right, and on her left the mezzo-soprani and contralti. She does not beat time, but every one starts with perfect precision directly the harmonium prelude stops. When there is an interval for all, she counts one, two, three, four in a low voice; with this exception each one keeps time by counting mentally, and the result is astonishingly satisfactory. The expression is well given; it is only to be regretted that fresh, young voices should be in a minority, and that the tired, older ones should give a slightly metallic tone to the singing. And if a more artistic effect were striven after, the large element of work-

women, whose great pleasure is the eagerly anticipated choir practice, would be excluded, and thereby deprived of it. When this is taken into consideration, the defects in the choir seem little compared to the enjoyment of the singers.

And now let us consider what the future is which awaits these young girls after their exclusively musical education. Their prospects must of course be modest, but fairly secure and on the whole agreeable. They become teachers of music and organists in convents, schools, orphanages and hospitals; sometimes combining these engagements with the post of organist to the parish or mistress of a confraternity choir. They are boarded, fed, washed for and mended for, and make on an average 300 francs (£12) a year, according to their capacity and the means of the community or parish where they work. This is fully equivalent to a salary of 1,200 francs (£48) a year with no loss in time of illness, for in that case they are always nursed by the community which employs them, and often arrange to retire to it when old age prevents them working any longer. Therefore teaching music is a fair livelihood for a woman; for blind women, of course, there is no career which can touch it. Some people have insisted, and still insist, that it is better for the blind to be workwomen than teachers of music. But this kind of people are sophists, and it is waste of time to argue with them:* facts speak for themselves. A blind woman can never make by any manual trade even forty-five francs (£2) a month regularly; and those who affirm the contrary can-

*It is needless to say that I speak of Catholic countries where religious communities are numerous. In Protestant ones organists are of infinitely less importance, though of course they have the resource of teaching music in schools. Persons who wish to go into this subject at greater length are referred to my technical books, which are to be had at the Valentin Haüy Association, 31 Avenue de Breteuil, Paris.

not have studied the question, and would do well to go into it again. But it is only too evident that all blind women are not equally fitted to be organists or teachers, so those who do not appreciate music need have no fear; there will always be enough, if not too many, blind, to fill work-rooms, which I am sure my readers will admit when I have shewn them what blind manual labour really produces. Children require a good ear, an instinct for rhythm and time, sufficiently supple fingers and an average amount of intelligence; if they begin to learn music very early, these aptitudes have a fair chance of developing; but this is not the case with those who only become blind at thirteen or fourteen years old, with no previous musical training. All are taught music unless there be some unsurmountable reason to the contrary; and after a few months' trial are selected more or less by age. About thirty or forty per cent are eliminated owing to late blindness, insufficient aptitudes, etc. As a rule, it is not difficult to find employment for blind women who are good musicians. Convent schools are very numerous; even in the meanest neighbourhoods piano lessons are required, and sometimes there are no nuns who can give them. It is preferable for a music mistress to live more or less in community life, instead of in the world outside; she can be always on the spot to direct the practising and choir singing. She plays the harmonium in church, gets up little musical entertainments, and is quite content with a small salary principally paid in kind (service, food and lodging), which is not much of a strain on the resources of the convent.

Some, as I have said before, are in addition organists to their parishes, which adds to their means;

but this only applies to the more accomplished. The inferior ones make a little in orphanages and charitable institutions by teaching hymns and plainsong to children and sometimes to old people, and accompanying the musical parts of the different offices in the chapel when they are very simple and always the same. For years the demand for organists has exceeded the supply; but, notwithstanding, situations are sometimes scarce, and young girls with an anxious eye on the future may well say:

> For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones:
> Thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God! . . .
> For better is one day in Thy courts above thousands.
> I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners.—Psalm lxxxiii.

They can apply these words in real earnest to themselves, for they are indeed the turtle-doves who have found shelter in the sanctuary. I know a very old and solitary church, perched high up above a little town in Dauphiné, where at almost any time between the different offices may be heard the soft notes of a harmonium, which stop as soon as the door creaks or a chair is moved. The young blind organist lives with the nuns next door, but as she has no instrument, she has to come and practise in the church. Devout and angelically patient, she passes part of every day there, in the presence of the tabernacle, as faithfully as the perpetually burning lamp which she cannot see. Outside, the wind murmurs in the great tree which has overshadowed the church porch for four hundred years, swallows fly to and fro calling to each other, and the cries of children playing before school echo in the distance. The blind organist is silent; she is kneeling down by the harmonium, ready to take

up her music again when the church is once more empty. Thus her life is one long adoration; for if all work, whatever it may be, wherever it may be done, becomes prayer when it is offered to Almighty God, what shall be said of the prayers offered by one whose work it is to learn the hymns and praises of the Lord at the very foot of His altar?

ℭ V. The Knitting Department

THE knitting department was the first industry started, and more women are employed in it still than in any other. When Mlle Bergunion made up her mind, in 1851, to take a few blind girls into her work-room, they took up knitting, as being a clean and quiet employment that harmonized well with the fine needlework for which the establishment in the Rue des Postes was quite celebrated in all the great outfitting houses of Paris. The care and pains which Mlle Bergunion was very strict in expecting from her needlewomen are still a tradition in the knitting department also. There is but one voice to praise the shape and dainty freshness of whatever comes out of Sœur Marie-Stéphanie's cardboard boxes. In the large apartment called "The Children of Mary's Room" the work-women sit round a narrow table, on which each one places her work-box or bag. At one end is a little altar with a statue of our Lady watching over her children at work, a relic of Anne de Bergunion; at the other is a harmonium used to accompany the chants and festal choruses which from time to time enliven the monotony of knitting. This monotony is almost appalling when we remember that an average work-woman knits 2,000 stitches an hour, and a clever one 2,500, which represents 25,000 a day, and 1,500,000 a year! I admit that the work is not always even, there are loops on the wrong side, crooked ones, "reduc-

tions," and other pretty things, not to speak of the abomination of desolation, "dropped stitches"! These vary the monotony a little, but all the same it is terrible to think of making the same movement twenty-five thousand times a day, with the prospect of doing the same thing for life!

Knitting, to be done well, must be rapid, for the evenness depends on the loops, and these can only be even when the action which forms them is very swift and almost mechanical. The awkward workers who hesitate and knit in spurts, produce uneven work. Every one knows how the knitting-loop is made; blind and normal women work alike; the thumb and first finger of the left hand guide and "see." Crochet is also done at St Paul's; when coarse, it is easier than knitting, because only a single row of stitches is worked at a time, and there are no other needles full of stitches always liable to drop; but fine cotton crochet is very difficult, for the tiny stitches embedded in the work itself are hard to pick up, as they are not fixed on anything like a knitting needle to keep them firm. It is a constant preoccupation to keep knitting fresh and unsoiled; for this very dry and very clean hands are indispensable; persons who perspire freely will never make good knitters, the work being constantly held in both hands. Each workwoman has a freshly washed piece of linen in her basket, and carefully wraps up the work she has begun.

The simple adjuncts required are well known. Those for the blind are the usual ones, with the exception of a kind of rosary which some workwomen keep on the table, and call it "their conscience." It is composed of twenty beads strung on a double thread, they can be pushed up or down

at will, and are used to count the row or the pattern. This meets the difficulty of remembering without confusion how many rows have been worked since "reducing"; here memory alone can guide, for it would take very long and be almost impossible to go by the fingers; the rows cannot be felt distinctly enough to be counted. Working with coloured wools is easy, though visitors are always impressed by it. A workwoman will have as many as four different-coloured wools in her basket without confusing them, and this is not, as some persons imagine, because, with practice, the difference in colours can be felt. The most that can be discovered by touch are certain indications, such as softness or roughness, size of the skein, special marks, pins, paper, or knots in the ball. The blind woman remembers that her black wool is harsher than the white, because of the dye; the red is in finer strands, the blue ball is oblong, the violet round, a pin is sticking in the light blue, etc., and when you ask her to take the white, red, blue, black or violet wool out of her basket to show you, she is able to do so. But, confuse shapes and sizes, in the blue, violet or red balls, and you will soon find that colour in itself is imperceptible to the touch. In combining colours and designs, blind women can make what they know is pretty and graceful, or what is ordered of them, but it is needless to say that they can originate nothing, without they have had eyesight long enough to thoroughly understand colour and blending. But they are fond of combining different patterns in relief, such as ball stitch, diamond stitch, pearl stitch, grain-of-rice stitch, etc.

But if we inquire what can be made by work of

this kind, the reply, alas, is disheartening. So as to keep forty women employed all the year round, work for exportation must be taken, and commissions which bring in extremely little. A good worker can make three or four pennyworth of knitting in ten hours; when she reaches fivepence, it is a great triumph, and means that her work is exceptional. So many women can knit and crochet articles for themselves and their friends. Many also sell the work done in their odd moments, to make a little extra pocket money, and so are content with very small profits. Besides, blind women work slower than others of the same skill and intelligence, especially in "finishing off." Mounting, and sewing on edging, bows, buttons, etc., takes time, and if this is done by a second woman with eyesight, she also has to be paid. Fivepence a day! I must admit that I always feel a bewildered admiration for the patient workers who never get discouraged, and make so little! Think of the hours, and hours, and hours they sit knitting, to-morrow, the day after, next week, next month, the same thing will go on! Socks, cuffs, shawls, capes, stockings! It must indeed be terrible! No wonder they look forward to Sunday, with its rest and Church offices, holidays with little musical and dramatic entertainments (tragedies are usually chosen), or even choir-practice. The more mechanical the work, the keener the longing for change. I sometimes wonder if the great thirst for pleasure among city workmen be not partly due to the purely mechanical nature of most of their trades. When a locksmith of the Middle Ages made every part of a lock with his own hands, adding any fantastic touches that he pleased, I expect that when Sunday came round he felt less anxious for amusement than

his fellow craftsman of our day, who sits from morning till night in the same workshop, with the same vice, saw, scales, rivets and the rest, before him, at work on the same style of lock which is being reproduced by thousands. The field-labourer, despite the influx of agricultural machinery, still keeps a certain amount of variety in his work, and he always has the unexpected element in changes of weather and temperature; he works in different places, in the open air instead of in a factory, and hence is less anxious for diversion out of working hours. To monotonous labour the counter-balance of recreations and holidays is necessary: this is well understood at St Paul's, though of course the amusements partake of a pious character, since they take place in a convent before an audience of "Children of Mary," but still they are amusements, and are as frequent, animated and gay as possible. On the Superior's or Chaplain's feast day, all the tables are removed, a platform is arranged, and all the parlour and chapel chairs are brought in. It is even an amusement for the work-girls to take hands and pass the chairs along. "Fabiola,' "Estelle: or Gratitude," "Jeptha's Daughter," etc., etc., are played. In these pieces all the actors are blind, some are very clever, and all are very fond of dressing up. Their great delight is to re-incarnate themselves as chimerically rich girls, very old dowagers, Biblical personages, etc., any people who are far removed from the life they know. All this is real recreation, rest and recuperation to them. As we leave the Children of Mary's workroom with its endless labyrinth of stitches, we recall instinctively Le Play's words, "The real aim of work is virtue and not money."

ℭ VI. The Brush-Making Department

THE brush-making department is of recent creation and only dates from 1891. In 1892 the work received a fresh impetus from the Valentin Haüy Association, when this society began to send its blind girls and adult women there to be apprenticed.*

It was the special charge of Sister Mary Magdalen, who, as I have mentioned before, was one of the victims of the catastrophe of May 4, 1897. Each detail of the workrooms recalls the memory of the dear nun, and at every step you hear her name; as intelligent as she was holy, she organized, formed and arranged everything with the help of Sister Mary of Carmel, who now replaces her, and makes it her business to carry out the dead sister's excellent traditions.

To those persons who have never seen a brush taken to pieces, it is necessary to explain that it is usually composed of four parts: wood, of which there is a slab, pierced with even rows of holes; silk (the long hairs of divers animals); string, or wire, used to fix the silk or vegetable fibre to the back; and finally the back of the brush, which is a piece of wood more or less carefully made and polished, according to the quality of the brush and the use to be made of it. The different parts of the brush are made in large quantities in special factories; the "mounter's" work consists in putting one

*The Professional School for Blind Workers, 1 Rue Jacquier, Paris, to which France owes the spread of the profession of brush-making among the blind, gave the first instruction to the St Paul's Brush-Making Department.

by one the little bunches of silk or fibre, known as "tufts," into the wooden holes with her fingers. The head "mounter," holding the wood in her left hand, takes in her right a tuft of either silk or vegetable fibre, which must be perfectly even; she next folds it in half, passing it through a loop of cord or wire previously formed in threading through the wood; and then pulls it tight, so as to get the tuft firmly fixed in the hole. The worker is seated on a conveniently high stool, before a table or bench raised sufficiently for her to stand up occasionally to her work. Three sides of the table have a ledge, against which rest the little packets of silk, fibre, etc., etc. A strong screw is fastened to the bench, to hold down the end of wire or string in use. Up to this stage blind and normal are extremely handy, though the former are a great deal slower; a blind woman will fill 150 holes an hour when one who can see would fill 280 or 300. But when the process of cutting comes, that is to say, clipping the tufts of silk or fibre so that they are even at the ends, the two categories of women begin to work on different lines. Those who can see wait till all the holes are full, and then clip them all to the same length with a large pair of scissors, the blind are obliged to cut row after row with a long, wide pair of shears, of which one half is fastened to trestles; the left hand holds the wooden part of the brush, while the right moves the free half of the shears. In order that the blind woman may be sure of handling her tools evenly, a horizontal or parallel support is added to that half of the shears which is fixed on the trestles. This support is movable; it can be brought close to the edge of the shears or moved farther off; the worker takes her measurements beforehand, ad-

justs her supports and has nothing more to do but just press the wood of the brush against the support, while she moves the blade of the shears with the same dexterity and precision as if she could see. The necessity for stopping at each row of tufts wastes a great deal of time.

As soon as we enter the convent courtyard, and close behind us the gates which shut out the road, we find ourselves close to the brush department. As we approach we hear the brush-makers in animated conversation, laughing and sometimes singing, for the workroom is almost too small for them and doors and windows are constantly open. Of course, none of the departments at St Paul's are very large, but the brush-room is smaller than any; as it was started after all the others, whatever space remained was made the most of, and we find the workwomen and their brushes crowded and squeezed up into a few square yards, with only half the room really needed for the twelve apprentices, and the brushes and brooms ready for sale. Things are on quite a different footing from the knitting department; that holds the "Children of Mary," these are "St Joseph's Workwomen." They come from the four corners of the earth; one was a dressmaker before losing her sight, another a glove-maker, a third worked at boot-stitching, a fourth has been lady's maid. Here is an Algerian, there a Bretonne; some are young girls of eighteen, others women approaching forty. All this means much more life and individuality. Each workwoman has fixed in the corner of her bench a statue denoting her special devotion; one is our Lady of Lourdes with clasped hands and a plaster rosary in the highest relief, another is St Anthony carrying the Infant Jesus, another St

Joseph with his lily, etc. These statuettes answer to a need of the blind woman's soul; she cannot, like her happier sisters, lift up her head from time to time to draw fresh courage and fervour from the sight of the statue, picture or crucifix hanging on the wall; she knows that the great statue of the Blessed Virgin is in the room because she has sometimes touched it, but she is not in constant contact with it, and it is no ever-present symbol to her. But the statue close at hand, touched at will, speaks to the blind fingers as pictures and statues speak to seeing eyes. Here the work is less monotonous than knitting; a brush is sooner completed than a stocking or a cuff; there is the clipping of each row and the changes of shape which lose time, slacken work, but make variety. The women set each other tasks: "Come, let's each begin a brush and see who gets done first." They get quite excited, spur each other on and sing as they work. As we enter, they are nearly all engaged on oval flat brushes with short, stiff, silk bristles, technically known as "dabs," being in the shape of that fish. They are for the cavalry, and the order is a large one. Unfortunately, owing to a contract, the work is done for a middleman and brings in hardly any profit; but the prisons all have brush departments and will always take orders for next to nothing, so St Paul's must submit or close the work-room. The wooden parts of these said "dabs," which are turned out by thousands in the Ardennes, are drilled by machinery, and so carelessly that most of the holes are not large enough to hold the silk tufts, so that the workers, to avoid losing time in mounting the brushes, have to begin by driving a stiletto into each of the 360 holes to enlarge them! "We do them," they say, "as we walk about at recreation;

we finish a wooden back each time we go out." A young blind nun works at the bench in the middle of the room; she is alert and cheerful, remarkably persevering and dexterous. This is the forewoman, Sister Marie-Louise. The new apprentices are constantly appealing to her. "Sister Marie-Louise, my thread is broken, what am I to do? I have no more fibre. I've lost my place." And the little Sister, who keeps the most advanced girls nearest her, leaves her work to go and help the beginner and start her again. Often she does not wait to be called, but walks about among the women, feeling the brushes to see if the work is compact and the bristles quite even and neatly clipped. Sister Marie-Louise was the first blind apprentice sent by the Valentin Haüy Association to the St Paul's work-room when first it opened: it was a lucky choice, as she quickly became an expert. After spending some time in a work-room close to a large brush factory in the Oise department, she felt a vocation to the religious life, and entered St Paul's, where she became in time a professed nun, and now teaches the new recruits what she was so glad to learn herself. She is just suited to her post, as she has not only technical ability but understands explaining and demonstrating in the special way understood and preferred by the blind. Then, too, Sister Marie-Louise knows by experience the sadness and discouragement which assail and threaten to overwhelm young girls of twenty who have lost their sight. She also remembers how dear Sister Mary Magdalene treated the poor afflicted souls; she soothes, without ever wounding or slighting them. It is quite as important as teaching brush-making, to instil that strength and moral vigour which give the wish to work with determination

and perseverance. On Sundays and holidays the apprentices are her scholars, and Sister Marie-Louise teaches them reading and writing, having herself learnt the Braille characters at the age of twenty.

The raw materials and completed articles are kept in two tiny rooms, one of which is little more than a covered way. Every corner is utilized, the space is so small that even the window-sills are full of brushes, in every direction are suspended racks full of brushes and brooms, they even hang from the ceiling. Large pegs are screwed behind the doors to hold all the string collected in the house and carefully untied for use; during the ten years that brushes have been sold at St Paul's not an inch of string has ever been bought to tie up parcels; the paper used for wrapping them up is also collected from all sources, and even these small economies are of use. Sister Mary of Carmel selects a broom which she shows us with great pride: it is a new model, invented in the work-room, and known as the "fin-de-siècle." The idea is ingenious: the wooden back of the broom is edged with two rows of holes filled with wool, making a kind of fluffy pad to protect the furniture or walls of grand houses; it gives the brooms a "fin-de-siècle cachet," say the brush-making nuns, the epithet sounding quaintly on their tongues. I need hardly inform my readers that the scraps from the knitting room are used for this purpose. In a corner stands a table covered with scraps carefully collected from the floor. These will be carefully sorted according to size, and from the tumbled heap some ounces of pure silk extracted. The raw material is very expensive, silk for clothes and hat-brushes costing as much as 60 frs per kilogramme. This initial expenditure, the

necessary tools, the veneering and polishing, etc all cut down the profits of brush-making. Unfortunately in the sale of ordinary brushes the hand labour is only valued at two-tenths of the profit; that is to say, on a brush costing 3 frs (2s. 4d.) a deduction of 2.40 frs (1s. 10d.) for raw material, veneering, etc., leaves, at the outside, 50 centimes (5d.) as the worker's profit. This means that a great deal of capital is required in this industry, and that to ensure a wage to the worker of 400 francs (£16) a year, there must be a sale of 4,000 francs'-worth (£160) of brushes. Brush-making, of course, brings in more than knitting; the former industry is very simple and needs but short apprenticeship, which, alas! is obliged to be the case with any manual trades that the blind can learn. Because it is easy to learn, it is much followed in prisons and in those parts of the country where women and girls want additional work during the winter, and will accept nominal pay. This still further lowers the blind worker's profits.

