SISTER ROSALIE RENDU

1786-1856

The Story of over Fifty Years Devotion and Service to the Poor of a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

PLACED in the centre of Europe, with different races overlapping her borders, North, East and South, France has been in frequent turmoil for the past hundred and sixty years. Internal revolutions and external wars have spattered her history, and amid all the evils of those times, the Wisdom of God has brought forward a succession of saintly men and women to balance and rectify the doings of the wicked.

The French Revolution, between 1789 and 1799, besides proclaiming the Republic, had sought to nationalize the Church. There were Martyrs in plenty, who died for the rights of the Church. Religious communities of men and of women were butchered or dispersed, and the diocesan clergy were deported or compelled to leave their parishes, and seek temporary refuge abroad. Many of these went over across the mountains of Switzerland, and the house of the Rendu family was a stage of the weary journey for numbers of them, and a hideout for others.

The Rendu Family

It was a modest house in the village of Confort, named after a chapel of Our Lady of Consolation or "Confort," built by Cistercian Monks there on the roadside. It looked out over the valley to the majestic peaks of the Jura Mountain Chain, between France and Switzerland.

It was here that Jeanne Marie Rendu was born in 1786, the first child of this branch of the family which had its well-known roots back in the fifteenth century. Her father died when she was ten, followed by a baby daughter, leaving his wife with three girls to care for and educate.

Jeanne Marie made her first Holy Communion in the secrecy of the cellar, when she was nine years of age. In later years she recalled the pleasing risks of the Masses celebrated in the morning darkness in her home by her Parish Priest and by "the gardener, Peter," who was in fact the Bishop of Annecy; both of these were in hiding in the house.

Schooling and Vocation

The Ursuline Nuns had bravely reopened their boarding school at Gex a few years earlier, and Jeanne Marie was sent there, thirty miles from home, for a couple of years' instruction and education. Well- grounded in the elements of her religion by her mother, she enjoyed the freedom of its practice in this convent; and her willing nature benefited by the teaching given, as is evident in her capacities in after life. It was in Gex that she first saw the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, whose hospital there had been founded in 1660 by St. Vincent himself, shortly before his death. On one of her visits to Gex, Madam Rendu took her daughter to visit a friend in the hospital. The sight of the sick and their nurses impressed the girl indelibly, though she was not yet twelve years of age. She had been accustomed to help her mother in caring for the poor and the sick who called at their home by the wayside, even to the extent of giving away her best Sunday shoes to a barefooted stranger, and her nearer view of great human distress and suffering in the hospital beds made a stirring appeal to her generous heart. The grace of God was to add its force to her own compassionate nature, and soon bring her to make the gift of herself and her life for the service of the poor and suffering.

Novitiate

She returned home, helping her mother for two years, but with her dream of the future always in mind, until, at the age of fifteen, with the advice of the Parish Priest of Gex, in company with one of her schoolmates, she decided to join the Community of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. Their novitiate had been reopened in 1800 when the Daughters of Charity, scattered and tried by the Revolution, came together again to continue their charitable works for the people who had molested them. After their heartfelt farewells and a long, tedious drive in the stage-coach, the two Postulants were delivered to the Mother House on the 25th of May, 1802. Jeanne Marie then began her period of training and the consolidating of her vocation in charity, humility and simplicity. The change of climate from her mountain air and the

ardent life of the Novitiate threatened her health, so that she was transferred to another house in Paris, whilst still in the black habit of a Novice, and was given the name of Sister Rosalie.

Active Service

Her new home was in the street of the "Epée de Bois" or of the "Wooden Sword," not far from the Mother House and from St. Sulpice Church, in a slum area, with its crowds of people, its vulgarity and wretchedness, and its shops and markets along the dirty streets. She was now sixteen years of age, and was to reside in this dreary-looking quarter of the city for the rest of her days, going about doing good. Here the Sisters had a "house for relief," set up by the Government to distribute relief to the poor, who were very numerous after the disorganization of the Revolution. The seven Sisters also conducted a primary school, a dispensary, and a depot for clothing and linen goods, and visited the sick and the poor in their homes and hovels. Their services were so much valued by the local residents that when the Sisters had been brought before one of the revolutionary tribunals as "reactionaries," the men of the place gathered there and told the Judges that they were determined to protect the Sisters and take them back to their home. The Judges gave way, and the men escorted the Sisters back in triumph.