A factory or country worker only gets 40 or 50 centimes (4d. or 5d.) for every thousand holes filled with bristle; they can fill 300 to 400 holes an hour, i.e., 3,000 to 4,000 in a ten-hours' day, which leaves 1.50 francs (1s. 3d.) for the worker. But the blind brush-maker generally works slower, and thinks herself lucky if she can fill 1,500 to 2,000 holes and get 75 centimes (7½d.) to 1 franc (10d.) a day; many cannot get through more than 1,000 holes. The poor women's dependable earnings can easily be calculated, if we remember the Sundays, holidays, illnesses or accidental causes that suspend or delay work, not to speak of change of patterns, time wasted in waiting for orders, or for the raw

material to arrive, the inevitable fluctuations of trade and intervals of stock-taking.

When work is done for a customer without any middleman, personal labour becomes more profitable, and often brings in 1 fr. (10d.) to 1.50 frs (1s. 3d.) per thousand holes. Thus my readers will gather how much good they can do without spending a halfpenny extra by simply giving their custom to the blind. Recently the public was deeply moved by the hidden sufferings brought to light by an inquiry into the condition of Viennese workwomen, made in March, 1896. It was proved that most of the seamstresses only made 1.60 frs (1s. 4d.) a day, by working twelve, thirteen or fourteen hours, with a regularly recurring slack season of five or six months in the year. How could these poor wretches live? The inquiry gave a terrible answer. Well, does it seem reasonable to expect a blind woman, who can only work at half the speed of another, and can only be trained to certain depreciated trades (depreciated because they are easily learnt and mostly followed by prisoners) to keep herself entirely by manual labour? (Of course I am not alluding to those who keep shops.) I must repeat that I do not understand how people can reproach Blind Schools in France with making a special effort to train girls as organists and teachers of music, whenever feasible.

To resume: the acquisition of regular customers and the loss of profit are a continual anxiety. So as to sell direct to the buyers without the intervention of a middleman, the energetic Sister Mary Magdalene, accompanied by her lieutenant, Sister Mary of Carmel, used constantly to make the round of convents, religious institutions and the

sacristies of Parisian churches, where, samples in hand, they begged for orders. This is hard work, and more often meets with rebuffs than encouragement; however, brooms and brushes are always and everywhere wanted, which is more than can be said for woollen shawls easily knitted at home; and with patience and perseverance regular customers for the brushes can be secured. The "Bazar de la Charité," which is never mentioned at St Paul's save with bated breath, had been an annual source of important and increasing profit. When talking to Sister Mary of Carmel about her dear Sister Mary Magdalene, I learned a touchingly simple detail of her life: "She was always thinking of others," said the surviving nun, "and sometimes on Sundays she would say, 'Let us put down all the suggestions and information we get about the work, so that if we have to leave it, others may not have the difficulties we had in the beginning.'" This struck me as a triumph of the true religious spirit; these two nuns who had worked their hardest to start the workshop with its apprentices, customers and whole organism, were ready at their superior's slightest hint, and without explanation or delay, to leave the work which they loved as people love their hardest-won triumphs; and only one thing preoccupied them—the smoothing of the way for their successors. With such instruments at her command surely a superior can move mountains!

ℂ. VII. The Printing of the "White Books"

BOOKS for the blind are strange and abnormal-looking. One thinks of volumes as compact objects, heavy in proportion to their size, and whether containing print, manuscript, text, illustration, music or figures, they are impossible to conceive as blank paper. But we must now make acquaintance with white pages, covered with round blisters or raised strokes: these excrescences run like an eruption over the surface, distend the volume, and make it heavy, large and cumbersome. Everything is very clean in printing for the blind; a great deal of water but not a drop of ink is used; there seems something mysterious in, so to speak, incorporating the vivid thoughts of Bossuet, Corneille, Bach or Schumann in these great pages which remain as white after anything is committed to them as before.

Since 1786, when the first book in relief was printed by Valentin Haüy, numerous modifications have been introduced which it is not necessary to describe here; the books of Valentin Haüy and his imitators are printed in raised letters of the ordinary Roman type. Repeated attempts have been made at forming letters which should be easily and quickly felt, without taking up too much room, a result very difficult to obtain. Owing to the rather complicated shapes of Latin letters and Arabian figures, they must be fairly large to be perceptible to the touch. But then these characters may extend beyond the acutely sensitive part of the finger

tip, which in women and children is rather limited. In this case there must be constant stroking and fumbling about the letters, rendering reading very slow. The characters are only recognized with ease when isolated, and this means that to contain a reasonable quantity of matter a book must be enormous. On the other hand, if the characters be reduced till they can be completely covered by the "field of vision" at the finger tips, simple letters like i, o, u, l, v, will stand out, but complicated shapes like e, f, g, etc., will be confusing and clumsy to the touch; they have too many small lines, and the principal strokes are too often looped back to lend themselves to bold relief. The finger cannot slip quickly enough from one letter to another, and reading, unless by an exceptional scholar, is very slow. Finally, after many experiments, and much testing and rejecting of different methods in Europe and America, the cypher alphabet invented by the blind Louis Braille was almost universally adopted. It consists, as I have explained before, in a combination of six raised dots.

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All Braille characters, whether written or printed, are alike; in print they are firmer and less liable to get dented.

The first Braille book was printed in 1829, at the Royal Institute for the youthful Blind in Paris; and in 1864 the Abbé Juge started the Blind Nuns' printing department. At first it was only used to provide the community with books of devotion, and the children with Lives of the Saints, grammars and arithmetic books; only one or two of the blind nuns

worked at the printing, which was carried on in a limited space and with rudimentary materials. It has gradually grown, till it is one of the most important departments in the house. Nine blind women, including five nuns, are constantly at work, under the direction of Sister Mary Xavier, a very intelligent and enterprising little blind woman, who came to the convent in 1866, when the printing was in its infancy, and became an invaluable helper to the Abbé Juge and the Valentin Haüy Association, which has done so much for blind printing. Skilful and bold in the best sense of the word, Sister Mary Xavier set her blind helpers to stereotyping and "lifting," hitherto considered impossible without sight. This proves once more how rash it is to limit the powers of the blind. Her best pupil, Sister Mary Lucy, is now head assistant, and takes sole charge of one department. After several changes, the printing establishment was finally located in two large ground-floor rooms. I believe Sister Mary Xavier half regrets the miniature printing department of 1866, where everything and every one was crowded up together. But she was young then and had just entered religious life; each experiment and test was a novelty, and human beings are so made that the glamour of first experiment can never return when things are launched and running smoothly. Great activity reigns in the "White Book" factory. On busy days when proofs are wanted in a hurry, as many as twelve blind or semi-blind women are moving about the room, but all is perfectly arranged, and each worker thoroughly understands where she has to go, and what she has to do. They walk about carrying paper and heavy "formes" on wooden trays which

rest on their chests and outstretched arms; they pass each other again and again, without the slightest confusion, hesitation or accident. "It is years since a forme was dropped," says Sister Mary Lucy; "we may say that such a thing never happens."

To attain these results the greatest order and regularity are necessary; every object must be returned to the exact spot it was taken from, and each person must always go in the same direction to perform the same action; this, of course, applies to any complex and combined labour. When hundreds and thousands of sheets have to go to press (on an average St Paul's prints six hundred thousand pages a year) it is of importance that no useless or aimless movements should be made, and that each one should work unimpeded. All is arranged to this end, and the human machinery works with all the precision of steel and the suppleness of india-rubber.

Composition and printing are two perfectly distinct departments of labour: the first is, to a certain extent, intellectual, the second, purely mechanical. Composing is done in two ways: typographically, by movable letters taken one by one from "cases," and arranged first in lines, and then in pages and "formes"; or by reproducing the characters, one by one, on double sheets of zinc or copper, placed on a Braille tablet made of steel for this special purpose. Each dot is made by hammering on a steel punch; the page thus written, first on the right side and then on the reverse, is withdrawn from the tablet and unfolded like an oyster-shell, the zinc forming a kind of hinge. After being carefully checked and corrected the stereotype or plate is ready for the impression; nothing now remains

but to introduce the sheet of paper between the two halves of the zinc oyster-shell, and pass it under the press, which completes the printing. Owing to want of space the stereotyping workshop is in a kind of adjoining passage. "Space is always rare in Paris," and it has to take in five blind nuns. There is always a great deal of work on hand; the "Revue Braille"* and the "Louis Braille" are printed in the convent, as well as numerous devotional, literary and musical works, which are in constant demand. The stereotypes of those which have been finally revised are of permanent value. Stereotyping has many advantages over typography proper: it saves time and space, as the characters can be printed on both sides,† and very small quantities of matter can be printed, as the stereotypes are indestructible and can be used at any time. Consequently, it is not necessary to overload shops with numberless copies of the same work, a cumbersome and expensive procedure which locks up the capital expended on paper and binding. But stereotyping requires great dexterity and care in the operator, as corrections are difficult and sometimes impossible to make. Carelessness or the omission of a phrase, line or letter may necessitate remaking the whole stereotype or four pages. The left side of the printing room is taken up with all that concerns typographic composition, the right with the materials for printing: down the centre a large space is kept vacant for the "lifters," "wetters," "stretchers," etc., to come

* The "Louis Braille," a monthly review, gives special instruction and information to the blind, which they cannot otherwise obtain. The "Revue Braille" is a weekly publication, and keeps them in touch with literary, scientific, musical and political subjects; these two papers are issued by the Valentin Haüy Association for the welfare of the blind.

† Since this was written it has been found possible to type on both sides of the paper, and the Valentine Haüy Association will shortly introduce this improvement at St Paul's.

and go: overhead is a network of wires of which I will explain the use presently. In order thoroughly to understand the working of this department, we will watch the evolution of a literary or musical work, such as a conference by Père Monsabré, or a suite by Grieg, hitherto unpublished in Braille. First of all the text is handed over to a little half-blind novice, who can read or manage to make out fair-sized printed characters, by holding them close to her poor dim eye. Two novices are thus employed, Sister J. copies words, and Sister P. music, the latter requiring wider accomplishments; one can see with her left eye and the other with her right, but both together do not equal an ordinary pair of eyes. These cases of abnormal vision are very peculiar. One woman will be able to read even small print if held close enough, yet cannot help knocking against people as they pass her on the pavement or tell the difference between a man on horseback and a furniture van. Another can find her way perfectly along a crowded thoroughfare, but can only read letters of two centimetres in size; one can see as well by artificial light as by daylight, another becomes totally blind when lights are lit. Be this as it may, all these strange limitations of sight are utilized by the blind nuns of St Paul, and with discrimination they can be of real uses. When Père Monsabré's conference or Grieg's "Cantilena" has been written in Braille and carefully corrected, the copy is passed on to one or more compositors, according to the amount of work on hand and the workers available. The "cases" lie on large tables, first those for the words, and farther off those for the music; between the two is a little "case" for Sister Mary Lucy, who directs

this branch. She corrects, checks and finishes the setting-up in the same way that Sister Mary Xavier overlooks all the stereotyping. The blind compositor puts the Braille copy in the case, reading with her left hand. With her right she looks for the letters (or, to put it correctly, finds them unerringly) in the letter-box of the case, and puts them on a sort of wooden palette about the size of a page, with a raised edge on three of its sides. The letters are in lead alloy, and consequently rather heavy, and are shaped like small, thick dominoes, having the Braille characters at one extremity.

They are placed upright side by side on the palette, resting against the left and top edges; the first row is unstable, but when two or three have been set up, they form a solid mass, framed on three sides in wood, and firmly supported underneath by a leaden block. The palette, thus filled, can be carried to the "unfinished-shelf," and thence to the correcting table, where, having been duly corrected, checked, etc., it is tied tightly across three times with strong cord, and becomes the "forme" ready for printing. But first a proof has to be made, which a very careful blind woman, assisted by one who can still see a little, compares with the original black and white text. Music is treated in the same way as words, but with even more care and attention in the correction, as a fault is so easily made in the musical text. The corrector must understand the pages before her as a whole, with the musical scheme and harmonies, to be able to check what looks doubtful. The blind nuns have the reputation of turning out very correct proofs, and they make a great point of deserving it.

As I have explained before, all that appertains

to the letterpress is kept on the right side of the printing-room. These are, a fountain with a large and very shallow zinc trough in which to plunge the sheets of paper; a marble table with a drain; the great roller-press for the typed proofs, which are done in sheets of eight in octavo or four quarto pages; a little hand roller-press, easily turned, for the stereotyped proofs which are on small sheets of two in octavo or one quarto page; and lastly, cupboards full of paper in piles eighteen feet high, corresponding to those on the left, which contain the composed pages ready to put on the formes, or the formes themselves before they are put under the press. Proofs in relief require very thick cartridge or drawing paper, which must be damp, but not dripping, and therefore is wetted overnight. Each sheet is soaked separately in the trough of water until completely immersed; then they are put one over the other on the marble table, the last being covered with india-rubber. A heavy weight is then placed over all, and for four and twenty hours the paper absorbs the moisture and allows the superfluous fluid to drip off. When the time has come for printing, and the "formes" are in the "bed" of the press, a sheet is taken from the table and placed on the "formes," and a "reeler" winds the press. Printing in relief requires also slow winding, a certain time must elapse before the paper is well moulded on to the characters, and takes their shape; the fibres of the paper must adapt themselves to ridges and lines, and this is a sensibly slower process than simply stamping ink or colour on the surface. Next the "lifter" very dexterously and quickly removes the printed sheet, lays it on a cardboard tray beside

the press, and taking a fresh sheet, fixes it over the "formes," flattens the india-rubber, which is used to support the relief, and the press starts again. The "lifter's" work is very delicate, as great dexterity is required in handling, without tearing, the large sheets of paper measuring 65 by 50 centimetres, particularly after the printing, when they are apt to stick to the projecting characters. One hundred sheets an hour is an average record.

The "dryer" then takes the cardboard tray containing twenty or thirty sheets, and mounts a short pair of steps which end in a small table intended to hold the tray of paper to be dried. She then carefully lifts the sheets separately, for they are easily torn or defaced, and stretches them on the galvanized wires, in due rotation, as linen is hung up to dry, but with infinitely more care. A man with eyesight would not proceed in the same way; instead of the steps he would use a "peel," that is to say, a long stick in the shape of a T. The sheet to be dried would be hung crosswise over the horizontal piece of wood, and placed on the wire next to the one last finished. His sight would allow of his working from a distance, but touch necessitates proximity, hence the difference between blind and other labour. I have already mentioned the small press, which only takes in sheets of 33 by 25 centimetres; it is much easier to wind, and is kept for small stereotypes. Here the "lifter" is able to sit down to her work, which is not so difficult as typing. She has a pile of wet sheets beside her, and taking up one, she places it between the two halves of the stereotype, and while the press is turning, she takes the paper out of the preceding stereotype, replaces it by a fresh sheet, and lays it under the

press in its turn. Pages one, two, seven, eight of the upper stereotype are printed alternately with pages three, four, five, six of the under. Good "lifters" and "reelers" can manage 200 sheets an hour.

A great sense of peace reigns over the busy scene. We are in June, the windows looking on the garden are wide open, the warm, lime-scented air pours in, compositors and correctors as they work hear the birds sing in the trees of Chateaubriand's park; they listen, we are sure, but they hear still more clearly the song which is for ever rising in their own hearts to the Beloved, always present, and always filling the soul of His servants, His chosen, His spouses. Here are no vague heart-sinkings and wistful day-dreams; He for whom they work, to whom they offer each letter, each turn of the wheel, each sheet, will not fail them nor break His promises. Work begun sometimes languidly and wearily soon becomes a source of happiness; instead of bitterness and disappointment at the end of the task, joy, light-heartedness and peace await them, and so the hours pass serenely on. Silence falls over the little home of the great "White Books"; the presses no longer turn, the steps of the stretchers have ceased, hushed is the perpetual hammering of the stereotypers and the smooth, quick tap of the characters dropping back into the cases, like the first drops of a thunder shower on parched ground. The bell has rung for the night Office, and with the sound the room has become empty and silent. That spontaneous obedience which leaves a wheel half turned, a word half finished is the groundwork of the graceful legend so often repeated in convents, of the beautifull angel who finished in gold letters the word left

blank for love of the Holy Rule. Chairs, punches, hammers, formes are all in their appointed places within reach of the blind workers who will find them next day without hesitation, when they come back to work till the bell stops them once more. The great dotted sheets wave on their wires in the rising breeze, their substance is gradually hardening and incorporating the great thoughts which blind fingers have helped to transmit to the brains of the sightless.

Strange and wonderful anomaly! Weak man, so powerless to prolong for a few seconds the fleeting spell of his happiness while he loves and is loved again—man who dares hardly enjoy anything to the full, lest his capacity become exhausted—this very creature can fix and transmit down the centuries that most intangible and fugitive of all things—a thought! For interminable ages this thought will strengthen or disturb the souls of others, it may bring them life, enthusiasm or despair. This is the weight of responsibility which the author must accept with fame. To-morrow the leaves will be dry; charged with intellectual or spiritual savour, they will be folded, sorted, bound, and at last, in great volumes they will be stored in the huge pigeon-holes which reach to the ceiling of that adjoining room where we lately heard the hammers and punches of the stereotypers at work. The books are carefully wrapped in old newspapers given to the community—we know that nothing is wasted at St Paul's—and, well-preserved from dust, they await the time when they will be dispatched to every part of France and the four quarters of the globe. Here are boxes addressed to Toulouse, Nancy, Lyons, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Boston, Rio-Janeiro, each with its Braille label, for blind hands undertake everything per-

taining to libraries as well as printing. The Superior or Novice-Mistress hands in letters, almost always written in Braille, asking for books; the blind women look them out, and get together classical works, books of devotion, stories, music for piano, organ or voice, and technical books. They weigh the parcels on scales from the brush-room; the hand can judge as well as the eye which half of the scales is the heavier, and Sister Mary Xavier does not need sight any more than does the practised tradesman to tell whether the weight she is lifting be labelled 10, 100, or 1,000 grammes; the shape and size of the box and the pigeon-hole she took it from are sufficient indications.

As I have said before, everything is utilized in this home of order and economy; even an odd-shaped piece of metal which the Sister tells us was found among some tools belonging to the Father Founder. "We use it to weigh the packages," she tells us, "we know it weighs 4,525 grammes, and by adding 75 grammes, we get the kilogramme, which is missing in our set of weights." The paper used to wrap up the books comes with the sheets for printing; it is carefully kept, as well as the string which I mentioned earlier. When the package is ready, the address is put on by a novice who can see—she also fills up the invoice—and then the "white books" leave the blessed house where they have been manufactured by the blind, and go forth to the rest of the blind world, carrying their message of knowledge and love, and rousing enthusiasm for science, art and the things of God.