In the School

Sister Rosalie was first placed in the schoolroom. With a kind and devoted heart, her gay and bright disposition, capable, and experienced by the handling of her own smaller sisters, she found this instructing of children a pleasing apostolate, and gave herself to it in the spirit of the Blessed Virgin teaching the Christ Child. As the pastoral care of priests had been scarce and fitful for nearly ten years, she also became the catechist to many grown-ups at evening classes, begun for their benefit. After school she was allowed to accompany other Sisters visiting the homes of the poor to bring food, clothes, and all sorts of necessities. One astonishing experience she had at this time. Her Superior had been asked by the Archbishop of Paris to attend to the meals and care of a good priest, who, through no fault of his own, had become a victim of diabolical possession. Sister Rosalie went on one of these visits to him, and when she had swept and tidied the room where he sat at a desk, writing, her Superior said to her: "Say 'good-day' to Father and ask for his prayers." She was about to do so when, like lightning, the poor man sprang to the ceiling and ran around on it as if it were the floor, calling out: "Rosalie, what a lot of souls you will snatch from me." In terror, Sister Rosalie was out and away down the street in a moment. It was a startling event, but it was a revelation of the virtue of the young Sister and of the power for good she wielded.

In 1807, at the age of 21, she made her vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Service of the Poor, as a full member of the Company of the Daughters of Charity; she continued her school-work and her errands around the slum. Her cornette was a sign of comfort and charity wherever she went in the dirty, narrow streets and the low, verminous houses. No visitor was more welcome, more pleasant and charming; and no one was more happy and pleased to be serving the needy and the poor. Mishaps of all kinds came for her healing. One day she was seen leading a horse along the street. A strange sight, but it had a simple explanation. A man came to her in tears at the loss of his horse; he was a carrier, and his livelihood was in danger. She approached one of her benefactors. "I need a horse," she said rather shyly. "If that is all," her friend replied, "take one of those in the stable." But these were racehorses. "Well, then, you will have to go and buy it yourself, if you want a draught horse," the man said. "Send the account to me."

Superioress

In 1815, when she was only twenty- eight, Sister Rosalie was appointed Superioress of the house of eight Sisters in the street of the "Wooden Sword." She was young for such a charge, but her worth was evident and her capabilities esteemed. Her zeal was contagious, showing its effect in the house by the fervent, regular life of her companions, and outside, by their willing co-operation in the works of charity. In all the busy days of her life, first place was given to her direct duties to God in prayer, presence at Holy Mass, and the devotions normal to her Community. It was from this source that all her activity for others was guided and stimulated.

Her spirit of Faith never flagged, and she saw the spiritual aspect of every circumstance. "You should not lose a moment of your lovely calling," she said to a school sister; "you alone will teach these children to know and love God;

their mothers would never do it. . . . And remember that you are paid to teach them; if you do not do it, you will fail in justice." And again: "Since you will not have the good fortune to be visiting the poor, you can do good for yourself by cleaning the shoes of those who do, and who may not have the time to do it themselves."

She chose a strong young Sister to do the visiting:. in a thickly populated area, known as the "Gilded City." "You will have the best part," she said, "in this place. There are twelve hundred people there, living in huts of all sorts built by the rag- pickers. People who are without work, without clothes; many couples are not married and most of them come there through vice rather than by misfortune. There are lots of drunkards. Ask the children you meet whether they go to school. There is a great deal of good to be done among them by a Daughter of Charity." A policeman on duty met the Sister on her way. "I think, Sister, this is not your place," he said kindly, "it is hardly wise for you to come among these rogues. We ourselves come only in squads." On reporting this to her Superior, Sister Rosalie told her: "You have nothing to fear; the police are there to deal out human justice, you are there to show the mercy of God. Do what you can. God wants us to dig and sow; He will bring on the fruits; grace has its own time. Get the children to pray." Sister Rosalie had no qualms about her zeal, with complete confidence in the helping hand of God.