The written thought, the book, may have a great and far-reaching influence over a blind person's soul. "I fear the man of one book," says an ancient

writer; that is to say, the man who reads little but well, who reads attentively and deeply, saturating his mind with the matter before him. This is exactly the blind man's attitude to the "white books"; he has not many at his disposal, for they are expensive and cumbrous; he reads slowly and constantly goes over the same ground. With his few distractions he can feed on some striking thought for days or weeks. What a field for an author's influence! People have been known to say, "The blind do not require scientific or purely literary works, because their reading must necessarily be so limited. It is more practical for them to depend on kindness or the paid services of a reader." This is a strangely superficial idea, but as the opinion has been expressed, I will answer it. First of all, thanks to circulating libraries,* a great number of books come into blind hands. At no very distant date some 2,000 works, or about 10,000 volumes will be at the disposition of the blind population of France, and this is no trifling collection; but if it had to be restricted to a few dozen really great works of antiquity and modern times, even that would mean that the blind could read and re-read them at any moment, according to their general wishes and needs. Lacordaire said of General Drouot: "A really great work was a living being to him, a friend

*The Valentin Haüy Association keeps up the "Braille Library" which is open on Wednesdays from two to five at 31 Avenue de Breteuil, Paris. It contains more than 7,000 volumes in raised characters. Most of these are in manuscript, as the Braille books are expensive to print, the contents of a 3.50 frs (2s. 11d.) volume requiring twelve volumes in octavo at 3 frs (2s. 6d.) each, or 36 frs (£1 8s. 10d.) in all. Hence it is not possible to publish for the blind any but absolutely necessary books, such as educational works or prayer books; the price of merely useful or agreeable books would be prohibitive in most cases, blindness being most prevalent among the poorer classes. That is the reason that many ladies living in the world have learned the Braille characters, so as to copy useful and amusing books for the blind, which are to be had in librairies all over France.

whom every evening he admitted to his heart of hearts. To think his own thoughts as he read a real book, to take it up and lay it down while he absorbed and retained its very perfume, was to him, as to all who understand this kind of naïve sensuousness, the purest of pleasures. Time flies as we blend our thoughts with the aspiring thoughts of another, tears fill our eyes, and we thank God for His goodness in allowing fleeting human thoughts to live for ever with the life of truth." If this be, as it is, true of the contact of one human intelligence with another, what shall we say of sacred books and of the best among devotional ones? "The Imitation," "The Introduction to a Devout Life," "Meditations on the Gospels," "The Life of Saint Theresa," these, next to the Holy Scriptures, are the books which we can best enjoy alone. The soul of the blind man, like that of his happier brothers, is helped and strengthened in his intercourse with almighty God by attentive and serious reading, a very different thing from passive listening to another's voice. Whether we be absorbed or weary, enthusiastic or discouraged, it is still a comfort to take up the beloved book and find the thought which interprets our own; we feed on it and quench our thirst in the solitude of our own hearts.

Then there are those among the blind who are deaf also; darkness to them brought silence with it, they can only be addressed by artificial means, and some cannot be made to hear in any way. This was the case with a holy religious, Fr Joseph-Célestin, a Capuchin of Chambéry, who lost his sight and hearing when a missionary in the Seychelles. He writes: "Since my return [from Lourdes] I did not cease invoking the Immaculate Virgin. Last year,

as I could not go back on the anniversary of my pilgrimage, I said to her: 'Will you not grant me anything? I can no longer bear my walled-in prison!' That very evening one of our fathers from Paris sent me a sheet of Braille alphabet. The Superior said to me: 'This method seems very difficult, try if it can be of any use to you. I will send for one of our fathers from the convent at Thonon to accompany you to Lausanne.' I felt this was the grace I had prayed for in the morning. Despite my fifty years and bad memory I devoured the alphabet in a few hours. . . . How can I express my joy at being able to read and write in Braille? My life is completely changed; I have books, every Sunday I get the pleasant distraction of 'The Braille Review,' I begin to write and receive letters, I forget my affliction, and live again. The terrible isolation, the long, mournful nights, the death-like silence of the grave, are over, and instead have come resurrection, the return to life, light, liberty and intelligence! The captive sees his fetters fall to the ground! Blessed be God for the great mercy He has shown me; I unite my gratitude with that of all the blind, to thank Him for inspiring Louis Braille with such a method. Now I no longer feel blind, I have friends close by, day and night. I live in the most complete silence, and only feel the rays of the sun I cannot see. This would be the most terrible loneliness were it not sweetened by the thoughts of God and the comfort I get from the Braille. Since I can work, my life is brighter, and I almost begin to think myself lucky." These are some of the marvels brought about by the "White Books."

Of all the forms of encouragement which help us to pass certain stages of our life, is any higher than

a book by a beloved author, consulted as a friend? Everything has a different aspect and meaning; trials and difficulties diminish, at any rate for the moment. Doubtless they do not really change, but their disturbing influence is lessened, and that is a great step towards surmounting them. It is of manifest importance to give the blind as much of such comfort as possible. It is as great a mistake to think that people can live on material necessities only, as it is to imagine that spiritual needs enable us to ignore the wants of the body. It is dangerous to forget that a man is not a being of one substance, and that soul and body react on each other; if peace and equilibrium are to be maintained, the double nature of man must be provided for. Even for those destined to humble walks of life, it is important that their ideas should be trained, for the mind has a great deal to do with the way material needs are supplied. The Valentin Haüy Association, which largely employs the Blind Nuns' Printing Establishment, is strongly imbued with these views; knowing what hope and energy mean to the blind, whose life is generally hard and lonely, the Association endeavours to supply them, through books and periodicals, with a world of wholesome, generous and vigorous ideas. That is why, at the risk of appearing utopian, the Association constantly publishes books and periodicals, and multiplies circulating libraries in every direction with as much energy as it strives to find means of livelihood for the blind. The Community of Saint Paul is an invaluable auxiliary to the Valentin Haüy Association, which thus has a body of intelligent and devoted helpers working for the same interest. In return the work given out is fairly remunerative to

the convent. In the little printing-room of the "White Books" every one works in the dark; they do not stop when, at the close of the short winter's day, night falls long before the bell has rung for silence; for light and darkness are all one to them. The little workshop, wrapped in twilight, is a shining generator of light to those who have to walk through life with no rays but from the intellect. Let us shed light on them abundantly, that they too may have their share of joy.

BOOK III. The Nuns

ℭ I. Religious Vocation

PEOPLE of superficial views generally have answers as prompt as they are unsatisfactory to all questions; no psychological problems exist for them long enough to dwell in their mind or to determine their opinion. If religious vocation be under discussion, they will say, "Convents are peopled with women physically deformed, weak in intellect, disappointed in love, or soured by trouble." But this summary answer explains nothing, for every day convents open their doors to women who are as charming in mind as in body, absolutely sane, and some of them at the earliest dawn of womanhood. How do such opinions arise? It would seem that life, by some mirage, only shows such objectors her happy side; they glance at the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and without further reflection condemn them as against nature; forgetting, or having never understood, that such sacrifices bring down magnificent compensation, offered as they are to no abstract idea, but to a real Being, the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, beloved and served as God and Man. It is quite true that religious vows, founded on those evangelical counsels which were addressed to individuals and not to mankind as a whole, are not within the attainment of all; but this does not make them "against nature," but only above and beyond ordinary human nature, which is by no means the same thing.* It follows

* On such subjects it is essential to define the exact sense in which words are employed. If by "nature" we understand merely "instinct," then it is true that the vows of religion are diametrically opposed to it. But if we take

that, if these views upset and destroyed moral equilibrium, if they were diametrically opposed to the basis of human nature, they would expose mankind to such moral tortures that only a miracle could render them bearable. This I do not believe to be the case. The kind of life resulting from such conceptions is certainly beyond most human inclination, but it is not really in contradiction with man's nature; for such an existence vocation is of course a necessity, but what can we really achieve in life without a special vocation? We will now pause and consider what constitutes religious vocation, and what are the feelings which inspire it.*

the word in its fuller, higher sense, as constituting the entire man, soul as well as body, then his human side is not distorted and baulked, but idealized and rendered supernatural. Are we not conscious of varied degrees of power within ourselves? To say that we act "against nature" when we start our lives on a higher plane, is equivalent to saying that it is "against nature" to control our physical instincts by our reason, and that the man who does so govern them is in every instance worse off than his brother who follows them without restraint. Perhaps I shall better express my meaning by summing it up: nothing which helps the soul to rise can be "against nature," because the tendency of human beings is always to aspire, and the rallying cry of "Excelsior!" is not and never can be unnatural. I am glad to be able to call St Thomas to witness this (commentary by Professor Roure): "'When several elements,' says the Saint, 'go to make up a whole, it will happen that one thing will suit one element in particular, and another will blend with the whole, whence it follows that, though it be natural for concupiscence to seek sensible delectation, if this appetite be considered as human, it becomes natural for it to seek its object under the control of reason. Thus the blind impulse which would carry it to its object is not naturally a human one, and it would be more correct to say that from this point of view it is against human nature.'" It is good and right for man to enjoy beautiful sounds and colours, because it is natural; but sensuousness, which is the moving power in animals, must be subordinate to the empire of reason in man, the thinking being. Consequently, every impulse of sense uncontrolled or undominated by reason is really 'against nature,' and is a disorder, an infraction of rule, and a moral defection. It is our business to subordinate the inferior to the superior faculties. But if Christianity opposes nature, it is not to destroy, but to elevate it and bring it within due bounds. In spite of all that has been said to the contrary, Christianity does not act 'against nature,' but perfects our humanity. To this the doctrines tend, which preach renunciation, abnegation, or even an effort in these directions, and they all teach the same lesson. But, for the sake of clearness and simplicity, traditional religious morality lays its foundations and restrictions, not in our human nature which is on probation, but in the spiritual domain, and if human nature would conform to these rules it would be perfect."—Lucien Roure, S.J., "Contemporary Views on Morals."

*Perhaps it will be necessary to state at the beginning (although I repeat it often as I go on) that the "efficient" cause of religious vocation, the

We often come across young girls who, quite outside mysticism, have a natural shrinking from marriage. With some it may come from a dread of the unknown, or from repugnance; with others it may merely imply avoidance of cares and a wish for independence. Hence celibacy may be the normal condition for some individuals. People quote Genesis: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself"; and "Man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh." Yes, God destined man and woman for each other, and that united life would have been as easy as everything else if creation had obeyed the Divine plan. But, since the Fall, with its resulting physical and moral calamities, another fiat has gone forth. "I will multiply thy sorrows and thy conceptions; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee." The union of sexes and life in common entail special sacrifices upon women; marriage requires a special vocation as a development of human life.* But, say the objectors, you forget love and the joy

motive power and mainstay of the three vows, is incontestibly the love of God and an intense devotion to the Person of our Saviour Jesus Christ. I shall return to this statement several times, but perhaps it is advisable to start by putting it forcibly, in order that my readers may follow me in my subsequent analysis. In these days of hurry people pass lightly over the most important considerations. Certain persons are accustomed to class religious vocation among the peculiarities and anomalies of the human mind, and married life as a normal condition calling for no special vocation. Such persons may not pay much attention to what I write, and may imagine, quite wrongly, that I consider vocation as an ordinary and simple matter, shorn of anything supernatural. No, it is manifest that the three vows impose very real sacrifices, but not, correctly speaking, "unnatural" or unreasonable ones. That is all I wish to prove. And further, I would beg the reader who has followed me so far, to suspend his judgement until he has read the chapter on "Religious Life," which is practically the sequel to this. Finally I, as a humble layman, must disavow any presumptuous attempt on my own part to make these two chapters into a theological and ascetic treatise on the subject.

*Some catechisms (Couturier, Nantes, Comminges and Rodez) contain advice upon marriage, celibacy and vocations.

of living with the beloved! Yes, at the bottom of every human heart is the longing to be always near some one who belongs to you, and to whom you have given yourself, completing each other and each becoming the other's true helpmate. "We have been together for five days," writes Ozanam; "peace and serenity fill that heart which you remember was always seeking causes for suffering! I let myself be happy—I count neither hours nor days. Time is nothing to me. What matters the future? Happiness is here and now. Eternity is with us. . . . I understand heaven. Every day I find fresh qualities in my wife, and my debt to Providence grows. . . . There is more than a contract in marriage; above all there is sacrifice, a double sacrifice; the woman gives up what God has given her and she can never know again: her mother's care, her first freshness, perhaps her health, and that power of loving which women know but once; the man in his turn sacrifices the liberty of youth, those incomparable years for ever past, the strength of devotion to one woman which only exists in youth, and the efforts of first love to make her life brilliant and happy. Man can do this but once, between the ages of twenty and thirty, a little earlier or later, perhaps never! . . . That is why I call Christian marriage a double sacrifice; it is like a symbol of two cups: one contains virtue, modesty and innocence; the other first love, devotion and the immortal dedication of the man to that weaker creature he has known since yesterday and will gladly spend his life with; these cups must be full, if the union is to be holy and blessed by heaven."

But love does not always precede marriage; many unions are "arranged" and planned by pru-

dent friends because of their suitability. Love is left out, but will come later. Such arrangements are wise and admirable, as are all sincere hopes, but supposing love does not follow? What happens when even very real and pure love is over? Wise, prudent people, you who consider the religious life as an abnormal state, and marriage as the natural development of life calling for no special vocation, but coming as growth comes, I suppose you will not deny that the glamour of love may disappear? You know this, perhaps have experienced it in your own lives. After a few months, or years, if you will, of long, sweet companionship, a book becomes first pleasant and then necessary: "It is so charming to read together," that is, to interpose another's thoughts between us. "It is so delightful to work together," that is, to occupy ourselves. Later, the presence of children is craved for, and if this be denied, the society of friends is sought from time to time, then oftener, and at last every day. Finally, the most commonplace visitor will be welcome, if only to interrupt the tête-à-tête. Is not this satiety and disillusionment? Do you think that ardent, intense love still lives in such a union, with its transfiguring charm? Our minds and, alas, our hearts are like deceptive modern apartments—they seem vast and spacious as we sit in the drawing-room, but when we have been all over them, and become intimate enough to open all the doors, the glamour vanishes! We perceive that the rooms are few and small, they can all be explored in no time, and what looked like a charming vista from where we sat is enclosed between two doors. We have seen everything. We can no longer amuse ourselves with imagining all sorts of wonders beyond our ken.

Still, we are possessed with the wish to know more and penetrate still farther; we always imagine that we shall be happier when we have said everything and had everything said to us in return, forgetting that the charm lay in what was not said at all. Is not our great disease the craving to dissect what we love, and the inability to love when we have done so? We love the ideal which we make ourselves. This contradiction, which is a constant grief, only ceases with regard to God; the better we know Him, the deeper grows our love. He is infinite Perfection, and we can always find something more in him to know and to love. As for us poor mortals, if we wish our houses to remain attractive, we had better neither exhibit nor explore them too completely. If we wish to retain charm and influence ourselves, let us refrain from saying or hearing everything. Or else let us be courageous and strive without ceasing to make ourselves greater and nobler, so that the more we are known the wider will be the untrodden field of our nature.

If progress and intellectual perfection* be the condition of constancy in the affections, how can love last in some marriages? Does it not disappear after a year or two? But the trials of marriage and life in common remain, with all the divergencies of character, ideas and feelings. Does not the help and advice we counted on for life fail us at the most critical moments, for the very reason that we look to the person who promised to be our helper and

* "How is it possible not to understand that even here on earth love, as well as science, consists in seeing the creature, not as it is, but as it might be? The poetry of love can see, behind the veil of the flesh, the idea of God in the soul, to which the whole being is attuned; and love is only blind, and creatures deceptive, when they fall short of the likeness to God in which He created them. As to those noble beings who aim at their true fulfilment in God, the love we give them is not blind, it is the only love which has eyes." —Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame."

adviser? We have to face our problems alone. Oh, if they dared speak, how many women, after ten or fifteen years of marriage, would confess that their children are much more to them than their husbands, who are often a source of grief or, at least, of trouble and perplexity to them! It is true that marriage must not be entered upon for selfish motives alone, the family has to be thought of, and the great law of humanity is "Grow and multiply"; we do not bring up our children for ourselves, and we must not seek in marriage the happiness of pleasure only (bonheur-jouissance). In spite of their disappointments many married people are where Providence evidently intended them to be; God intended them for a life of trial, and meant them to only know the joys of abnegation. To all this I heartily agree, but in the face of such reasoning, it must not be denied that marriage demands great sacrifices of women, and therefore needs a special vocation, or call, from God. Mgr Bougaud speaks with warmth and feeling of the powerlessness of human love to consolidate family ties without religion:

"As family life springs from human affection, nothing would seem easier than to create family happiness. And yet if you consult history or experience, you will see that it is not so. In a thing which seems so easy and so sweet, the human heart has failed signally. Man has made splendid efforts, he has had sublime impulses and moments, but he has failed. He has loved for a time, but what he could not compass was to love for long, or for ever, in the divine solitude of unity. He can say, 'I love you,' but has hardly ever been able to say, 'You only, and for ever.' This it is which has been perhaps

the darkest cloud over humanity. All our bitterest tears flow from this source. Man has long struggled with this conviction and refused to admit it; but he has had to yield to evidence. . . . That is one reason why love is so rare on earth; its very sublimity is its limit. Does any creature live, however marvellously endowed, who can nourish such a flame? . . . This is the real problem of marriage. Perhaps you think it hard to rein in the invading flow of passion; not so; the difficulty is to prevent it ebbing away. Love must be restrained, kept within insurmountable barriers, preserved chaste and pure; its purity will keep it more lasting, more sweet and more profound. But this is where, without the help of God, you are powerless. And what is a thousand times harder is to keep love ever growing and to feed an ever-spreading flame. . . . Religion brings the young man and the young girl to the foot of the altar; she teaches the young girl to say, 'O my God, I am young and beloved; but I know my nothingness, and that I am only a fragile flower incapable of keeping for ever the love that has been given me. O my God, open our souls to Love Eternal, and our eyes to Uncreated Beauty.' Then the scales fall from their eyes, and behind the mortal features soon to decay they see the real beauty of a soul redeemed by Jesus Christ, resting for a time on earth, and already bearing in its innermost core the great God who made it for Himself. Who shall say what food such thoughts give to these young hearts? Will they not be protected against those gross snares, where love expires that called itself eternal? Age may come with all its bodily changes, but the soul grows daily, its beauty shining more and more as it draws near to eternity."*

* Bougaud, "Le Christianisme et les Temps présents," vol. I.

To anyone who really reflects and endeavours to judge things for himself without the medium of conventional words, marriage must be admitted to require a serious and mature vocation. To love, still less to hope for love, is no substitute for such a vocation nor the proof of one; it may pass, but physical and moral sufferings remain. Thus it follows that there is more uncertainty on the threshold of marriage than on the eve of religious profession. Nothing is more solemn to the thinking man than the sight of a young girl about to launch out into the unknown. As we look at the bride—a queen to-day, a victim perhaps to be—can we forget that flowers, so lately full of scent and beauty, must wither and fall, and that the lovely little ephemera dies in giving birth? The happiness which we promise that dear child with so much assurance may have its flaws. She must give herself with all her heart, her youth, her beauty and her illusions; she must be pure, loving and prepared to sacrifice all to wifely duty. This is as it should be, but what is offered her in exchange? Jewels, dresses probably paid for out of her own dowry, a few passing compliments, a semblance of independence, a husband who is almost a stranger, and perhaps a long course of physical and moral suffering, which you sceptics who call the religious life "against nature" and marriage a perfectly simple and natural state would never have the courage to endure. "You who wept for your daughter as if she were dead and buried on the day she espoused our Lord, and refused the husband you had chosen for her, do you guess the secret thoughts of the woman who did marry him? Let me tell you what they were, for I have often heard them. 'If young girls under their mother's

wing knew what I know and realized what can be hidden in such men's natures, there would not be enough convents in the whole world for us to take refuge in from the possibility of such despair.' . . . Yes, we all know it! Thus speak hundreds of miseable women, drawn to irreparable sorrow by the adorable name of love and the sacred word 'home.'"* Even without reaching such extremities, many women are prevented by their husbands' characters and views from a real union of souls. They are only united in body, and only find support and advice on material subjects. In matters of the heart they are alone, and this in cases where the marriage began in what is called mutual attraction.

Of course we must not despise nor belittle any of God's gifts to man. Real love is a blessed and solemn thing, but in most cases only a passing episode in our existence, and when we are confronted with those who would make it the whole background of life, is it not wise to go a little below the surface, and remind them that love passes, and that it is dangerous to depend on it for all, since in old age the most devoted couples have only a feeble shadow of their past to remember? They still love each other, but with a difference. Love no longer transforms everything, veiling defects of character, softening friction, hiding intellectual shortcomings; now every drawback is seen and felt acutely, they bear with one another, perhaps willingly, but principally because they know that mutual concessions are due, because, in one word, it is their duty, and they have a true vocation for marriage. What is really against nature is a lonely life, especially for women, who require support and to feel affection

* Gratry, "Henry Perreyve."

around them. Women dread facing the difficulties of daily life alone; except in exceptional cases, they pine and dwindle in loneliness, or else give up all attempt at energy, and lapse into quiescence. In the convent the dread of growing old has lost its sting, and the haunting fear of dying alone, which marriage cannot always avert, is laid to rest. For life to be happy it must be fruitful. Human beings cannot find happiness in solitude and egoism; none of man's endowments are intended for himself alone, he must share and transmit all he has received, his gifts are a trust and not a possession. To accomplish his destiny and find true happiness he must give birth to something which proceeds from himself and will perpetuate him. But if the founding of a family be the ordinary and primitive means of transmitting our identity and our life, it is not the sole one. Only a superficial mind will fail to understand that virginity also may be fruitful; fruitful in example, in the training of souls, in self-abnegation and in complete devotion to the poor and miserable who have no natural protectors. Such devotion has, in a sense, the power of transmitting what is best in life and perpetuating our own individuality. And is there no fruitfulness in prayer? Nothing is so fruitful in its results, although it is a common error constantly to divide contemplation from action. Contemplative prayer acts, in a way, on God Himself, who is the Essence of Being. It is we who are usually too sluggish and material to understand these truths.