Her Character

A determined woman of strong will, she was kind and maternal towards her companions. She rarely gave commands, but rather gently begged her Sisters to oblige her. She asked their advice in the affairs that concerned them and their work. "If I wanted to know how to bark," she said in justification of her practice, "Would I not ask a dog ?" She had full confidence in their judgment, for they were, like herself, fully devoted to the work of God for His poor. She showed them many kind attentions and favours, seeing that their shoes were dried if they had been out in the rain, preparing a special dish for the delicate, or taking a spell in their classrooms to relieve them. Sisters did not like to be changed from her side, nor did she like to lose them. She said to Sister Melanie, who thought of going across to the Mother House for some family ceremony: "Do not go; you are tall, and when they see you they will be thinking of you for some other place." She was strong and firm in her management, but never severe; rigorous and thoughtful; understanding and considerate, though not soft; compassionate and forgiving, unselfish, and more tender than a mother towards the Sisters in her care. For forty years she was Superior in the one house, where she trained many Sisters and many Postulants, for it was a sort of place of apprenticeship. Sister de Verien, who planted the Company of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland at Drogheda in 1855, was among these; and it was from the house in Drogheda that the first Superioress in Australia came in 1926.

Some Undertakings

She had not long been Superior in the Rue de l'Epee de Bois, when she was summoned to the Mother House and given the message to remain there. She was engaged in sewing and at some work in the garden for several days, waiting to know what was to be her destination. Being asked did she not want to interview the Mother General, she replied simply: "I shall see her when she wishes to send for me; I have nothing to speak to her about; just now I have only to be obedient." She was sent for, and her Superior said: "Sister, you are a nuisance to us here; you may return to your own house." Humble and happy within herself, she set off at once for the Mouffetard quarter of the city and the poor and to the work she loved.

Her undertakings were advancing under her valiant guiding hand. She kept a vigilant eye on the children's school, for she valued their instruction and upbringing— always in accord with their social status, for she did not wish them to be overeducated, with ambitions beyond their reach and with a distaste for life among their own families.

As the girls grew up and left school to go to work, she encouraged them to come back on Sundays and Feastdays for some recreation, dancing and singing—and for her good advice. Her past-pupils were delegated to look after the younger girls in their first years in the world—they were to be "big sisters," and were formed into an Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Since good is contagious, these girls extended their charity to visiting old and lonely people in the district, talking and reading to them, bringing them some delicacies and doing their laundry for them.

The Day Nursery she established was dear to her heart, for it gave her contact with these innocent souls, and though she could not spend much time personally with the babies, she took care to meet their mothers and enquire

after their welfare and the practice of their religion in the Sacraments and the Mass.

As her charity embraced all ages, she began a night shelter for men. As many as eighty, old and solitaries for the most part, were given lodging. She gave them, besides, comfort and encouragement, appreciating the anxieties and the crosses of old age; and regarding them as near-candidates for Heaven, she instilled into them the patience and courage to go on in their hope of a blessed after-life. She had no complaints or rebukes for them, but always defended them in their faults and made excuses for them. If they took too much wine—"old men's milk" they called it--it was excused because they wished to forget their troubles and misery; or because, having no other place of recreation or comfort than the taprooms, they were led unconsciously to indulge in the bright, shining wines.

At one period of cholera, in 1832, Sister Rosalie gathered seventy orphan children in a few days; their parents were stricken down in this unsavoury quarter of the city, and the Sisters stepped into their place.

The expenses of these branches of her charity never worried Sister Rosalie. The generous open hand of Providence, through some human medium, secured the funds for the expansion of buildings, for the food and clothing of the boarders, and for the articles distributed to those in want. One month in 1838, two thousand people were given a daily ration from the "soup- kitchen" kept by the Sisters—several hours of service and a considerable cost.

Besides, she had always cultivated a childlike confidence in the Mother of God, appealing to her in all circumstances and trusting in her maternal protection. From their foundation the Daughters of Charity had been schooled in the devotion of the Rosary and in the belief of the Immaculate Conception, which gave special prayers and cult to Mary. Sister Rosalie was no exception, and her filial piety for Our Lady was always to the fore. It is exemplified in the advice she gave to one of her friends, whose wife had just died: "Make Mary the Mother of your children." Frequently she visited the Church of Our Lady of Victories to pray for special needs, but the shrine of Our Lady of Hope in St. Severin's Church seemed to be her chosen place of pilgrimage; it was near her house, and she could call there easily.

She lived in the days of the manifestation of the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, when the Blessed Virgin appeared to St. Catherine Laboure, one of the younger Sisters of her Community at the Mother House; and she saw this medal get its name of "miraculous medal" because of the graces and conversions and favours received through its use. In her own activities she was an ardent propagator of the medal and its devotion. And when she passed near the Mother House, after that date, she never failed to call to the shrine; on her monthly visit there she would spend as much time as possible in that chapel, interceding for her people, their needs and welfare.