What is there so extraordinary in the vow of obedience? Are we not everywhere in the hands of others wiser than ourselves? Do not death and illness govern life, irrespective of our will? Is it not

a truism to repeat that happiness can never be found in licence and caprice? Indulging every passing whim does not necessarily make us any happier. Whatever happiness exists in life is to be found in the devotion of ourselves, our intelligence and our will to some thing, person or idea which we love better than ourselves, and which is stronger than our own will. The artist, the student, the man of action are certainly not free as long as they attempt to live a full and complete life and to realize and attain an ideal. They are forced to act, not on the caprice of the moment, but in arbitrary pursuit of their aim; the ideal they set before them of choice, becomes imperiously tyrannical. Even the mother of a family, if she intends to fulfil her mission, cannot always be a free agent between her husband and her children. She obeys no written rule, but is none the less obliged to consult the wishes of others before her own, and to conform her life to circumstances; it does not follow because her duties are not regulated by a previously arranged time-table, that her time is any the more her own. After all, is "choice" really so dear to the human mind?*

Many men choose professions and careers where their work is clearly defined, and does not call for too much risk, initiative or responsibility; in intellectual pursuits certain specific methods are followed to ensure success, but also to avoid the onus of selection. The great problem to conscientious

* If we sift certain sentiments and inclinations to their foundation, it will not be difficult to prove that, despite all said to the contrary, man dreads liberty. Do my readers remember the awful apostrophe which Dostoïevsky puts in the mouth of the Grand Inquisitor? He is addressing our Saviour, who has returned to earth and has been imprisoned in Seville by the Inquisition: "Thou seekest to wander through the world empty-handed, offering men a promise which their inborn infirmity and foolishness misunderstands, a fearful promise of freedom, for men have never found anything so intolerable as absolute liberty!"—Dostoïevsky, "Les Frères Karamazow."

natures is to know how far their obligations and their strength ought to carry them, and where their real duty lies. Have I done all I could and ought to have done? Have I given my all? These are haunting questions which the vow of obedience settles once and for all. Hence the vow is not so abnormal and contrary to nature as some people imagine. We do not allude to the "intellectuels" who profess to have explored the whole of life and found it empty. They are disgusted with everything and have lost their will power; but all sane and unprejudiced human beings know that if man has free will he is also hampered by circumstances and held back by conscience and considerations of duty; these must present themselves to him as limits, whatsoever be the standard he follows. Happiness does not consist in having no master: we are always the servants of some one or thing; but surely it is a joy to have chosen our Master willingly, with open eyes, and to serve Him with love. No one is so well protected from weariness and deception as a nun—God does not deceive, He is never weary, He never changes, and she has given herself to Him. She has tested her vocation, with the option of drawing back if the human element between God and her soul (her superiors) should have seemed uncongenial to her nature and disposition. The married woman cannot say as much. It is true that she can look to God above her earthly lord and master, and serve Him in the married state, but for this her piety must be deep indeed.

It is often quoted as surprising that many confessors have great influence over their female penitents,* but considering how marriages are made it

* This, of course, applies to certain countries only.

seems quite natural. It is not wonderful that many a wretched young wife quickly awakes from her dream; she discovers that her husband is more or less unfaithful, or not what she imagined or expected him to be. She feels a want in her life, perhaps her grief leads to despair. Then the Church pacifies and calms her; in the confessional a wise priest will speak in the name of our Saviour and exhort her to courage and patience. He will show her where, high above all passing things, lies the path of duty and service to that Master who will never deceive or betray her. He will never grow weary; He will always accept human service and obedience.

There remains poverty. Poverty comprises two things: renunciation of personal possessions, giving up all the comforts and pleasures not allowed by the Rule and, where the option is given, choosing even on trifling occasions the lowest place. If this standard be really lived up to, it means a high ideal, but there is nothing in it "against nature." For what man, however little of a philosopher, estimates happiness by the possession of goods? Is not the use of them sufficient to the wise man? And although wise men may be rare, we cannot say that they are "against nature." What is really essential to peace of mind and heart is the assurance of daily bread and the bare necessaries of life; this feeling of certainty suffices, whether it be based on a patrimony, or on faith in these words: "For your Father knoweth that you have need of these things. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things will be added unto you."*

When an all-satisfying idea, or a great love, has

*Matt. vi.

taken possession of our heart and mind, it matters little to our happiness (I mean, our real, deep, essential happiness, not our little surface joys) whether we eat this or that, wear clothes of such and such a colour or material, sleep on straw or on a mattress, or even whether we own the fork we eat with, or the rosary on which we say our prayers. I hope no one will reproach me with reasoning merely as a philosopher or a theorist, an utopian or a blind man, an incomplete individual who can only appreciate part of the joys of this life; I am arguing from the standpoint of the normal man or woman for whom the things of this world have a great attraction and zest. Let us understand each other; I do not say that the pleasures of sense, comfort and luxury, go for nothing; alas! I am neither philosophical enough, nor sufficiently numbed by blindness, to be more indifferent to them than many other people; I merely contend that these pleasures are not essential to human nature, or radically necessary to our happiness, and that every time we have the courage to give them up for some higher motive, we do not lose, but gain by the sacrifice. This is so true, that we constantly see scientists and unsuccessful inventors abandoning all material advantages, quite independently of any religious motive, for the sake of pursuing the idea which possesses them, be it truth or illusion. And if their dream come true, and they even approach it, their sacrifice is sufficiently rewarded. But, say the objectors, you are speaking as a man, your scientists and seekers after truth are men also; a young, attractive woman requires a certain amount of dress and luxury, as a real need of her nature; it is abnormal to deny it to her, and force

her to spend the years of her youth in a heavy, ugly, shapeless garment, which robs her of all individuality. Of course this is a sacrifice, and a heavy one, to some women; far be it from me to belittle it! But apart from the fact that they offer it to the Supreme Being, who can give them the courage to perform actions really "against nature" (as the martyrs have repeatedly proved), I still maintain that words must not be used in a wrong sense. This renunciation is poignant, difficult, heroic, and you may think it superogatory, but it is not "against nature," it does not deprive a human being of any essential, and happiness is not really dependent on dress. We must not lightly use the expression "against nature," or, what comes to the same thing, use it in describing things which may restrict our inclinations without necessarily stunting our human nature. Among these is voluntary poverty, the poverty of humility as well as the lack of material possessions. Putting on one side those socialist dreamers who refuse to own anything individually in order to arrive at an equal division of property—a consummation only possible in a religious community—we know moralists teach that moderation in our desires and wishes is the only road to happiness. Has not our own experience proved hundreds of times that money may bring with it the very reverse of contentment? On a journey, it is not only the luxury of the railway carriages and the comfort of the places we stop at (even if we travel in so-called "trains de luxe") that make the joys of travel. Whether the journey be through life, or round the world, it is our own feelings, and the thoughts and ideas we have been careful to impregnate ourselves with, that make us forget all our

fatigue, uncomfortable railway carriages, badly laid roads and indifferent inns.

I cannot understand people condemning the religious vows as unnatural and unreasonable, who themselves have fed on a literature of refined pessimism, which perpetually demonstrates the evanescence of love, the satiety after the possession of what has been ardently pursued and the absolute inability of money to procure real happiness.

A further objection is that in youth it is not always possible to have fixed views on life; youth is the time for love, and all-powerful love illumines and transfigures the world. The power of love is immense and incontestable, but even if we put aside the supernatural motive* which can neutralize and counteract even the power of love, is it really certain that every one really knows what love is? Is love always alluring? This has by no means been proved. A tendency to pessimism, though less frequent, is as natural as a tendency to optimism, and there are two ways of considering the value of life. There is analysis or deduction which shows by experience that living is not in itself an aim, since life cannot satisfy us completely. And then there is that enthusiasm for great and noble things, or the service of God, which carries the soul in one grand impetus up into the higher regions, and makes the so-called joys of life look uncertain and insignificant. It is difficult to satisfy the soul when it has

* "I have often heard people say," writes Father Chocarne, "that we become priests or religious too early in life, and pledge our lives before we know ourselves or the world, and that when our eyes are opened to the terrible truth it is too late. I do not at all share this view; I believe that happily a young man may understand the things of God, which are all-sufficing, even without knowing the world. If he be faithful, the love of God will always be uppermost in his heart; and I do not see why, if men choose their companions in their first freshness, God should have to choose His spouses from among those souls who are stale, tainted or tired of life."

been in contact with the Infinite. Montalembert speaks of such souls with all his eloquence: "With strength they receive light, wisdom and real power of judgement. Who has taught them the secret of pain? Who has taught these pure and passionate creatures, at an age when the heart first begins to be devoured by an insatiable longing for human tenderness and sympathy, that their thirst can never be assuaged in this world? Who has revealed to them the despicable fragility of human affection, even when noblest and sweetest, tenderest and most deep-seated; of that human affection which thought itself immortal, and held the highest place in the now empty heart? They can only have learnt such lessons by an instinct of divine affranchisement, which has taken them out of this world to set them free. They are saved all the disillusion, scorn and betrayals, which beset the way of love and sometimes lead, after all our efforts and hopes, to death in life. They have guessed at the enemy's wiles, and have baffled and conquered him; they have escaped for ever: 'Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est; laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus!' They are going to offer their heart to God in its first freshness, to surrender to Him all the treasures of love which they have refused to man. They are going to be buried and consumed in voluntary renunciation and abnegation. They tell us they have found peace and joy, and that in self-sacrifice lies the perfection of love. They have kept their heart free for One who cannot change or betray. In His service they will find consolations worth the price they paid and joys which are not cloudless, because that would make them of no worth, but whose sweetness and savour will follow them to the grave."*

* Montalembert, "Les Moines d'Occident," vol. V.

Love of the ideal may exist with a certain spirit of critical analysis, and both may lead to the convent. After expecting to realize our ideal in life, we soon discover that, instead of being helped towards perfection, we are hindered and delayed by people and events, and we may be obliged to live in commonplace and trivial surroundings. In a convent a young girl hopes to find chosen souls, attuned to her own, and sharing her aspirations, she hopes to be helped on the road to perfection and to an intimate love of God. When heart, mind and soul are constantly full of one thought, we long to speak of it; but a kind of shyness prevents us talking to indifferent people who breathe a different atmosphere. With the exception of her confessor, and perhaps a woman friend, a girl of spiritual ideals, repelled and disgusted by passing, commonplace trifles, and longing to get nearer to God, will feel herself alone; she hopes to find in the convent the environment which is lacking to her in that world where she feels herself a stranger. In many, as I have said before, there is the wish to escape the responsibility of a decision or choice in life; by experience or intuition, they learn that obedience will simplify existence and bring them considerable peace of mind. The intimate things of the soul, such as happiness and sacrifice, are essentially subjective; the intensity of pleasure or renunciation depends less on the value of their object, than on the impression we receive of it.

I think the same may be said of the events of life; their influence on us is also subjective. We have little independence of mind where events, important to ourselves, are concerned. It always seems (and this impression must be stronger in a

woman or a young girl) that our life must take the same direction as that of some other person under the same circumstances, and that a certain event will have the same influence on us as on our friends. Thus we passionately dread or wish for things, which in themselves have little importance; we stop at nothing to acquire or escape them.

Many a young girl must see traces of lassitude or regret in a companion, perhaps her mother or elder sister. After dreams of undying love, many a one has seen her father unkind, even brutal; she has surprised her mother in tears after quarrels with him, and the poor child says to herself: "Don't they love each other?" She has seen her elder sister or greatest friend, after a few months of marriage, gradually avoid a tête-a-tête with her husband, and come back to her friends, her books and flowers with less freedom, but a rather sad lingering. "Is it over already?" she thinks. She has watched desolate, broken-hearted widows and widowers (when the first burst of grief was passed), forgetting, marrying, and talking of their happiness. "Love is not what I thought it," she says sadly, "there is no such thing." Then she takes down from her bookshelf a beautiful little book given to her on her First Communion Day, and there, surrounded by flowers and pretty trifles, alone in her bedroom whose carefully guarded door has never opened to admit Schopenhauer nor Maupassant, Job nor Ecclesiastes, there, I say, she reads and meditates on these words: "Here hast thou no abiding city, and wherever thou mayest be, thou art a stranger and a pilgrim, nor wilt thou ever have rest, except thou be interiorly united with Christ. . . . Why standest thou looking about thee here, since this is

not the place of thy rest? . . . Shut the door upon thee, and call unto thee Jesus, thy Beloved. . . . Stay with Him in thy cell; for nowhere else shalt thou find so great peace. . . . Learn to despise exterior things, and to give thyself to interior things, and thou shalt see the Kingdom of God come within thee. . . . If thou wilt refuse exterior consolations, thou shalt be able to apply thy mind to heavenly things, and experience frequent interior joy. . . . The love of things created is deceitful and inconstant; the love of Jesus is faithful and enduring. . . . Trust not, nor lean upon a reed full of wind. . . . For all flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof shall fade like the flower of grass. . . . All things pass away, and thou along with them. . . . See thou cleave not to them, lest thou be ensnared and perish. . . . Oftentimes a joyous going abroad begetteth a sorrowful coming home; and a merry evening maketh a sad morning. . . . So all carnal joys enter pleasantly; but at the last bring remorse and death. . . . What canst thou see anywhere that can last long under the sun? . . . Thou trustest that perchance thou wilt be satisfied; but thou wilt never be able to reach it. . . . Cast off then all earthly things . . . that so thou mayest lay hold on true happiness. . . . All human comfort is vain and short. . . . We must not put any great confidence in frail and mortal man, useful and beloved though he be; nor should we be much grieved if he sometimes oppose and contradict us."*

Some thoughts are like chemicals when they come into contact with certain bodies; let but one drop fall and its work is done; it penetrates everything, annihilating and dissolving every impediment

* "The Imitation." Authorized translation.

it meets with. Those deep thinkers who treat religious vocations as abnormal and against nature, and consider marriage as so natural that no deliberation is necessary before embarking on it, those people, I repeat, are surprised that the young can feel disillusioned about life. . . . Ah! but you should have blindfolded the girl of twenty, or at any rate not allowed her to read "The Imitation"! Perhaps you thought she would not understand it, or very likely you have not read or understood it yourselves. It is indeed a truth that even the things of this world can easily lead to a convent. Some natures are predisposed by convent education to a religious vocation. When from childhood a girl has been wrapped in an atmosphere of calm peace and order, she will fall naturally into regular habits. She has been taught to fear the world and its dangers to an almost superstitious extent; the vaguer are her terrors, the more they repel her; she fears the future, and though she knows that she can save her soul in other walks of life, the convent seems inviting and the world alarming, and she chooses the former to remain in or return to.

But the motives of vocation which we have hitherto examined are, so to speak, secondary or natural ones; we must now come to the real, or supernatural cause. Natural causes being manifold, the primary and efficient motive can only be single, that is, God-Unity does not exclude variety, and the same love of God can exist in different people under different forms or aspects. The Divine call is not the same to all: to some it comes imperatively as to Philip: "Follow Me"; to others as to Andrew and Peter: "Come and see," that is to say, "choose." To really understand this subject we must free our

minds from society conversations or philosophical dissertations about it, and patiently read the lives of nuns in their own diaries or letters, or written by psychological biographers.

We might try to question a few intelligent and experienced religious or novice-mistresses who have a great knowledge of human nature. We should then discover that, quite contrary to the received idea, the most numerous and lasting vocations are direct calls, mystically heard in the soul during silent prayer. They come under different aspects; principally the attraction to virginity, the desire to be among "those undefiled who follow the Lamb," which so often draws very innocent and pure souls. This is the vocation of life in its spring-time, circumstances may delay its fulfilment, but it comes when a man or woman is freshest and most enthusiastic; such give themselves with all their power unimpaired, and the knowledge that their offering to God is intact. Then there is the personal love of Jesus Christ and the wish to become His spouse.

"One day after Holy Communion He made me understand that He was incomparably greater, more powerful and more to be loved than any earthly spouse. And another time He said to me, 'I have chosen you for My spouse, and we promised each other fidelity on the day you took your vow of chastity. It was I who urged you to take it; before the world had any part in your heart, I desired a heart quite pure and free from all earthly ties.'"*

We read in the life of St Agnes:

> He hath adorned my neck and my right hand with precious stones, He hath hung my ears with jewels of price and surrounded me with shining jewels.

* Bougaud, "Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite Marie."

He hath placed a sign on my face, so that I may have no other lover but Him. I love Christ and I will espouse the Virgin's Son, whose Father had no earthly spouse, whose music is tuneful to me, whom when I love I am chaste, whom when I touch I am pure, whom when I possess I am a virgin. He hath pledged me with a ring and hath adorned me with a precious necklace.

I have received milk and honey from His mouth, and His blood hath adorned my cheeks. He hath showed me incomparable treasures which He hath promised me.

Already I have fed on His body, and His blood adorns my cheeks, whose mother is a virgin, whose Father had no earthly spouse.

I am betrothed to Him whom angels serve, and whose beauty sun and moon admire.*

There is also the attraction to an apostolate, an ardent longing to bring souls to Christ; the religious feels such happiness in the knowledge and love of our Lord that she wants to do even her finite part in making Him known and loved by all. This type of vocation leads, as a rule, to those Orders which in so many different ways work for the conversion of infidels and the evangelization of children and the poor, and send their members on missions. This apostolic zeal also inspires contemplatives like St Theresa, who from the depths of her Carmel prayed so fervently for St Francis Xavier's missions, and thus contributed to their wonderful success. Then there is the wish to serve God by doing His will to the fullest extent, and realizing as far as possible our Saviour's words: "My meat is to do the will of My Father." Other souls are specially attracted to a perfect and total union with God. They have "chosen the better part." They wish to pass their earthly existence in contemplation at the feet of the Guest of Bethany, leaving the world behind. The longing for complete, absolute renunciation, the

*Responses sung by the Church on St Agnes's Day, words drawn from the "Acts" of this martyr.

thirst for immolation, the wish to share, however little, in the sufferings of the Passion, the desire to expiate the outrages daily offered to God, lead to the Orders of Carmelites and Poor Clares. The severest, austerest orders attract instead of repelling, and the postulant finds nothing too hard. This attraction seems very wonderful and incomprehensible; we who live in the world, even if simple in our tastes, try to make our lives as congenial and comfortable as possible; even when sincerely attached to our religion, we seek the Lord Jesus rather at Bethany than in the desert, we follow Him more willingly to Mount Tabor or to the supper room than to the Mount of Olives or Calvary. That is why we find it so hard to understand those souls who are athirst for suffering, who ask and look for crosses, because they possess the ineffable gift of "loving much." They offer an effective love to Him who willed to suffer so deeply for love of us. These are the steadiest, most unchanging vocations, because they are founded on motives so high as to be untainted by any personal interest.*

* "As to religious vocation, without wishing to speak too definitely, this is my opinion. I am inclined to think you have a real vocation, and these are my reasons: First, your motives are perfectly pure and disinterested, and you have that extraordinary attraction for sacrifice, which seems an inspiration from our Lord. Then there is your taste for an exceptional life, which, far from appearing to be the result of an excited imagination, is accompanied by very clear perceptions of the sacrifices you will have to make and the exterior trials you will have to pass through in your new life. Do not conceal these trials from yourself, nor yet exaggerate them; as I have said, they come from the outward side of community life, but this ought not to prevent your soul from rising above them, and feeling the sweetness and the profound and solemn happiness which comes from the certainty that you have chosen 'the better part.' I am, therefore, very much inclined to believe that you are really called by God, although you do not yet see to which walk of religious life: that is a question to be decided later. But I advise you neither to declare it too abruptly, nor delay too long in informing your family; I leave that to your tact and filial respect. I am not surprised that in the human part of your soul you should feel those fears you describe. You are about to strike a decisive blow which will sever many strong and tender ties. But I feel assured that God, in His goodness, will give you the consolations that underlie every great sacrifice and every great duty undertaken."—Lagrange, "Life of Mgr Dupanloup," vol. III.