Visitation of the Poor

The primary duty of visiting the poor in their own homes and garrets was never neglected. These were, in the words of St. Vincent de Paul, her "lords and masters," so for them she gave her love and service, begging her Superiors to send her more Sisters in order to relieve them the more. She instructed her new helpers in their approach to the poor, in the good offices and attentions they should show them, and in the ways of attending to their ills and sicknesses.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Among her other helpers were some men, university students and professors, who became the foundation members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. They were engaged in visiting prisons and hospitals and in rescuing foundlings, in their spare time, and had worked individually under the direction of Sister Rosalie in her district, visiting the sick and needy. There was a study-circle or "conference of History" meeting regularly in the home or office of Professor Bailly, of the Sorbonne University, frequented by students like Frederick Ozanam, Lamache, Lallier and Letaillander. It was at one of these meetings that someone complained in disgust: "Christianity is dead. You boast of being Catholics; what are you doing about it ?" After the meeting, Ozanam said to Letaillander: "That's true. Let us not talk about charity, but let us put it into action." At the next gathering it was suggested that a "conference of charity" be formed. All present agreed; Professor Bailly was very pleased, and he advised them to go to Sister Rosalie for advice and instruction about ways and means. The "Conference for History" became the "Conference for Charity," the first Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in 1833.

It was not far from the University to Sister's house in the street of the "Wooden Sword," where she had now spent 30 years. Ozanam knew the way very well. Sister Rosalie already knew him, and had warned him of his excessive generosity to the poor. She told him of one of her young men who had given all his clothes to a poor beggar, so that a friend who called on him in the morning found him still in bed because he had nothing to wear. A message was sent to Sister Rosalie, who supplied the necessary garments, and a note which said: "My poor friend, if you become a Bishop some day, you will give away your Cross and mitre." (The young man, M. Dupuch, did become Bishop of Algiers, and did give away his crozier and mitre in his generosity.) Ozanam learned this lesson of prudence, as he did many other things, from Sister Rosalie.

The Conference of Charity often met in her house in the "Wooden Sword." She gave them addresses and houses to call at, proving to them the need and the welcome nature of their activities. She also generously refilled their "poor-box" with alms, when it was depending solely upon their weekly collection among themselves. Moreover, she freely gave them her advice and experience, and imbued them with the spirit of supernatural charity and the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. The first Rule of the Society, published in 1835, is remarkable for its many expressions identical with those of St. Vincent, for instance: "Here at last is the commencement of the written Constitution for which we have so long yearned. It has had to wait for a long time. . . . But were we not bound to feel assured that God wished it to continue ? Was it not necessary to see what it could do, by what it had done already, before framing its rules and its obligations ? . . . Jesus Christ first practised what He was afterwards to teach mankind: "He began to do and to teach." We wish to imitate that Divine Model so far as our weakness allows. . . . We shall love our Society tenderly, and even with a greater affection than any other similar body, not because of its excellence or through pride, but as dutiful children love a poor and deformed mother more than all other women, however remarkable they may be for their wealth and attractions."—These are formulae taken from St. Vincent's own writings. Besides, this Rule adopts what St. Vincent did and did not wish in various circumstances as its guide in charity. The President General of the Society, Professor Bailly, in a letter to the whole Society in 1842, emphasized the source of these Rules: "They are not the word of man, or at least they are the word of a man who was made a Saint, a man whose sayings and whole life God has crowned with heavenly glory. You are aware, of course, that those thoughts are taken from the most intimate writings of St. Vincent de Paul, from the Rules which he drew up after many years' experience for the holy societies of which he was the father."—Where did these ideas of St. Vincent come from ? What was the channel bringing them to these charitable men, if not Sister Rosalie Rendu ?

She knew the first members of the Society very closely, and knew their goodwill and earnestness, their zeal and charity; they sought her aid and her counsel, and valued her experience and guidance. When the question arose at one of their meetings of branching out into a second conference, after fruitless discussion, the member who had proposed it, said: "It is not my idea; it came from Sister Rosalie," and the proposal was at once agreed to by all. It is no wonder that she is revered by the 16,000 Conferences throughout the world as one of the founders of their Society.

Daily Callers

It was reckoned that at times in her small office in the Street of the "Wooden Sword," Sister Rosalie interviewed as many as five hundred people in one day. What doctor or lawyer or executive would see as many ? There were poor and sick, rich and miserable; some coming for alms, others to give them; some for employment, others for advice. Prudence, patience, charity and good humour were active here all day long.

Seeing a client in the queue at her door, she called him: "I want you to do me a little advice; take this parcel to the address written on it for me." On leaving, the man was surprised to read his own name and address on the packet—a ruse of Sister Rosalie to cover up his shame and shyness and preserve his self-respect.

"Sister, I want to get a place as a singer in a church choir," was the request of one caller, and forthwith he began to sing. "You sing very well," she said, "but I imagine you have sung in the taverns oftener than in the church." "Oh, well, I do take a glass with my friends, but it is not a habit," was his simple admission. "Well, then,' she replied, "I'll give you a recommendation to the Parish Priest, but, though I would not forbid a small taste after you have sung the Lord's praises, do not take anything beforehand."

A printer who had lost his sight was brought by his friend and guide to visit her. He remained cold and surly and

was sarcastic about her work. She called in some children and introduced them, asking him to give them from his experience the benefit of his advice regarding their futures. He was touched, and finding this an avenue for helping others, became a frequent visitor.

A lady in mourning, who had just lost her daughter in death, was sent one day by the Archbishop. Sister Rosalie sympathized with her, then asked her if she would take some bread tickets to a few poor families. "You can write your daughter's name on each, and it will be she who gives them." The sorrowing mother took the messages, and found other people worse off than herself—a field for work which she set herself to cultivate, and thus secured peace and consolation for herself.

A lady who had given her valuable ring to one of the needy persons she visited at the instigation of Sister Rosalie, came one day to complain, for, when she had called back, the woman, instead of having pawned the ring, was wearing it sparkling on her finger. Sister was plainly amused. "It is not a serious affair, Madam," she said, "you must forgive her; perhaps the wearing of this ring is the only pleasure she has had in her life."

At her desk one day, Sister Rosalie was listening to the story of a poor neighbour, telling of her troubles. Her quick eye noticed that the caller was feeling the cold. "You are cold," she said, "you need to wear more clothes. Wait till I see," and she went off to return with a sound, warm petticoat. "Put that on, and you will feel better," was all she said. . .. But as the day wore on Sister Rosalie became pale with cold herself, for she had robbed herself to meet this need.

Among her visitors she had Bishops and Generals, Ministers of State and the Police, and on one occasion in 1852, the Emperor Napoleon III and the Empress came to thank her for her universal charity to the Parisians. As General Cavaignac, the Chief of the Army, was talking to her one day the Angelus bell rang from the local church. "Shall we say the Angelus together ?" she asked, and, of course, they did.

Revolutions and Refugees

Living in the heart of Paris from 1802 till 1856, Sister Rosalie could not escape contact with the Revolutions there in 1830 and 1848, and she proved her heroism again and again in these events. In her quarter of the city, the rising was not general in 1830, but that did not prevent her house being used as an ambulance station for the wounded of the regular army and the rebels. She knew many of them on both sides personally through having helped them in her charity through the years. Her courage, her gratitude and her reputation are well emphasized in an account of one of her exploits. A certain Joseph Bavcoffe, a compatriot and friend of the Rendu family, who had been an officer of the Polish Lancers with Napoleon in the retreat from Moscow, and was now an officer of the National Guard, and a benefactor and frequent visitor at the house in the Rue d'Epee de Bois, was reported missing during the July Revolution. His wife came to Sister Rosalie to ask her help. The Sister set off at once alone through the barricaded streets, risking the flying bullets, climbing over the barricades, enquiring for Commandant Bavcoffe. Her cornette was familiar to the rioters and the soldiers, and admiring her hardihood, they allowed her to pass on. She crossed the River Seine into the centre of the city, all in turmoil, and in front of the City Hall was told that the Commandant was among the dead in the Square. With help, she recovered him from the heap of corpses, to find that he was still breathing, although riddled with shot in the chest and with the fingers of his right hand slashed off. She had him quickly carried back to his home, where she left him in the care of his wife and children to be fully restored to health.