Other direct and high calls, though less sublime than the preceding, often give rise to very steadfast vocations; generally these manifest themselves later in life. A man or woman realizes very deeply the transient quality of all earthly things, and the words: "In the morning man shall grow up like grass, in the morning he shall flourish and pass away, in the evening he shall fall, grow dry and wither." A vigorous spirit of faith dissipates the glamour of the world, and shews its joys in their true light. Some people are attracted by the beauty of the priceless things of God, others disgusted with the insignificance of earthly success. Another powerful motive of vocation is the determination not to waste any part of life, but to make it as full of good deeds as possible. Some souls are attracted to solitude and silence, they hope to be able to meditate in peace and keep themselves constantly near to God. These longings will sometimes give a girl, who has always been petted, loved and admired, the courage to leave her parents. The parting is none the less cruel, the history of vocations abounds in struggles, tears and hesitations, but peace and serenity always come when the final step is taken.*

* "But an immediate decision is not at all necessary, on the contrary, it appears indispensable that you should stay some time longer in the world with your family; always offering God your holy intention, meditating on it without impatience or anxiety, and taking full time to gauge the depth of your vocation and convince yourself and your family of its reality; this last point is a very delicate one, and requires extreme prudence and tact on your part. The grief of your dear parents is very natural from their point of view and with their ideas, they must find it so hard to understand and consent to your sacrifice! Do not check their sorrow, give them every opportunity of whatever they think their duty to put to you, in fairness and reason; let them feel convinced that you have listened to their objections and thoroughly weighed and considered them and that you are not carried away by impulse, but conviction. In everything, be kinder and more attentive to them than ever. Listen to them calmly, deferentially and respectfully on the subject of your vocation, and answer gently but firmly. Let them feel that your love is deep, real and more filial than ever, so that if they see you resist it, they

The fewest vocations, and those which require the test of a careful novitiate, come from the following motives: wish to fly from the world, desire to expiate personal sins or those of some one dear, fear of not saving our soul in the world, and dread of succumbing to strong temptations. In these it is very easy to miscalculate the depth of feelings, and the reality of the vocation, hence it is important to multiply precautions and increase delay. The girl who fears for her salvation and sees snares everywhere may discover after a short time that cir-

may understand that you are really called by a higher voice than that of affection, the only call for which a child ought to sacrifice paternal and maternal claims. During these trials and struggles, turn more than ever to God in prayer, there lies your joy, your consolation, your peace and your light. Blessed be He who deigns to mix the balm of His consolation with the bitterness of such battles! He does not always do so; and that is the supreme ordeal. I pray Him to spare you, and to bear you in His arms, till all be consummated, and you belong to Him for ever. Then He will do as He wills with you. You will be strenghtened, you will grow in spiritual beauty and fruitfulness, you will follow where He leads you, be the way smooth or difficult. Wait then, a little while longer, in peace and quietness, search your mind attentively and calmly, and wait for the strength and sweetness which you will get from God. I hope to be able to see you soon. Then you can come to a definite decision. I pray Almighty God with my whole strength to enlighten me, and put in my mouth words which will really interpret His holy will in regard to you. . . . You are feeling, my dear child, what always comes after great sacrifices. Calm, profound peace, the peace of God, follows the natural shrinking of flesh and blood from its immolation. When the sacrifice is consummated, you are alone with God, hidden in His Fatherly breast, and tasting infinite happiness. May you enjoy that happiness and peace to the full, my child. Regret nothing that you are leaving behind, for what is this world and what is human life? Think of God and Heaven, all is there; the whole reason of your sacrifice and your hopes lies in that great contrast. As to the sacred ties you have to break, fear nothing! God will repay a hundredfold the generous co-operation of your family in that vocation which so plainly comes from Him. Your dear mother writes to me that she is at peace, and can give thanks. As to your novitiate and the whole of your religious life, my child, I can only repeat to you St Jerome's words to the souls he led up to the heights by paths resembling yours: 'Be generous, let your sacrifice be complete, withdraw nothing of what you have once offered.' Then you may expect a holy and fruitful life, even, I would add, a happy one, in spite of all you are giving up; for the blessing of the Holy Spirit, which surpasses all other sweetness, is promised to perfect generosity. Trials will come as you must know, dryness and the lack of consolation. But if, in spite of these ordeals and God's apparent neglect of you, your generosity does not fail, what merit, and what abundance of spiritual joys will be yours! Courage then, dear child, you are nearing the haven. Make fast your poor little vessel, and Jesus will be with you. I bless you paternally in our Lord."—Lagrange, "Vie de Mgr Dupanloup," vol. I, iii.

cumstances have altered, her wish to re-enter religion has passed, and ordinary life quite fulfils her real aspirations. Such vocations are more often founded on the fear than on the love of God. This is only the "beginning of wisdom," but it may lead to its fullness if we really know how to search our own hearts. Souls who have once heard the "still, small voice" are always anxious to know themselves. That voice, so sweet and gentle, yet so firm, says to one, "Martha, Martha, thou art troubled about many things," to another, "Follow Me," and "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." People say these are counsels, not precepts, and counsels are not of obligation. But counsels are obligations to some natures; it is enough for perfection to be held up to them. "Oh! if thou wouldst," said the voice to young Gratry, and this is ever in their ears.* For them, there can be no possible peace but in entire obedience to the counsels, abnegation, and the complete giving up of self, consummated in those three vows of religion so lightly condemned as "unreasonable" and "against nature." There can be nothing unreasonable or unnatural in immolating self, and wishing to be encouraged, instead of deterred by our companions and surroundings. It is not against nature to long to lay down the bur-

* "A kind of life-giving air surrounded me and penetrated my breast; an interior voice, extraordinarily solemn yet strangely sweet, repeated slowly and gravely with an accent of fathomless depth, 'Ah, if thou wouldst!' 'I cannot,' I answered gently and respectfully, 'you see it is impossible.' 'But, if thou wouldst,' repeated the gentle voice, ever more caressing and life-giving. And I went on giving the same answer, calling Heaven and earth to witness that it was impossible. 'There is no obligation,' repeated the angel, or the Queen of Heaven, who seemed to be addressing me, 'but still, if thou wouldst!' . . . Always the same words, with ever-growing meaning. I saw the immense consequences of free will in this sacrifice which was not imposed upon me, but merely suggested to me, with such blessed possibilities. And so the marvellous conversation proceeded, with the same question and answer."—Gratry, "Souvenirs de ma Jeunesse."

den of responsibility and decisions, and obey a Superior who takes it all on her own shoulders. Neither is it against nature to give ourself unreservedly, with heart and soul, to One whom we absolutely trust, to Jesus Christ, instead of to man.

ℂ. II. Vocations among the Blind

THE question now to be considered is, the real cause of vocations in the blind. People in the world, according to their several views, either wonder that any blind women become nuns, or that all do not enter convents. It is natural that those who consider the religious life as folly or a long martyrdom, and see in it only its privations and humiliations, should not understand how a blind person can add this torture to the affliction of blindness. On the other hand, those who look upon life in the cloister as a heaven upon earth, unappreciated only by those absorbed in the "fleeting seductions of the world," are surprised that, as a convent for blind nuns does exist, all the blind women living should not instantly rush into it. I have said before, and I repeat it advisedly, both these classes of people look upon blind girls as annihilated and paralysed by their misfortune; they admit that the affections may survive in them, but to them a blind person can only be half alive. I have endeavoured to shew how exaggerated such views are, and I hope that at this stage my readers have come to agree with me. Celibacy being, as we have seen, the lot of most blind girls, the education given them is of a kind to prepare them for it. But it would be a mistake to think that all who have passed through Blind Schools are ready to enter religion. First of all, single life is there enforced, and not their chosen lot, and in the second place the natural tendency of any spinster's character is

by no means identical with that of a nun. Old maids are generally very independent, and prefer to be as little as possible under subjection to anyone. On the contrary, the married woman in some ways is far more like a nun; it is the more loving natures that long for support and protection, who shrink from responsibility and dread solitude; passionate, ardent souls, who long to surrender themselves once and for all to one object, without waiting for the thousand daily opportunities of self-sacrifice.

"It is no life for a young girl," writes a working woman, "to be always alone. There comes a time when she gets terribly weary of her life. Marriage has no attractions for me. My wish is to enter religion: to devote myself entirely to God and do all the good I can around me."*

It is true that this was not written by a blind woman, but the idea is very human, and particularly French; blindness would not alter it. "Does there exist a people on whom collective life has had more influence than on the French, who always feel the need of being in harmony with others? Solitude is irksome to us; if union is our strength, it is also our happiness. We cannot consent to think alone, live alone, or enjoy ourselves alone; we cannot separate our pleasures from those of others."†

This frame of mind is more feminine than masculine, and is certainly the cause of the immense success of female communities in France. Blind girls are not exempt from it, they long intensely to share the aims and sympathies of their youth with congenial souls, and to feel that others have like tastes and aspirations. When we are drawn to the

* Comte d'Haussonville, "Salaires et Misères de Femmes."
† Fouillée, " Psychologie du Peuple Français."

Good and the Beautiful, and are profoundly moved by one of their manifestations, our first instinct is to communicate our enthusiasm to others; admiration is essentially altruistic. It is a very pure form of enjoyment to pray in common or to read a noble book with a friend. Blind people feel this keenly, and cannot hope, as others, for this kind of intimacy to be brought about by marriage.

When girls who have been educated by refined, cultured teachers, in select schools among sympathetic companions, return to their own homes, if they find themselves in commonplace surroundings and hear of nothing but material interests, they feel oppressed, out of their element, and aspire to a different kind of existence. Furthermore, it is a great thing for the blind to live together and devote themselves to the education and bringing up of blind children; they feel themselves of use, and their lives become practical with definite aims and immediate results. They have also the satisfaction of feeling themselves part of a group or a whole, and that they are entering on a special mission. This satisfaction is the keener that often a blind woman in her own home has met with humiliations and been considered a failure. Their religious profession at once puts them on a level with their companions. Finally, there is the longing for material and moral support, and a constant need of supervision which the blind woman feels far more than her happier sisters. Still, we must not exaggerate; however attractive psychological research may be, and those explanations which flatter the rationalistic tendencies of the present day, we must not overlook in the motives for religious vocation the immense attraction to blind as to other women so well expressed

in this fragment from the life of Blessed Margaret Mary:

"My greatest joy was the thought of frequent Communion, for it was rarely allowed me. I should have thought myself the happiest of mortals, if I could have communicated often and spent the night before the Blessed Sacrament. On the eves of my Communions I felt myself rapt in such profound silence that it was an effort to speak, because of the solemnity of what I was about to do; and afterwards my consolation was so great that I felt I did not need to eat, drink, see nor speak.

"If I were to go into the community it would be for love of you; I wish to go where I have no friends or acquaintances, so as to become a nun without any other motive than the love of God. . . . I wish to go to the 'Saintes Maries,' in a distant convent, where I shall know no one. I wish to be a nun for the sake of God alone. I desire to forsake the world entirely and hide myself in some corner where I can forget and be forgotten for ever."*

In considering vocations, we must allow a very great deal for the direct action of God. The imperative, unmistakable call of God to the soul, which it listens to and answers in silence, can be heard as well by the blind as by others. Only before the days of Anne Bergunion, the souls of the blind could not correspond to it. They felt an unknown want which was the cause of great suffering to them though unexpressed. Anne Bergunion had felt it herself; perhaps others confided in her, and thus inspired her work. We cannot deny that these calls exist. We see blind organists leaving a convent where they had found an agreeable refined home,

* "Life of Blessed Margaret Mary," Bougaud.

to consecrate themselves completely to God, and become the mystic Spouses of Jesus Christ. Others with nothing attractive in their surroundings, whose lives are hard and uncongenial, will not hear of entering religion. No, religious vocation, any more than piety and fervour, does not necessarily follow from blindness; it is rooted in the depths of the soul. In the same way that it ought to be forbidden to persons lacking the artistic instinct to talk about art (though they may be otherwise intelligent and interesting), so those who have never tried to lead the interior life, for whom piety and fervour are but abstractions, ought never to discuss the workings of God in the soul, because they cannot in the least understand them. When a soul has really experienced the holy joy of fervour, the rapture of joining her nothingness to God, she will feel (whether blind or not matters nothing) that no earthly happiness can approach this mystic union; it is not wonderful, therefore, that she longs to remain henceforth and for ever in that delicious atmosphere which she finds in the religious life.

ℭ III. The Religious Life

TO understand "the religious life" we must make a real effort to forget ourselves and our usual way of looking at things. The man who has never seriously reflected on life for half an hour, or wondered what was the object of his own existence, who practically, if not theoretically, has been interested solely in this world, and who goes on his way with no wish to draw near to God, or to train himself, can have no conception of the religious life. To be interested in it we must be preoccupied with the interior life, the things of the soul and contact with God. We must understand the great happiness (perhaps the greatest) of constantly working at our spiritual formation. If we accept ourselves without trying to improve, with our mass of qualities and defects, good or bad tendencies inherited from our parents or assimilated by the force of circumstances, or if we go to the other extreme of thinking God too far off to bring His infinite Being into contact with our finite souls, if we have never known those blessed and ideal hours of silent converse with God of which Père Gratry writes, then we are ignorant of the very alphabet of the spiritual life. We can neither understand nor speak of it; and we fall into the mistake of thinking of a very real objective truth as a chimerical illusion. The life of the soul is a different thing from the intellectual life, in the usual sense of the expression. A humble nun, busy from morning till night with material work, may be leading a far

more intensely spiritual life than a man of letters, or a student who is constantly immersed in problems, but leaves his soul quite undeveloped. Culture may under certain circumstances prepare the soul and make the way clear for spiritual interests, but it is in no way essential to them. For the soul is not the intellect; it has other faculties and powers, not only exterior and interior intuitions, but also a "sense of the divine."*

When, in agreement with Thomassin, Gratry and other philosophers, we admit the existence of this "sense of the Divine," when, without ever having heard the names of these thinkers, or knowing that the soul has certain powers, we can feel this sense in ourselves, it is not difficult to realize it in others, or to understand the religious life. We discover how it is that in life the contact with persons and things does not satisfy us or fill our whole being; we feel the supreme desire to draw near to God, and we strive with our whole will to become less ethically imperfect. We feel so weak, so lonely in the struggle, so hindered and impeded by the weeds of habit and the parasites of daily occupations that we realize what must be the comfort and relief, the encouragement and support of

* "Impressions from physical nature are called feelings; for others is reserved the name of sentiments, but in the latter we must not confound the instincts of our own soul with those which may come from God. The triple capacity of realizing three things, our body, our soul and God, has three names according to its object: exterior sense, intuitive sense, and sense of the Divine. Some philosophers deny the existence of what we call the sense of the Divine. This would seem illogical, for these very thinkers who will not hear of more than two senses (the exterior, with nature for its object, and the intuitive, whose object is the soul), are forced to admit that there is something in the soul which apprehends, or at any rate reaches, the idea of God. Some, it is true, believe that the soul cannot realize God, and that He can only be apprehended by Pure Reason. This is a profound error. These philosophers also think that there are no signs of the presence of God but the necessary ideas, cause, unity and infinity. To believe this is to mutilate the soul, to rob its sanctuary, and to drag up its roots."—Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame," vol. I.

that scheme of existence known as "religious" or "community life."

"If all could know the happiness of the religious state," says St Lawrence Justinian, "men would rush madly into it; but as this would arrest the reproduction of humanity, Providence withholds this knowledge from the greater number, and it remains to them a riddle to which only a few have the answer." What is this happiness? Is it purely mystical? Does "She hath chosen the better part," mean only for eternity? But then what would become of our Lord's promise to St Peter: "Amen, I say to you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the Kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive much more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting."*

All those who have read Lacordaire's "St Dominic" will remember his poetic description of the medieval monastery, with its interior cloister, the symbolical fountain or well in the middle of the vaults, its wide galleries and tiny cells, its solemn church with pictures and inscriptions telling the history of the Order, and mementoes of the religious family and its long files of monks, old and young, pacing in peaceful silence over the stones which cover the skeletons of their predecessors. Monasteries were usually situated in beautiful scenery; many bore such names as "Beau-Lieu," "Clair-Lieu," "Cher-Lieu," etc. Alcuin, about to leave his monastery for Charlemagne's court, writes: "O my cell! sweet and beloved resting place, farewell for ever! I shall see no more the woods which surround thee, with their interlacing branches

* Luke xviii.

and flowery verdure, no more shall I behold thy meadows full of sweet-smelling and health-giving herbs, thy waters full of fish, thy orchards, and thy gardens where roses and lilies mingle! I shall no longer hear the birds who, like us, sing Matins and praise their Creator in their own way; or those teachings of sweet and sacred wisdom, which, with praises of the Most High, echo from lips and hearts at peace. Dear cell! I shall regret and weep for you for ever; but thus all things change and have an end, night succeeds day, summer follows winter, storm comes after calm, and ardent youth ends in worn-out old age."*

Thus did monks love their monasteries a thousand years ago, and they love them none the less to-day. Certainly the convents where nuns spend their lives nowadays have little in common with medieval monasteries. Many are badly built houses, some mere hovels in a side alley. But it is there that young girls see, in the midst of foundlings, sick people or old paupers, the Sister of Charity who looks as if she had found a haven of rest. If not a haven of peace, this ugly, cold, gloomy, confined and inconvenient building is where she had her revelation, and perhaps will spend her novitiate. The nineteenth-century nun grows attached to her convent, loves it, and enshrines it in her memory, as the monk Alcuin thought of his fair solitude. And truly, when we reflect how nuns love even the walls of the house where they made their novitiate in the springtime of their vocation, it makes us really believe that the entry into religion is a "new birth." They are burning with zeal, and full of those vivid impressions which belong to childhood or to the time

*Montalembert, "Les Moines d'Occident," Introduction.

of young love. Children possess the priceless faculty of seeing things, not as they are but as they would wish them to be. A child can make itself believe that a wretched little acorn is a golden cup or a fairy boat.