With the same calm and fortitude, she stopped a gang of incendiaries, who were about to burn down an orphanage, by her very presence and kind words to them; they even organized a guard for the house, and the order was given: "No noise; these little girls and their guardians must be allowed to have their sleep."—It was no ordinary person that could exercise such influence and command such regard and respect.

She gave sanctuary to another notable person in these days. Her friends let her know of plans for attacking and sacking the Archbishop's residence, near Notre Dame Cathedral. This was done in February, 1831, when the house was pillaged and the books, pictures and furniture thrown into the river; the building itself was ruined and partly demolished. Meantime, following her timely warning, Archbishop de Quelen was in the quiet safety and solitude of Sister Rosalie's house in the street of the "Wooden Sword."

Further small risings in 1832 and 1834 brought more care to Sister Rosalie. Some persons took refuge with her, and she provided them with means of escape. One was an officer of the Royal Guard, now sought by the police on

account of his defection from duty. Order was given to arrest Sister Rosalie for her complicity, but the officer appointed to do this remarked to his Chief that this would surely bring on another upheaval in that district, since she was a power to be reckoned with there. So the Prefect of Police himself went to visit her. Making him wait whilst she attended to her aged and poor, she asked what she could do for him. He did not want a service, he said, but came to do one. "You are seriously compromised by helping the escape of an ex-Royal Guard officer; you acted in violation of the law." "Sir," she replied," I have no flag; as you know, I am a Daughter of Charity, and I try to help the unfortunate everywhere I meet them. If ever you yourself are hunted and ask help of me, it will not be refused." She was impenitent and clung to her point of view, for she could not think of herself as being in any least way responsible for bringing about any of the common executions or of bringing further misfortune to any of her children.

Revolution of 1848

Unrest continued for some years, in greater or less degree, until social conditions in 1848 brought complete lock-outs from the workshops, and one hundred thousand men were out of work and wages. In June rebellion reached its height. General Cavaignac was in command of 50,000 regular army troops, who in a few days quelled the revolt, in which 16,000 men perished. The General had sent a warning to Sister Rosalie that her quarter of the city would be bombed, and offered her and her Sisters a safe conduct out of the area; she and they gratefully refused it, preferring to stay among their poor to assist them in their time of terror.

In these hectic days a barricade was thrown up across the lower end of the Rue d'Epee de Bois. In an assault upon it, an officer of the Mobile Guard, with his squad of men, had climbed over it. They were all shot down except himself. Alone among the rebels, he raced a few yards down the street, before they had realized the position, and into the courtyard of the Sisters. He was followed at once, but Sister Rosalie was there. She stood in front of the officer, facing his pursuers as they handled their rifles. "You don't kill anyone here," she said. "Well, we'll take him outside," one of them replied. But she stood firm, protecting her refugee. Their rifles were raised to shoot over her shoulders, when she went down on her knees in front of them. "In the name of my fifty years' service to you and your wives and children, I beg for safety and escape for this man," she said. The rifles were lowered and his captors departed. A picture that became a common ornament in the poor homes of the Moufftard Quarter represents this incident.

Sister Rosalie was not afraid to be out on the streets in this time of carnage and strife. "Why should I be safe and run no risk when my children are being slaughtered ?" she asked those who urged her to stay indoors. Archbishop Affre had gone on a peace mission with a white flag of truce to one of the barricades, when he was shot down by a stray bullet and mortally wounded. Her small figure moved around the fighting zones, and whilst other areas were still in battle, peace and quiet came to her district. "Have I not enough widows and orphans to look after, without you making more ?" she asked the men at the crossroads barricade.

Cross of the Legion of Honour

Not only were the people in admiration of her bravery and her zeal in doing good, but the Government also resolved to mark its appreciation. She was cited for the Cross of the Legion of Honour—the highest award of France. This was a trial for her humility, and she strove to have the award cancelled. However, she was duly invested and the Cross pinned on her collar, amid the great joy and pleasure of her friends and clients in the neighbourhood. After that she would allow no further reference to it, and never wore the decoration again. Later in 1854, the Emperor Napoleon III called to visit her, when he said: "You do not wear the Cross of Honour I sent you ? I will send you another which I hope you will wear." And he sent her a gold cross enclosing some relics of St. Vincent de Paul.

There were twenty years of troubled times, of incessant relief works, of sharing the misfortunes and calamities of her disturbed people, leading to this public recognition of her merits. But her service had been for God in the person of His poor and distressed, and it continued for another twelve years.