"So far as I myself have observed, the distinctive character of a child is to live always in the tangible present, having little pleasure in memory and being utterly impatient and tormented by anticipation; weak alike in reflection and forethought, but having an intense possession of the actual present, down to the shortest moments and least objects of it; possessing it indeed so intensely that the sweet childish days are as long as twenty days will be; and setting all the faculties of heart and imagination on little things, so as to be able to make anything out of them he chooses. Confined to a little garden, he does not imagine himself somewhere else, but makes a great garden out of that; possessed of an acorn-cup, he will not despise it and throw it away, and covet a golden one in its stead: it is the adult who does so. The child keeps his acorn-cup as a treasure, and makes a golden one out of it in his mind; so that the wondering, grown-up person standing beside him is always tempted to ask concerning his treasures, not, 'What would you have more than these?' but, 'What possibly can you see in these?' for, to the bystander, there is a ludicrous and incomprehensible inconsistency between the child's words and the reality. The little thing tells him gravely, holding up the acorn-cup, that 'this is a queen's crown,' or 'a fairy's boat,' and, with beautiful effrontery, expects you to believe the same. But observe, the acorn-cup must be there, and in his own hand. 'Give it

me; then I will make more of it for myself.' That is the child's one word always. It is also the one word of the Greek, 'Give it me.' Give me anything definite here in my sight, then I will make more of it."*

At such times the mind beholds its surroundings (as it never does again in life, except perhaps under the magic of love) as the heart would have them. We are happy, and later in life we have the impression or the illusion of past happiness; the places lived in long ago, especially if we have never seen them since, remain idealized in our memory, and full of marvellous visions. Love is what really makes nuns, and love it is that keeps them in the convent—a very real, objective love of the person of Jesus Christ, which fills heart and mind. When philosophers speak of the homage men owe to God because of His infinite perfections, they understand this to imply a certain amount of love, since we always feel a little love for what we greatly admire; but is not such a feeling more in the intellect than in the affection? Ideas cannot fill a life. . . . Well, our Lord Jesus Christ, loved as a real living person, close at hand, to whom a nun has given herself totally and for ever, can satisfy her soul completely. Doubtless she may, and does, have moments of gloom and sadness; she has to face difficulties and all the little meannesses and inevitable consequences of human imperfections; but they are but moments, accidents which are absorbed in the great love she bears the Master whom all serve in common. In any large household there must be differences and divergences of thoughts, tastes and opinions; but the general harmony is not affected by them because

* Ruskin, "Aratra Pentelici," "Imagination," 77, 78.

of the common ground of affection where all meet, and which is the unity of the whole family. In the convent, active and fervent piety is the moving spirit, the sole preoccupation, and the bond of union between all hearts and minds. It is enough to read St Theresa to understand how prayer can rouse the soul, and if anyone objects that this implies more mystic imagination than solid reality, I would ask him, with Père Gratry, "Yes or no, do you believe that God is powerless to communicate with His creatures?" Is the Word unable to make Himself heard, if men can speak to each other? In the convent they believe in prayer and practise it; they cultivate the "interior life" and are not afraid to mention it. They are encouraged in this in a perfectly practical and reasonable way, in wisdom and sound common sense. St Jane Chantal wrote to her daughters:

"1. Never voluntarily commit any fault, however small; I mean of your own absolute free will and choice, and never omit any good deed which you know God expects of you. Then set your minds at rest.

"2. Never be troubled about your past, present or future shortcomings; I wish you to feel no care or anxiety on this subject.

"3. Humble yourselves profoundly before God for your smallest sins; remember that evil is the produce of your own natures, but the smallest good in you is an effect of the help and grace of our Lord. Resolve, with the help of His grace, to acquire some good habit to repair the known shortcomings.

"4. This is corresponding faithfully to the presence of God, and performing all your actions with the sole aim of pleasing His Divine Majesty. Fi-

nally, my daughter, humble yourself, humble yourself, humble yourself; do all the good possible, avoid all the harm you can, so that you may never be surprised into committing a fault from shere carelessness. Humiliate yourself without losing your peace of mind. Pride causes us to weep over our imperfections, but truly humble contrition draws profit even from our falls."*

St Vincent de Paul, in his familiar instructions, says: "Love God, brothers, love God; but let it be with the labour of our hands and in the sweat of our brow. Many acts of the love of God, such as complacency, benevolence, and other affections and interior practices of a loving heart, though very good and desirable, are often very useless when we come to put effectual love into practice. Our Lord tells us that we glorify His Father by bringing forth much fruit. We must be very careful; many have a devotional exterior, and a heart full of high sentiment, but when it comes to action, they stop short. They exult in their excited imagination, and speak like angels of the sweet converse they have had with God, but beyond this, when it is a question of working for Him, mortifying themselves, instructing the poor, seeking the lost sheep, willingly foregoing their comforts, accepting illness or misfortune, alas, they leave their post, and their courage fails them."†

Convent life is busy and active; sometimes the work is hard and difficult, but difficulties are never encountered singly, and life in common has an immense advantage. "It is better to be two than one, for each profits by the other's company. If one fall,

* "Conseils de Mère Chantal à la Mère Françoise Madeleine de Chaugy."
† Abelly, "Vie de Saint-Vincent de Paul," vol. I.

the other raises him up; if one is cold, the other warms him; if one is too weak to resist, the other helps him to overcome; and if a rope is formed of three strands, it is not easily broken."

These words of an ancient writer are true to-day; isolation in activity is a dreadful ordeal which quickly exhausts strength, whereas the most tiring and unattractive work is transformed when shared by some one with whom we are in harmony of ideas and feelings. The nuns tell each other events in the lives of the saints, and collecting sisters repeat pious legends, bringing faith and trust in God into their daily lives. "It so happened that two itinerant friars were still fasting at three in the afternoon, and they asked each other how they could appease their hunger in the rugged, arid country they were walking over. As they were speaking, a man in the dress of a traveller came up to them and said, 'What troubles ye, O men of little faith? Seek first the kingdom of God, and the rest will be given to you in abundance. You had faith enough to give yourselves to God, and now you are afraid that He will leave you without food! Cross this field, and when you come to the valley below you will have reached a village; enter the church, and the parish priest will invite you to his house. Then will appear a knight who will try to take you home with him by force; then the patron of the living will thrust himself between them and take the priest, the knight and both of you off and entertain you magnificently. Trust in the Lord and encourage your brothers to have faith in Him.' So saying he disappeared, and all fell out as he had foretold. The brothers, when they returned to Paris, told what had happened to them to Brother

Henry and the few poor brothers then living there."*

Thus the imagination is constantly fed with the sayings and doings of ancient, and often very edifying personages, whose example leads, through the highest paths, to the ideal. This union of hearts, wills and souls is delightfully fruitful in intellectual work; individual minds gain largely in strength and insight. That is why Père Gratry was so anxious to revive the Oratory in France.†

It is a very subtle and keen pleasure to be in contact with those souls whom we influence or develop; who, at the first conception of an ideal or special object in life, has not dreamed of a fellow-worker with similar aims, who should have realized the ideal or be pursuing it, but be still our guide? What joy, what a glow of comfort we feel when we think we have found one! . . . It is this joy (and a greater, since the "Master" was Christ) that shines through St. John's description of the meeting of the first disciples.‡

* Gerard de Frachet, "Vie des Frères," quoted by Lacordaire in his "Life of St Dominic."

† "What! souls and minds can meet in God? No! no! say ignorance and habit with heavy materialistic commonsense. But there, in that nest where we were all together, so united in affection, thought and hopes, we often felt as if struck by flashes from each other's souls, and were pursued by a ferment of feelings and thoughts which we conveyed to each other. I hardly like to describe some experiences, because though true they sound so unlikely. 'But who ever since yesterday, all through the night and even this morning, has been following up an idea that was not even mentioned yesterday? I fancy it was you!' 'Yes, it was I,' immediately answered Henri Perreyve. We need not go farther into these psychological analyses: some things are manifest to all. It is perfectly evident that we are, and feel ourselves to be, stronger when in a congenial assemblage of minds. Supported and mutually strengthened, full of confidence and hope, we meditated the realization at some future day of a kind of mental workshop where all should labour together for the same ends."—Gratry, "Henri Perreyve."

‡ "The next day again, John stood, and two of his disciples, and beholding Jesus walking, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God.

"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

"And Jesus turning, and seeing them following Him, saith unto them, What seek you? Who said to Him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest Thou?

When once we have found the "Master," night may come, and with it every evening of our lives, with the different feelings of melancholy born of each season and epoch of our existence; we can watch them without alarm, following each other and even hurrying by. Yes, it is a great happiness to have found the "Master" in youth; the Person who incarnates and defines the ideal which we had striven to erect in our solitude. Often we had but vague and even faulty conceptions; His sudden entry into our lives, in all His perfection, has all the more power over us. Many young girls find that their Superior in the Convent is an exceptional personality, and they attach themselves to her all the more deeply because the rule enjoins on them to consider their Superior as God's delegate, and urges them to trust her fully and open their hearts completely to her. Then, indeed, peace and light fill the soul. And such encounters and intuition of soul do not depend on length of friendship or many words. "What matters speech? Often mere bodily presence says more than long discourses, an affectionate, intelligent, magnetic, vital personality needs no words to make its power felt, and captivate us even in silence!"*

If happiness be "peace and order," as St Augustine says, it ought to be found in the religious life, where all is foreseen, arranged and settled. In the perfect regularity of such an existence, where we and our neighbours are under one authority, is there not a shadow of the security and dependence of our childhood, that feeling which, alas! is among the

"He saith to them: Come and see. They came, and saw where He abode, and they staid with Him that day: now it was about the tenth hour.

"And Andrew the brother of Simon Peter was one of the two who had heard from John and followed Him."

* Père Didon, "Jésus-Christ," vol. I.

first to leave us? We feel that each thing and person is "in the right place." In the world we have to fight our way among cares and details which absorb time and strength, and paralyse us for the great actions of life, and we know that our friends and neighbours are eaten up by the same disease; in the convent one person looks after the material interests of all the others, so that each one's faculties remain unimpeded; each has a task, which she applies herself to with all her heart and mind, to bring to perfection. The entire scheme of existence is morally and physically beneficent; the complete repose and silence so essential to mental equilibrium are only found in convents; in the world we neither know how to rest nor keep silence with any semblance of method. As silence gives force to words, so repose is the strength of action; it is as necessary to know when to rest as when to work; in the convent repose is a science.*

As the Rule insists on regular, periodical intervals of rest, active natures do not run the risk of exhausting themselves in feverish work, interrupted by pauses of extreme fatigue spent more in torpid languor than in useful rest; and dreamers and undecided characters are not able to waste their lives in long periods of semi-idleness. Sleep is a blessed and mysterious thing, we throw ourselves into it

* "Repose is a necessity; and nowadays, we need rest far more than work.

"Repose is the sister of silence. We lack both.

"We are often more sterile for need of rest, than for want of work.

"Repose is such an important thing that the Holy Scriptures go so far as to say: 'The wise man acquires wisdom in his time of rest.' The greatest reproach a prophet addresses to the Jewish people is: 'Ye have said, we will not rest'—Et dixisti: Non quiescam.

"What, then, is rest? Rest is the pause of life, while she drinks at her source.

"Sleep is repose of the body, God alone knows what passes during sleep.

"Prayer is rest of mind and soul. Prayer is the soul's life, when the heart and intellect pauses to drink and bathe in their source, which is God."—Gratry, "Les Sources."

without respect or preparation, one day abusing it, and the next depriving ourselves; we can only get, in soul and body, the real good of sleep, when we receive it as the gift of God, prepared for in silence, and followed by it. Silence has been much praised. This is well, but I doubt if it really be practised anywhere but in convents. Silence is brutally imposed on children when it would often be better to allow them to speak and think aloud; but we do not prescribe it for ourselves. In many communities the admirable institution of the "Great Silence" exists; it commences at nine in the evening, and ends at seven next morning, and is not broken save for absolute necessity. Sleep, prayer and work have quite different effects when prepared for in silence.

Of course the silence of the lips does not necessarily imply that of the heart and mind; it is possible to say nothing, yet, at the same time, not to be in that quiet interior frame of mind which can hear the instructions of the Word "without sound of speech"; but even lip-silence leads to the spiritual subtleness and lucidity necessary at such times. Ordinary life lacks silence as much as prayer; we are constantly in a state of material and mental unrest, we do not think calmly, we do not "rise," our soul is as if asleep, its highest powers undeveloped.*

* "Is it not manifest that in some souls one dominant faculty dwarfs every other? The spontaneous instinctive life of feelings, passions and desires almost entirely overwhelms intellect and will; very few men develop reason more than feeling, and liberty more than either. They cannot understand Christ's words: 'If ye shall do My words, ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. . . .' But it is a law that we must vaguely follow some model. The science of the soul shews an enormous disproportion between our knowledge and outward impressions, an enormous and deplorable disproportion between our love and free action, as regards our inspirations, or even our understanding; and this disproportion is the proof of childishness as well as decadence in the soul, disobedience to law, indigence and deformity, only to be repaired by the work of a lifetime."—Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame," vol. I.

We think of our souls as fully developed, we do not try to understand their promptings, and in truth, do many people believe that the soul is a "growing power," and try to live a spiritual life in God? There is, in the interior life, an inexhaustible flow of light and strength at which the humblest may quench his thirst.*

In convents all the arrangements of material and spiritual existence powerfully assist the soul's development; all tend to this end, and help us towards it instead of impeding us. I wonder at the naïveté of some clever men, whose psychological perceptions must be very limited. They are surprised when a young girl enters a convent, and say, "She had all she could wish for in the world." Yes, all except food for that "sense of the divine" in the soul, which such men do not remember or believe in, but which nevertheless exists, and is so real, that to satisfy and develop it she gladly gives up what they call "everything in life." How well Père Gratry (not to mention others) understands human nature! He appeals to every faculty and power, he tries to lead the whole man, body, mind and soul to God, and would have us develop our whole personality to its utmost. Souls respond to such appeals, they are suddenly transported into an atmosphere where they feel an immense freedom. What happiness it is to realize that we can help on our own interior development, and that nothing can really arrest or limit us in this direction! The wise men of this world only busy themselves with the exterior; religious psychology goes further and plumbs the soul to its very depths. The moral dis-

* Maine de Biran says: "One moment of love and peace in God's presence shews and teaches us more truths than all the reasoning in the world."

comfort felt by some, and but little understood, is due to their not having the courage to develop their souls to the full, or not knowing how to do so. The soul unconsciously aspires, and sometimes cannot reach its goal except by the road of sacrifice. Few people, I repeat, seem to realize that we do not receive our souls fully developed and equipped; the soul is a "growing power," always susceptible of expansion as long as its corporeal envelope grows.*

This is as divine a law as the growth of the body, that law which we can never disobey without the penalty of discomfort, or even sometimes bitter suffering, if Providence has ordained any considerable changes in us. Now, if the soul be a growing power, if it possess a sense of the Divine, how can it fail to suffer when hindered in development and prevented from satisfying its divine instincts? The nun is spared this kind of pain; her Rule and the pervading atmosphere keep her constantly employed in cultivating the spiritual side of her nature. When we read Rodriguez, a master of the spiritual life most frequently studied in communities, we are struck by his constant advice to develop the human soul. The first point is to try and know ourselves thoroughly. It is true that philosophy has been advising us to do this ever since Socrates, but who

* "The object of life is to cultivate clear intelligence and free will from first premisses and to develop them from their known principles. The life in us grows through our own efforts. . . . Most souls remain fallow; neither a clear intelligence nor an effectual love can proceed from a mass of vague instincts and dim perceptions. These are those unprofitable souls whom the Master of men accuses in His Gospel of wasting the talents which God has given them. They are 'buried,' says the Gospel. Their reason is not a definite power, and they have no freedom of action. All their thoughts are inarticulate and confused; the only love they know is that of instinct and blind passion. Effectual clear-sighted love, springing from heart and mind, never reigns in them; their perpetual twilight never gives way to the dawn of day. . . . Again, there are souls whose intelligence and will are definitely developed to a certain extent; but these powers only awake to separate and enter into conflict with each other and with their common source."—Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame."

acts on the advice so thoroughly as nuns, who examine their thoughts, words, deeds and omissions at least twice a day?

I claim that in the convent a human being can satisfy every want and aspiration. Indeed, the religious or community life, although not of divine primitive institution like the family and home life, yet is so directly founded on the "counsels," if not on the "precepts" of the Gospel, that it must also be considered as the intention of Providence. The Church, which represents God on earth, has so often and openly approved of it, that in Christian society it is almost as fundamental as the family in natural conditions. Now, all that is of divine institution is in perfect equilibrium and admirable harmony. Complete family life, not restricted or truncated by contemporary egoism, answers to all the needs of the heart at every stage of existence; everything about it is in harmony and has its proper season. Home life is a link with the past and a claim on the future; when old age appears with its sorrows, grandchildren have already come, as a pledge of continuity, to enliven us with their fresh gaiety. We feel consoled to think that something belonging to us will go on into the future, we are surrounded by grandchildren, when our own children, absorbed by the stress of life, are absent from our fireside. But human selfishness interrupts the harmony Providence intended, and too often old people end their days by a hearth which is symbolically, if not materially, cold.

In the religious life pre-established harmony cannot be interrupted by the selfishness of individuals. The community does not pass, but remains the same; it is renewed, but insensibly, and without

the painful impression of decay in what we have loved and longed to keep intact—decay of what we knew when we were young and happy. The nun feels a profound peace, a moral and material sense of security in the face of possible illness, approaching old age and death. As I have said before, it is a mistake to imagine the religious life as philosophically abnormal, or in discord with the wants of our heart and mind, to think of it as a constant torture to human nature, a perpetual contradiction of every taste, wish and inclination, or to believe that God is obliged to interfere supernaturally at every instant, and give his privileged servants strength to bear the struggle of such an unnatural existence. Doubtless God does intervene, and sustains them by that grace which He gives all his creatures in every condition of Christian life; but the supernatural perfects and completes the natural order; it is above, but not against it.* Convent life is a very rational existence; only a superficial and careless observer could think otherwise. It fully meets the real needs of humanity; only useless details and caprices are eliminated from this life. It is said to oppose nature, but if so we must take nature as implying fantastic and irrational instincts; it in no way contradicts commonsense, or the real laws of nature, and is a life of moral and physical well-being. The practice of virtue does not consist in having extraordinary and unnatural aims. The

*It would be an entire misapprehension of my meaning, if from what I have written, and what is to follow, my readers should conclude that I minimize the share of Divine grace in the work of self-amendment; an improvement which is necessary before we can be our best and highest selves. This grace is indeed indispensable, but I claim that we are rewarded for this subtle effort and labour, not only supernaturally (which would be quite sufficient) but in a human sense. I mean, and am trying to prove, that obedience to the Gospel counsels repays us not only in the world to come with eternal life, but here and now a thousandfold.

spirit of renunciation, basis of all mystical and community life, is so little opposed to human happiness that those who have no belief beyond matter and earth teach that to be happy we must do our duty; a duty which often calls for a sacrifice of taste, inclination and personal interests to the good of the race and future generations of humanity. What is this but renunciation? Is not this language, in the mouths of the opponents of all religious ideas, a testimony in favour of my theory? Speaking of the renunciation and mortification so severely practised by Hindoos for thousands of years, Schopenhauer remarks that there is a deep-seated instinct of mortification at the basis of all human nature. "We have seen the wicked man suffering burning agonies of mind through his own obstinacy, and when all the objects of his desire are exhausted, quenching the furious thirst of his egoism in the spectacle of others' woes; so the man who has reached the negation of the wish to live, however miserable, sad and full of renunciation be his apparent lot, is full of celestial peace and joy."*

Thus we come to admit that sacrifice and abnegation are part of our nature; it has a tendency to selfishness, but directly we have conquered this we are repaid by the approval of conscience, which naturally exists in every reasonable being. We are agreed that happiness is only to be found in duty fulfilled; but in what is called worldly life, we are tempted at every moment to leave duty for pleasure, or for the satisfaction of the moment which appeals to our weakness; we yield, and are soon disgusted and satiated; whereas, in the convent the same temptations may come, but more

*Schopenhauer, "The World as Will and Representation," vol. I.

rarely, and to help us resist them we have the rule and our Superior's orders, and though these rules and orders may seem hard at the moment, they prove an efficient protection. Apart from the peace of a conscience at rest, the natural affections are more durable and constant in the convent than elsewhere; complete satisfaction always leads to disenchantment, whereas self-denial keeps a perpetual glamour over our desires.

Whether the Founders of Orders intended it or no, the mortifications prescribed in their holy institutions are precious antidotes against the disenchantments of life, as well as penances; and this is an excellent measure of psychological hygiene. The result of observing their rule is that nuns find both natural and supernatural happiness; they do not understand the philosophical reasons for this, but they reap the benefit, and that is sufficient. Such calculations of course are far from their thoughts. It is none the less true that a frequent obligation to keep silence gives a zest to the mildest conversation, in the same way that habitual frugality adds a succulent flavour to the plainest of food. Particular friendships and tête-à-tête conversations out of recreation time being forbidden, the charm of conversation is preserved intact. When we are not allowed to fully probe the hearts and minds of others, it becomes possible to believe in their sincerity and depth. Is it not a species of vanity to believe that we can always go on interesting the same person and be of interest ourselves? An electric fuse is not more quickly spent than we are, and our little stock of ideas and interesting sentiments is soon exhausted. For man, that limited being of boundless yearnings, happiness, like strength,

is only to be found in restraint, moderation and sobriety.

It is sad to realize how limited are our powers of enjoying what we love, our powers of helping and consoling, our powers of grasping and assimilating new ideas and fresh knowledge, our power of creating the beautiful in art. In life as in art we must never strain execution to its utmost extent, for work produced by exhaustion is repellent, though our instinct is always to go beyond our strength. We must learn how to stop at the right moment.

Alas, how our weak will is overwhelmed by the bewildering attractions of the unknown! A tangible rule followed by flesh and blood close to us is necessary to keep us within bounds. This is indispensable, for we have of ourselves so little joy, light, or comfort, to give others, that we can only keep up our influence and strength as long as they believe we have anything, and, alas, at best it is so little, to give! One of the bitterest things in life is to realize that nothing human lasts or endures; that we have only the passing moment. We watch in ourselves and others the slow decrepitude and dissolution of feeling. Physical decomposition is horrible, but the disintegration of our feelings is sadder still. In the former, only the substance of our personality decays; in the latter, that identity itself dissolves and rots away. In youth it is an effort not to love creatures too well, so much charm and promise do some of them offer us; later, alas! the effort is to feel the proper amount of interest in them, so insignificant and vapid do they seem. Do my readers remember the exquisite lines of Père Gratry, in which he so

touchingly describes the sadness of the human heart in the autumn of life, when hope and expectation have been disappointed? "Yes, I feel indifference coming! I already understand in myself the cruel insensibility and the absolute selfishness of so many old people. In my youth the mere sight of a stranger entering into my life made my heart beat; I looked and hoped: I thought I had found a treasure! Have I not learned, by long experience, to expect nothing of any man? I know the limits of their hearts and minds. What have I to do with strangers? Do any men shape their lives on any definite basis? Do those who once loved me still remember me? Often I have thought that I was really received into the soul of another, really beloved! What remains of that hope? I am no longer lovable or loving. In a short time I shall be alone, no one will hope for anything more from me, and I shall no longer hope anything from others. Yet I know that we nearly always grow old alone, and die in solitude!"*

One great cause of discontent in men is that life is a means not an end. Death is not the destruction of human existence; it is, as the humble little catechism so profoundly says, "a transition." This transition is an integral part of a great plan, of which earthly life is but the beginning and preparation, and eternity the conclusion and end. In truth, I hardly venture to repeat such truisms, though it is only on the surface that they sound hackneyed. Of course, we learned all this before our first Communion, but are we quite sure that as the words engraved themselves in our memory, the important ideas for which they stood entered sufficiently

*Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame."

into our mind to practically guide our ideas and feelings? I think not. The grosser side of our double nature is always apt to see life as an end in itself; hence our discontent and sadness, for we feel it always slipping relentlessly from our grasp, and each hour defrauds us. Only the thought of eternity and death courageously faced can remedy this. In the world this thought is dreaded and shunned; we put it aside as much as possible. We try to forget death; we avoid mentioning it, or if we do, we speak of it as of some malevolent power that can be appeased by profound homage when it approaches us.

" 'Nearly all nature is in a trance,' says Bossuet. 'Man sleeps, and dreams that he is alive. The son of earth is lulled by his senses, as a child in its mother's womb; he forgets that he must wake and come to the birth. The soul sees, but the world is dim even to the soul and not transparent up to God. Man's view is limited by the visible horizon, and cut off by the outline of a tangible earth. He believes that space and atmosphere are void, the stars dust and the sun a lamp! He does not remember that the earth revolves and will disappear; he believes it to be eternally immovable. On this solid basis the child of earth seeks to build an imperishable dwelling. He will live and reign on earth, and enjoy his possessions. Then he sells his soul; it becomes enslaved to the yoke and traditions of this world; riches, pleasures, honours, as they are considered, and the usual means offered of gaining them; to all these things the soul is given up completely, with all the heart and strength of man. Then the old procession of the satellites of this world take possession of the soul: ambition, avarice, envy, pride, hatred, fear, hope, rage and despair, leave

it no peace. These violent passions rend it, while underneath goes on the insidious putrefaction of sensuality. Are not thousands and thousands of souls thus destroyed before our eyes? With eyes and ears closed, they go on their fatal way till overtaken by death!

"Happy the soul which foresees such an ending, while yet at the outset of life! Happy the vigorous souls and lucid minds that look to the end of the journey! Happy they who, watching men run like sheep to destruction, draw back, and choose the path which leads to life! Happy, I say, are the clear-seeing minds who look, and think, and meditate on what the others forget. What is their meditation? Death! Happy they who understand that they are moving on, who do not believe themselves for ever fixed to solid earth, and who see life as it is, a rapid transition ending in death! A man rouses himself from his dream. He wakes; his eyes open; he sees things as they are, the beginning and end, life and death. Perhaps he does not understand. Perhaps he looks on death as nothingness, neutralizing and effacing all that is vital. But newly emancipated from the gross joys of the senses, the soul is empty, hungry, wretched, and seized with fear at the terrible image of inevitable death! It plunges back, affrighted into sleep; but its slumbers will only be feverish and fitful, until it finds a basis for its waking life.

"This basis can only be wisdom, true science, real faith, union with the one thing that is stable, the one thing that never passes, the one thing that knows not death. If the soul, in its despair, reach God; if at this supreme crisis, it rise instead of falling, then another state has begun. But how can we

explain what this other state is? It is the recognition and real understanding of Death. It is life lived beyond its present limits."*

"Yes, but we are afraid to die. This is useless, for we have to die. Whatever comes, we have to die. What have you to lose? Why not use death to glorify life? Why not enlarge the soul's outlook, and even in this world overleap the barriers of this short and limited life? But fear keeps men enslaved to the present, bound within known limits and fettered with all their ancient chains. The mass of men who turn their backs on death to escape it are death's flock. Death is the shepherd, and human beings the sheep. The more they turn their backs, the more death strikes! The quicker they run, the heavier is the burden bound on them! But what shall we say of the man who turns round, faces death, and makes towards it? Understand this thoroughly: the man who faces death is really going away from it. That is manifest. He meets death, it is true; but freely, with his eyes open, upright, and face to face. He passes through death, and death has passed for him. Death is God's repelling force, it drives back void and nothingness, wickedness and lying, from the soul which it has separated from the body, and takes away the innate and acquired obstacles which keep our souls from God. Death breaks down our barriers and leads us across the breach. We pass to the other side, free, purified, regenerated; to enter the central sphere of attraction, and the region of evergrowing life."†

My readers must forgive this long quotation. Or rather they ought to thank me for these lines

* Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame," vol. I.
† Gratry, "De la Connaissance de l'Ame," vol. II.

which are the perfection of thought and expression. Père Gratry, from whom I have so largely borrowed, is seldom quoted or studied as he deserves to be. Among the few who know his work, some say, "His remedies are too high and inaccessible." This is a great mistake. The humblest nun in a village convent daily puts into practice this high philosophy, though I am quite ready to admit that she may not understand it in theory. The observance of the Rule teaches nuns and obliges them to believe that life is only a temporary means to an end. They have to consider eternity in a practical way, as the sole aim of existence, to be kept constantly in view, with little interruption from passing interests. Peace and harmony fill their hearts, there is no conflict between their aspirations and the passing flight of all things, a flight which approaching age would vainly try to stem. It is true that the love and possession of God, to which tend all the efforts of religious life, seem to rise ever higher and higher out of their reach, but their goal grows ever clearer and more beautiful to their untiring gaze. This is life "in religion": detachment from surrounding objects, attachment to the real aim of life, the aim that gives it true worth and meaning, self-control, moderation in desires, complete development of the soul in all its powers. Surely in all this there is indeed nothing opposed to reasonable human nature. This is why nuns who "seek first the kingdom of God" have "all the rest added unto them"—all the rest, that is to say all they can have in this world: peace, deep happiness and joys which are rendered stable by that indispensable renunciation and restraint which we so seldom know how to impose upon ourselves.

¶ IV. Living with the Blind

LIFE is influenced far more by outward impressions than by reason, and among them, as I have said before, those of sight are the most vivid. That is why people do not stop to consider whether blindness be the worst of all afflictions; they instinctively dread it more than any other, perhaps because it cannot be hidden and it so completely isolates them from the outer world. The dread of becoming blind makes people shrink from mixing or even meeting with the blind. Of course it is well known that it is far more distressing to live with imbeciles or the insane, or with anyone dying of an incurable disease. But sight is so apt to seek sight that the first impression of closed or lifeless eyes is like death, and nothing strikes us as so sad as a group of blind faces. It would appear that to those who have never associated with the blind the prospect of living with them is really alarming. They imagine an extraordinary world peopled with unhappy shadows, with ideas and language apart, a world of difficulty where nothing less than a daily, hourly sacrifice can give the poor victims what they require as necessities. This imaginary idea and the desire of immolation is what attracts some souls who are eager for self-sacrifice, and enrols them among Mère Bergunion's daughters. They are much surprised later on to find themselves sometimes assisted or waited on by blind women, or when, for instance, they first hear a blind nun read aloud in the refectory.

But if life among the Blind Nuns, who are specially chosen, is not what they feared, what of the other inmates? Certainly self-abnegation and complete devotion to duty and the daily task are necessary everywhere, and I do not pretend that those Nuns of St Paul who can see are not called upon to practise these excellent virtues. I merely mean to say that blindness does not expose them to any especially dreadful ordeal. To leave abstractions and come to details, we find that in all that concerns material life, cooking nuns, linen-keepers, housekeepers, portresses or collecting sisters, need no more and no less perseverance in their daily tasks of making soup, washing and mending, keeping accounts, dismissing troublesome visitors and climbing the staircases of likely benefactors, than do nuns who are similarly employed in orphanages or refuges in no way connected with the blind.

That is all very well, you may say, but what of personal association with the blind? That must require so much patience and self-sacrifiee. Are they not difficult to get on with; sour, bad-tempered, depressing? We must distinguish between those who were born blind or became so in childhood and those who lose their sights as adults. Blind children have the faults common to childhood. Atavism, health, early training, and contact with other children of the same age affect their dispositions far more than does their affliction. Blindness, when it comes before adolescence, rarely affects the moral character; later it is different, when projects for the future, hopes and habits have to be abruptly relinquished. Rarely can a blind person resign himself until many years of struggle and painful disappointment have passed; he is out of his bearings in

every sense of the word; the moral ordeal is severe and may very seriously affect his character.

The blessed refuge of St Paul's is open to such poor derelicts, and, indeed, it has a special mission to them, a task full of loving tact and sympathy. It is necessary to fight against the despondency which threatens to overwhelm the newly blind. They do not try to make up for sight, because they always hope to recover it and find it so difficult to do without it. They feel a kind of shame and humiliation in their affliction; they are conscious, far too conscious in fact, of an inferiority and dependence which is really more felt by themselves than those about them; such feelings must sadden, but need not humiliate. They shrink from entering an institution for the blind, fancying that such a step will aggravate and render their blindness hopeless, whereas it is their best remedy—that is to say, the surest means of learning to be independent. Naturally, to find oneself in a house where no one can see lessens to a great extent the sense of inferiority and shyness; then, contact with blind people who can easily do a great deal that one had thought impossible, gives confidence, and life does not look so hopeless as before. Victims of recent blindness cross the threshold of the Rue Denfert Convent with great apprehension, and for the first few weeks require the greatest care and devotion. We have seen that blind children require to be taught quantities of things which normal children pick up themselves without effort or lessons. Often such children have been neglected in their homes, and have to learn everything down to the humblest details, but only a few nuns are told off to such duties as this entails.

There are several ways of looking after young or adult blind people; if all these are praiseworthy for their motives, some are open to criticism as producing questionable results. Some people who live with the blind imagine that it is best to do everything for them, not leaving them the initiative or the trouble of making a single movement; this is a serious error, for by waiting on blind people to this extent, we make them slaves as well as ourselves.

Other more ingenious persons think it a mark of delicate sympathy to push towards them without their knowledge anything they want or are looking for, so as to "keep up the illusion of finding it alone." This forethought is more kind than wise; first of all, the blind person can hear, if he cannot see, and in many cases will detect the pious fraud; nothing is sadder than to find ourselves deceived, even with the kindest of motives; it is treating us as children or as degenerates, and with all the will in the world to make us forget our infirmity it recalls it, by touching us on the sorest spot of all. Further, by acting in this way, we do not learn, or become accustomed, to find anything for ourselves.

No, this is not true forethought; real, enlightened, efficacious devotion consists, as I have said before, in rendering a blind person as independent as possible. To obtain this result, we must guide and help him with the utmost kindness and patience, as often and as long as it is really necessary, but no farther. Real consideration for the blind is shown by being very tidy, always replacing objects and furniture in the same place, and never leaving unexpected obstacles in the way; half-open doors, household articles (such as brooms, jugs and buc-

kets), when forgotten, in passages, are the greatest impediments to the blind; nothing warns them of the sharp edge of the door, which they have charged against, nor the bucket half-way up the stairs, which they upset as they fall over it.

We must be always ready to use our eyes for blind people when they really require aid, but the greatest kindness is to help them to dispense with assistance as much as possible. Say you are in the same room with a blind person: you see that he is looking for some object which has either been moved, or is where he cannot find it; the best plan is to sit still and tell him where the object is, even if rather difficult to find; firstly, because he will be delighted with his own success, and secondly, because he will find it more easily next time. It has been said that the truest charity is for the rich to enable the poor to help themselves; this is very true, and the real duty of the man who can see, and who is always rich compared to the blind man, is to make the latter independent of help, not out of selfishness, or to flatter the blind man's "amour-propre," but because it is a manifest duty to relieve such a terrible misfortune.

Some of the nuns with eyesight excel in this; such was the dear Sister Mary Magdalene, one of the martyrs of May 4, 1897, as I have said before. From tradition, personal observation and the grace of God (the Nuns of St Paul add to the three vows that of devotion to the blind), she was wonderfully successful in her mission, which was to initiate the blind new-comers into an independent existence. People who are thoroughly accustomed to the blind gradually forget their affliction, and leave them to move about freely, without rushing at them each

time they do not go straight towards the right chair. They get to understand that in some cases blind people find it easier to move in a way of their own, and that to them the direct way is not always the shortest; often some landmark will be found by going in a roundabout fashion, as I have explained at great length in an earlier chapter. Officious fussiness is always unpleasant, and to the blind it may become more trying and inconvenient than even careless neglect.

When first the community was founded, blind and normal nuns used to be assembled in separate groups, so as to exhort the former to resignation and the latter to gratitude; now all goes smoothly, there is no longer juxtaposition, but fusion, of the two elements. Both classes of nuns consider themselves Sisters of St Paul—that says everything; and if preferences or special friendships were allowed in convents, they would most often be between a blind and a normal nun. On January 25 and October 24, there are general rejoicings; on the day of St Paul's Conversion the nuns with eyesight have a festival for the blind, and on St Raphael's Day the blind sisters return the compliment.

It would be a great mistake to imagine the seeing nuns as "Marthas," entirely taken up with exterior works; and the blind nuns as "Maries," perpetually kneeling before the tabernacle and choosing "the better part." A purely physical difference cannot make such a line of demarcation; some nuns who can see have more contemplative souls than some of their blind sisters. It is the interior appeal of our Lord that makes "Maries," and not the lack or possession of any one physical sense. Tasks are divided and portioned off according to each indivi-

dual's aptitudes; some very important ones fall to the blind, such as music, some branches of scholastic teaching, and training to the brush-work and printing.

In searching the annals of the community we see still more intricate tasks confided to blind nuns; a certain Sister Mary Amelia, whilst the congregation was unavoidably divided between Bourg-la-Reine and Paris, took the direction of the former group; Sister Mary Dosithea, treasurer, becoming totally blind, continued her avocation most successfully, being only assisted in the mechanical work of book-keeping by a young novice; the real management falling entirely on the Sister.

General opinion exaggerates both the sacrifice and the merit of living with the blind, but it would ill become me, personally, to insist on this. I should indeed be grieved if anyone could accuse me of belittling people with eyesight and over-praising the blind. I merely wish to give a just idea of the matter, and the following are the words of a woman who can see, and who teaches in a blind school, written to a nurse-teacher at Bicêtre: "People are always talking of our self-sacrifice, but it is really nothing to yours." This she wrote after visiting the school-hospital section, set aside for the idiot, epileptic and half-paralysed children of the institution. And indeed I know nothing so lamentable as these victims of terrible mental and bodily infirmities; they are hardly more than animals, and their souls are completely atrophied. But it is not because nuns with eyesight are not obliged to look after the blind, as hospital-nurses attend to babies or sick people with perpetual and unsleeping care, that their devotion is any the less admirable, nor their task less

attractive to souls in love with self-sacrifice. It would be a new theory for self-sacrifice to be gauged by the difficulty or horror of its task! It is quite possible to devote our whole selves in the most admirable way to a relatively easy mission, such as, for instance, the education of charming, gifted children; and on the other hand, people have been mercenary, selfish and self-conscious, whilst taking care of the most wretched and degenerate of creatures. God alone can judge of each one's merits; it is enough for us to know that there is a great deal to be done and suffered at St Paul's for the blind, and that those who enter are urged to "empty themselves."

Surely that appeals strongly enough to souls determined on abnegation.

CONCLUSION

The Future of the Congregation

IT may seem strange that after forty years' existence the Congregation of the Blind Nuns of St Paul should still be so small. It consists of one small house containing barely sixty nuns; and is very little known even in the religious and charitable world.* Some people might therefore ask if the community fulfils a real want, and if it has a future as a congregation or an enterprise? I have no doubt myself on this point, and I will end my book by giving my reasons.

Of course there is no question of such a development as that of the Sisters of Charity, the Little Sisters of the Poor, or any other congregation devoted to the care of the unfortunate of every age, children, adults and old people. Now that family life is so scattered and disorganized, out of every thousand inhabitants (especially in towns) at least twenty need to enter refuges or require in their own homes the daily care of persons outside their families. Hundreds of congregations, whose object is to look after the poor and sick, undertake this work.

As for the blind, there is only one to every thousand, or 40,000 in France and Algeria; out of these 40,000, a fourth may be considered as beyond want;

* A few months ago, the Valentin Haüy Association for the Welfare of the Blind opened a school at Chilly-Mazarin (Seine-et-Oise), the first which has ever existed in France, for those backward or idiot children who are ineligible for any other institutions. The Association have asked the Nuns of St Paul to send a few blind and normal nuns to serve this modest but most useful little establishment.

there remain 30,000, a serious contingent to require help. Out of 40,000 blind, how many girls under thirty are eligible as nuns? About 1,800. We ask ourselves if this number can be sure of enough vocations to develop the Congregation? On the other hand, is a special Congregation required for work among the blind? Is its existence justified otherwise than by the satisfaction it affords to blind girls set on the religious life? Would the charitable work of the Nuns of St Paul really answer to a want, if developed and multiplied? This seems to me the way to consider the question. Is there a tendency to increase in the number of girls who feel drawn to the religious life? Of course, if their numbers did not grow, it would be impossible to enlarge the congregation. Everything points to such an increase. Every day more little blind girls enter special schools, and all these schools give them an essentially religious education. A still greater number of blind, trained from childhood and brought into contact with others (and this may suggest to them to devote their lives to the welfare of their afflicted fellow-creatures) with a much wider reputation for the Congregation—these would be very favourable conditions for increasing the number of vocations. Even now the Superior unfortunately cannot receive all the blind postulants who present themselves, because of the dearth of normal ones.

Are we to consider this as a definite state of affairs? Is there any very serious reason for this lack of novices with eyesight? It is mainly accidental, and quite remediable. As seven out of every thousand girls enter religion, why should not a few of them turn their steps towards our dear community, if it became better known? Why should not

such a devout and sympathetic Congregation find workers, as so many others do, for its own special mission? We live in a time of specialities, even in vocations and charitable work: people have preferences even in the forms of misery they devote themselves to alleviating. Congregations also are induced by the growing complexity of needs and interests, and the variety of knowledge necessary for utility in any one branch, to concentrate and define their work.