Her Last Years

As her years of life mounted, her health, severely taxed for many a day, gave room for anxiety. With spells of sickness of varying length during the 1840's, she kept her hand guiding all her varied undertakings. Around 1854 her

sight began to fail, and she had to rely in great measure on the attentions of her Sisters. An operation to remove cataract in 1855 improved her sight for a short time; then she became totally blind. A second operation was planned, but early in February, 1856, she fell gravely ill with pleurisy. The severe remedies of the time were tried, giving her reason for keen suffering, which she bore gladly and patiently.

She had always feared death and the Justice of God. It was towards the end of her days that she had a dream that impressed her very much. She felt she was at God's tribunal, where she was received very severely and her sentence was about to be given, when suddenly she was surrounded by a crowd of people wearing old shoes and stockings and hats, which they showed Our Lord, saying: "She gave us all these things." Then Our Lord turned to her and said: "Because of all these old clothes and things given in my name, I will open the gate of Heaven to you. Come in, and stay forever." The dream was a reflection of the sound words of St. Vincent: "Those who have loved the Poor during life, will have no fear of death," and Sister Rosalie gained calm and serene confidence during the latter days of her life.

Her malady grew worse. She was given Extreme Unction and her last gesture was in making the sign of the Cross, whilst her last words were: "My poor, my children! When I am no longer here, my God, please do not abandon them." After a short illness of three days, she gave back her soul to God on the 7th of February, 1856. She was seventy years of age, and now at rest after fifty-four years of ceaseless care and labour for her and God's poor.

Her life was not mere activity for its own sake, nor an outlet for personal energy or the love of command, but it was rooted in her belief of God's truths and promises; it was the supernatural growth from her prayer and meditations, from her fervent use of the Sacraments and of the common devotions of her Community, which inflamed her charity and gave her a constant outlook of Faith upon all the events and persons she had to meet; and whilst she laboured in the corporal works of Mercy, it was always the eternal salvation of souls redeemed by the Blood of Christ that she had in mind.

She lived in extraordinary times, for full fifty years of revolutions and risings and their aftermath, and in the ferment of one of the extraordinary quarters of Paris. How could her life be ordinary, dull and routine? New plans and new works had to be begun, without notice, in emergencies, to suit the changing social circumstances.

An intrepid soul, breaking her way through obstacles, facing difficulties squarely, winning her wishes and spreading peace; opposed to all evil, promoting charity and friendship and goodwill everywhere she went; forgetful of self and mindful of others; burning with zeal, guided by a well-balanced prudence; brave and fearless in the tumults of her time where the poor needed her succour; tender and patient in her dealings with her Sisters and her restless clients; moved by supernatural motives and urged by her love of God, the power of her whole life was drawn from the divine sources of prayer and of the grace and strength of God and faithfulness to her religious duties poured out in His Sacraments.

She had extraordinary qualities for her extraordinary life, and it is no wonder that, in February 1951, the Superiors of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul asked the present Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Feltin, to undertake the Introduction of the Case for her Canonization. This cause is now progressing; a prayer, authorized in Paris in 1936, is printed at the close of this pamphlet, asking God for the Beatification of this Servant of the Poor.

Her Funeral

It was chiefly the poor who buried her. There was no work that day for her friends in the Mouffetard Quarter. All gathered at the parish church of St. Medard and followed the hearse to the Cemetery of Montparnasse, where she was buried in the vaults of the Daughters of Charity.

Within a short time some of her friends got leave to give her a special grave, which they could visit, in one of the cemetery avenues, above which they placed a slab inscribed:

"To Sister Rosalie
from her Grateful Friends
the Poor and the Rich."

Unknown hands still place flowers upon it in gratitude.

Prayer to ask for the Beatification of Sister Rosalie

Lord Jesus, Whose Divine Heart, Furnace of ardent charity, so kindled the heart of the admirable Sister Rosalie Rendu with such a burning love of God and her neighbour, grant, we beseech Thee, that the power of her intercession with You may be shown by such great miracles, that soon, by the Authority of Your Church, she may be recognized and proclaimed Blessed; Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.

Nihil obstat
W. M. COLLINS, Censor Dioc.

Imprimatur :
✠ D. MANNIX,
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.
271h August, 1956