Although, thank God, blindness is not widespread enough to feed the zeal of such a charitable army as the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul, it claims enough virtues to call for, and utilize, a special Congregation. Hitherto our community has only looked after girls and women, who with the exception of blindness, are able-bodied and sane, a few old ladies and lay-boarders; but its aims might be much wider, as the Constitutions allow of any work tending to the intellectual, moral and physical welfare of the blind, whatever their age, sex or antecedents. Thus in addition, the congregation could start: Infant Schools for little boys from three to nine years old, workshops for apprentices, family boarding houses for work-girls, school asylums for imbecile and backward girls, and Homes for old people of both sexes.

Why indeed, should it not start special Homes for the aged blind? At the present time in France the following communities work for the blind: Sœurs de la Sagesse, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of Mary Immaculate, Dominicans of the Immaculate Conception, Sisters of Providence, Sisters of St Charles, Sisters of Mary, Sisters of St Paul of Chartres, etc., etc., they all vie with each other in

zeal, but the fact remains that they have not been specially trained for the work. Now our Sisters of St Paul, on the contrary, are naturally and supernaturally fitted for it; their special vow, their graces and the mere fact of blind and normal nuns having lived only for the blind from the beginning of their novitiate give them every facility for acquiring all the necessary technical knowledge.

It is generally recognized that for teaching blind children and training adults in all the mechanical groundwork of a trade, blind people, and still more blind nuns, are the most useful. But when we have got the teachers and the forewomen, eyesight is necessary to examine certain details which the blind woman may miss or take too long to execute; this is where nuns with eyesight, and accustomed from the novitiate to mix with the blind, are so invaluable.

It would be unwise to have a monopoly of either blind or normal sisters, for emulation is essentially wholesome to everything human, but still, when the Nuns of St Paul are able to have several convents, a good plan would be to relieve those establishments that only take care of the blind as an extra to their usual work, and would be very pleased to get rid of them. And even under present conditions there are many blind girls, widows, wives whose husbands have abandoned them, and poor old women whose sight is almost gone, dragging out a miserable existence, and perpetually trying to get into homes. These homes and refuges are always full, there are endless difficulties about being admitted, and often in the end the poor creatures are very uncomfortable.

Imagine what must be the entry and subsequent

existence of a poor blind woman, awkward, shy and miserable, amongst women who are mostly coarse and wanting in the rudiments of refined feeling, a population presided over by a "fin-de-siècle" matron who neglects her business, and whose thoughts are miles away! Go into one of the huge hospital wards which contain more than a hundred beds, where a poor blind woman must feel lost! Watch her and her companions, and if any of them are kind and good-natured, there will be plenty to laugh and jeer at the poor creature, whom they never call anything but the "blind 'un." They play tricks on her and then say, "Oh, the blind 'un's knocked herself again; all the better, it's a very good thing!" And the idleness—days and days of doing absolutely nothing! Some, for the semblance of an occupation, are reduced to pushing a pin in and out of the quilt for hours together. And the loneliness, the forlorn heart-ache of feeling that neither to-day, nor to-morrow, nor ever on earth will they be anything to anyone, that all is over; they are only units and hospital-numbers for the governors to register!

Well, these sufferings, and I call them moral tortures, could be avoided in hospitals and special homes served by sisters understanding the care of the blind. No more jeers, as all around are also blind; no more idleness, the nuns know how to teach some sort of employment to all; no more forlorn loneliness! To the sisters, whether blind or normal, each poor inmate is some one, some one with a past, with aspirations, with an eternal future; a soul and not a bed-number! Could not the congregation also look after blind old men (whom Holy Scripture pities for having only "men's hearts and

hands" to minister to them), since it was founded to relieve all the sorrows of blindness? It is quite evident that ten or fifteen congregations of blind nuns in France (and why should they not cross the frontier like so many others?) with several abroad, in Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Canada, could soon be filled with nuns and boarders. Means would not be lacking: who would refuse a blind nun begging for blind children and old people?

We have seen that St Paul's has a place among congregations devoted to charitable work, and that it may and ought to increase. It remains to be seen (and perhaps to be logical I ought to have begun by this) whether in the society of the future zeal inspired by religion will still find a place, and whether hospitable communities will continue to have social duties as in the past. There are several classes of people who do not believe in the social future of congregations. First there are the evolutionists, absolute innovators who taboo charitable work and say with Herbert Spencer: "It may be doubted whether the maudlin philanthropy which, looking only at direct mitigations, ignores indirect mischiefs, does not inflict more misery than the extremest selfishness inflicts."*

"The poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shoulderings aside of the weak by the strong, which leave so many in 'shallows and in miseries,' are the decrees of a far-seeing benevolence."†

* Herbert Spencer, "The Study of Sociology."

† Herbert Spencer, "Social Statics."

Some even venture to push the theory to its final solution; such as M. Lapouge, for instance, who has the questionable courage of his written and spoken opinions, and wishes to improve humanity by helping to eliminate as quickly as possible all morally or physically defective subjects, which rank

Then come those who believe that humanity will soon have become so perfect that men will understand their duties towards each other without any metaphysical considerations, and in fulfilling them will feel such keen satisfaction as will amply repay them and induce them to persevere. The first of these two categories are essentially utilitarian materialists—and we have seen to what lengths their views lead them—the second are idealists. Given up to natural motives only, man can certainly love and help his fellows, but if he stops at these almost instinctive feelings, he will seldom go far on the road to sacrifice. Natural instincts suffice to hinder us from evil, and even encourage us to do good, but they are not strong enough to help us to really painful self-sacrifice under hard conditions. Only a transcendent motive can spur us to self-abnegation, the love of God urging us to exceed the evangelical precepts addressed to mere nature, and to obey the counsels of perfection which surpass it. Then come more practical people; they have no unlimited confidence in the mutual immolation of mankind simply from altruism, but they will not consent at any price to allow religion or religious to have any influence over modern society. So, as they know that religion is the richest mine of zeal and devotion, they propose to do without self-sacrifice or even good will, and to demand everything as a legal right. These are the exponents of special theories, who, although professing to love their fellow-creatures, would sacrifice them to their own particular views.

equally in his eyes. His ideal is to create vast homes on a new plan, to which poor, vicious and degenerate beings would be attracted and congregate; as these are numerous, the establishments would be like whole towns, and vice would be encouraged by multiplying opportunities of debauch, so as to hasten the work of natural selection.

Finally there are the timid spirits, men in Government appointments of a type well known in France, who with true Latin temperament prefer uniformity and safety to everything. They must have everything protected and sanctified by law; they believe that the State alone is rich, powerful, lasting and strong enough to supply every kind of assistance to every modern need.* When friends of the poor are such people as Saint Vincent de Paul, M. Le Prévost, Jeanne Jugan, or Mme Garnier, they begin gradually, on their own resources, to take care of a few poor people; they have no dreams of transforming humanity, but only wish to work modestly at the harvest of their heavenly Father. Then they seek for brothers and sisters to join their work, and a little congregation is born. With time and God's blessing it grows and alleviates much misery; it does real good without claiming to do away with all the distress that is in the world.

But when such a friend of the poor is a philanthropist, he immediately strives to act upon the poor in categories of those who specially interest him; he appeals to the State, and presents an address to Parliament proposing a law which shall bear his name and make him famous, if indeed there be any fame connected with anything which is often so ephemeral as a law.

I may say, in passing, that in our day it requires

* A governor of charitable institutions sends us the following words of a functionary of the Public Charity Organization: "'What is the use of all your efforts?' lately asked an inspector devoted to our cause. 'Can we not do all that you do? You are poor, we are rich; you meet with endless difficulties because you are so little known, but every one knows the Government. You are full of zeal and enthusiasm now, but the future of your work depends on your being succeeded by men as zealous. You are condemned to death, but Governments are eternal. . . . Government has incontestable advantages over you, and I cannot see that you have any over Government.'"

very strong faith in the State to be so confident; but some people believe in Government to an almost superstitious extent; they think that the State ought to settle all charitable questions, that Government has remedies for all sorts of distress, and that money will do everything. But what is the use of laws and rules, if personal example does not influence the wills, and consequently the morals of mankind? Laws, however well conceived, are only mechanism, they are not enough; we want men, and no rule, however practical, ever made a man; rules are no good without moral obligations, and for each separate individual to resolve to obey them requires an interior effort far exceeding any legal power.

In conclusion, we must ask ourselves whether the gratuitous and complete devotion of a few to the succour and help of their weaker fellow-creatures be really necessary to the welfare of humanity? Positivists do not think so. Their theory is that in days gone by the fear of hell produced great sacrifices; but that as this terror is bound to be "dispelled by the light of progress," almsgiving and self-abnegation will also vanish, and that nowadays we must have recourse to force, otherwise law, in order to defray the necessary expenses of those who make a profession of charity. "Modern society neither can nor ought to depend on the good will of a few more or less unbalanced ascetics for the bringing up of orphans and the care of the old, infirm and sick."

The Church, on the contrary, believes in human liberty; she believes that the self-sacrifice of individuals to the masses will be always needed and always forthcoming. She says to those who are not content to follow the Evangelical Precepts only, but

wish to obey the Counsels of Perfection, and to those who long to spend themselves in the service of their fellow-creatures, "Come, offer yourselves"; and knowing that the difference between ordinary kindness and the complete surrender of self can only be bridged over by supernatural aid, she places all her spiritual graces at the service of those brave souls. Then she turns to the world of Christians and says, "To love our neighbour as ourselves is not obligatory but of precept; therefore you are not required to give of your necessaries, but out of your superfluity," and she merely holds out her hands. That is all; and millions of money always have been sent, and will be, in answer to her appeal. In olden days they took the form of vines, meadows, forests, measures of wheat, oil or wine; now they are in copper, silver or bank-notes.

We must make up our minds that in the world, as it exists, all things cannot be regulated beforehand by law; fixed conventions leave no room for good impulses, such as devotion on the one side and gratitude on the other. Associations, like some men when they reach their full stature, are intoxicated with their own strength, knowledge and success; such men refuse to be under obligations to anyone, particularly to the living, such as relations or neighbours, whom they consider much inferior to themselves in intelligence and science. In the same way our modern associations that require rules, tariffs and payment for everything imagine that they thus escape the obligation of gratitude. Poor wise men! They do not understand that one of the few joys in this world is to give or receive all!

I know, too, that ideas germinate and fructify in the masses as well as in the classes; the poor, tainted and

intoxicated with so-called democracy, refuse any help which calls for personal gratitude to individuals. They prefer to be helped collectively by the State, imagining that this preserves their independence. But State help, always costly, and often badly carried out, does not produce results proportionate to its expenses. Charitable Associations and Societies, while sparing the susceptibilities of the poor, yet use rich people's money to the best advantage; they are therefore preferable; they respond to a necessity, and can have no better agents than religious congregations.

I cannot say that I absolutely agree with certain persons, who are so over-zealous that they consider charitable enterprises the sole remedies for all social troubles, and would think it reasonable to have a thousand orphanages, hospitals or refuges, in every town of 50,000 inhabitants. No, my ideal would be to protect deserving families against reverses, such as slack times in trade, illness or even the premature death of parents; because, if several members of the same stock live together, the family home can resist ill-luck, the family can bring up orphans, look after the sick or take care of the aged among themselves and become a kind of society where the patronage of the poor by the rich would be patriarchal, simple and natural. But this indeed is an ideal; in reality many people are obliged to devote themselves to the alleviation of distress. Hence religious congregations are and perhaps always will be necessary to charitable enterprise.

I have not alluded to the assistance and fruitfulness of prayer, a force of which our inattentive minds are disposed to make light, not remembering that the rivulet hidden among the mountains is as

essential as the fountain springing up in the market-place, since the former feeds the latter. And which of us, in our dark hours or moments of loneliness, has not remembered, with a gleam of comfort and hope, that while we suffer, pure and holy souls, nuns and children, pray for us who are unknown to them? Faithful to the beautiful old monastic tradition, they never let the day end without begging the Lord to have pity on "travellers, the sick and the dying." When social conditions were in their infancy the religious orders originated and maintained civilization; I imagine that only very prejudiced persons would dispute their utility in the past. Now that advanced civilization, facility of communication, material independence, impatience of control, luxury and many other physical and material causes have dislocated family life, and that individuals instead of families are considered as social units, on many occasions the individual finds himself stranded, because man was never intended to live alone or to be a law unto himself. He needs help and care at each extremity of his life.

Individuals have insisted on throwing off the shackles of family life: well and good, but then voluntary assemblages must replace natural groups, and what better substitute could there be than those animated by the spirit of faith?

Religious employed by vocation and choice in the service of the poor, the weak and the sick, will always do their work better than salaried functionaries, however well meaning. Doubtless human nature will always be the same, and even Religious may sometimes so far forget themselves as to speak harshly to those they are serving, when the latter are exacting, bad-tempered or ungrateful, "Only

the love of God could compensate us for looking after anyone like you!" Certainly, it is ungracious to speak like this, and it rarely occurs; but it is better than hearing lay workers say, "No one would look after you if they hadn't to get their living by it." Religious cannot be replaced by the laity, however devoted.*

How are we to get celibates outside the religious life, and how can we do without the manifest advantages of their state? My readers will remember, in Ibsen's wonderful drama, "Brand," the scene of the little presbytery garden in the icy wind, that poignant and human situation, where the Lutheran minister is between the terrible alternative of sacrificing his duty as father and husband to his duty as a minister of religion.

Furthermore, there is the confidence and security of those who have to apply to us. Do we not daily see persons in the world, after remaining unmarried for years and entirely devoting themselves to some work, suddenly marrying and remarking: "Nothing in my life will be altered. Where I worked alone, we shall be two, and the work will gain by the change." This is nearly always an illusion; children, illness, scarcity of means, all impediments which cannot be discounted, take up, and legitimately, the best of the worker's strength. Indeed, to be a father or mother in the fulfilment of every duty is sufficiently absorbing, it is the first and best of careers, but such a parent can no longer give others more than his or her spare time or cash; and chari-

* Doctor Desprès, in one of his speeches at the Municipal Council of Paris, said, "I do not say that nuns have a monopoly of self-sacrifice, but what I maintain is that they alone have the means" ("Les Sœurs Hospitalières," speech made Nov. 24, 1885). And indeed, only Religious conform to St Paul's words to Timothy: "But having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content."

table organizations cannot live on superfluities, they want more than that, and employ our utmost energies.

On the other hand, lay celibacy generally means an isolation in which mankind pines: "It is not good for man to be alone," and it is only a strong tie, like that of religion, which can bind several people in that unity of will necessary for any lasting enterprise. This tie need not be apparent, it need entail no special dress nor long binding engagement; in our day several of these Congregations are to be found, and though the common herd do not know of their existence, they are true religious communities and not lay societies.

Another reason tells in favour of nuns; when we come to the bed-rock of things, social questions cannot be divorced from moral ones; the real remedy for distress and the true preventive of unhappiness is the observance of moral law, of the Decalogue. Here comes in our "object lesson"; we see that only a nun with a definite religion (i.e., Christianity) can ensure such observance. Who is better fitted than a Religious to teach and practise the Decalogue? And as everything in this world is really in harmony, we find that the progress of individualism, which gives a new and undeniable function to religious Congregations, multiplies vocations as far as natural causes go; many young girls who are disinclined for marriage feel that if they remain single they will have no home and no family life. They realize that with all its drawbacks home life is a safeguard and a background, and not having natural ties of affection, they seek spiritual ones. Here, again, we see that the same tendency and movement which creates the want supplies the remedy; for which may God be praised!

The Religious Congregations are not approaching their dissolution, and true friends of the poor, even if they have no religious sense themselves, ought to rejoice to see communities flourish. If they themselves will agree to put the interests of the poor above their own social or religious theories, they will admit that none are better fitted to care for the unfortunate than those who have voluntarily renounced what is called "the joys of living," and have no other ties but these selfsame poor.

As for us Catholics, we must be singularly indifferent to the welfare of the Church, or very short-sighted, not to interest ourselves in the spread of congregations devoted to charitable work. One of the best answers to make to the Church's enemies is the description of all she does for bodily ills, since we cannot usually make them admit the good she does for souls. Mme Swetchine says, "I only grant one privilege to Catholics, and that is to excel every one else." This privilege becomes a duty in an age when everything comes under discussion, and only experimental knowledge is valued. Those who should see Catholics doing good more wisely and perseveringly than others, and the Church bringing forth fruits of such comfort as no other society can, would find it difficult to deny that she has within her principles and aids which are not of earth. In everything we look for "object lessons"; it is no longer enough, if we want to be understood and imitated, to address ourselves to the mind and reason only. We must also speak to the senses and to the eyes; everything is illustration nowadays. People look for reproductions, plans and engravings, in books where formerly no one expected anything beyond the text; inspired works of charity

upheld by faith are, so to speak, the illustrations and the credentials of the religious life. Lastly, did not our Saviour say, "Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? Otherwise believe, for the very work's sake."*

Courage then! there is a future before the Blind Nuns of St Paul. Hitherto the community has developed slowly, owing, as I have said, to a lack of novices with eyesight. How should they come, while the Congregation is so little known? Let us work to make it better known, and with the help of God postulants will flock in.

Is not the name legion of those young girls who seek for something beyond the frivolities of life? They feel that the only really important thing in the world, the only thing worth living for, is the development of their own and others' souls. More numerous than the world believes are those affectionate children who cannot enjoy what is legitimately theirs, without being haunted by visions of those who want for everything. There is but one cure for this obsession, to give themselves totally and without reserve, with their will, their heart and their possessions, so as to make human suffering a little less unequal. Some of these "called and chosen" ones must find their way to Mère Bergunion's convent; they are expected and will be welcomed with joy. Outside numerous blind girls who have a religious vocation are waiting anxiously to hear that a postulant with eyesight has been received, for this will open the gates of the "Promised Land" to one of them.

You who are in your right place, and who perhaps remember what it cost you to respond to that

* John xiv.

call which left you no rest—that call which you heard in the noisiest crowds as clearly as in your chamber alone; you who know the home-sickness for the land where the heart is, and where life could be really lived in its true significance; you who know how we love whatever reminds us of that blessed land with all that speaks of and recalls it, who know how we watch others starting for it; you understand, do you not, the real, if purely spiritual, suffering of the blind woman who cannot follow her vocation because circumstances and her affliction oblige her to live almost as an egoist, when all the time she is longing to sacrifice herself completely?

Those who have no vocation, and have never known what it is to have any great or generous enthusiasm, any profound longing to give up all the promise of youth to something or some one, to a being or an idea which is loved far above self, will smile at all this and murmur, "Chimera!" They need not smile. If they cannot understand, let them at least be silent before this high and beneficent desire; life may be completely transformed by the breath of the ideal, when self has been immolated. If this be true of the devotion of ourselves to any great and beautiful ideal, what must it be, when we have given ourselves to God? Is it not a joy to a girl who can see, and has longed to give herself to our Lord, to know that she is opening the door to a blind postulant, who for years has longed so passionately to realize her vocation, and enter the Promised Land?

I have now concluded a work which circumstances and the claims of the essentially active life I lead have prevented being all it should be; but I hope some of my readers have followed me to the

end. May they never forget the work of Mère Bergunion and the Abbé Juge; and may there be those among them who can speak to young girls of that dear convent as I should wish to, and make them love it as I do. I so long to attract souls to that home of peace and self-sacrifice! I should indeed be happy, if thanks to this book some young girl who longs to become the mystic spouse of our Lord, and to serve the afflicted, would say on the blessed day of her Profession:

"I give myself to the Lord Jesus and to the blind for ever!"

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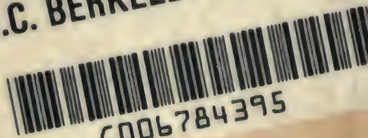

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