Chapter 2

THE ABANDONMENT OF INFANTS

Love much the service of those little children
by whose mouth God receives perfect praise . . .
Consider yourselves their mothers.
Saint Vincent de Paul

There have always been, and undoubtedly there will always be foundlings. As long as society is governed by the same passions and disturbed by the same crimes that have persisted through the centuries, the abandoning of poor little ones will continue to be a deplorable reality. That was true yesterday, and is true today. Thus, the establishment of homes for foundlings by Saint Vincent de Paul and his faithful co-worker was needed in their century, but more than that, it marked a step forward in social progress.

In Feudal Times

During this period of history feudal lords considered foundlings “an onerous burden,” since they incurred the obligation of providing for the upkeep of such children within their territorial holdings.¹

Little protected in the following centuries by patent letters, the condition of “bastards” remained precarious and extremely deplorable. Those little ones were excluded from the help given in hospitals to legitimate babies, orphans and the poor. The pretext for such discrimination was that their number would increase too rapidly. The patent letters of Charles VII under date of August 7, 1445, stated:

... there might be a very great number of them because many people would make too little difficulty in abandoning themselves to sin were they to see that bastard children were well nourished, and that they themselves would have neither the responsibility nor the care of them. Furthermore, twenty hospitals would not suffice to house them.²
The canons and the Chapter of Notre Dame had consequently to assume the charge of the foundlings of Paris, "whom they were accustomed to receive and feed for the honor of God." That fact is recorded in the letters patent of 1536, that provided for the foundation of the Enfants-Rouges Hospital.

In The Sixteenth Century

Infant mortality among the foundlings increased so much that the Parliament of Paris judged it necessary by the decree of August 11, 1552, to oblige the Lords, High Judges of the capital to contribute to the "feeding, upkeep, and sustenance" of the foundlings of the city and the environs. Besides the Archbishop of Paris and the Chapter of Notre-Dame, the following were included among the high judges of the city: the Abbots of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Victor, and Saint-Genevieve, the Grand Prior of France, the Priors of Saint Martin-des-champs and Saint-Denis-de-la-Charte, the Abbess of Montmartre, the Chapters of Saint-Marcel, Saint-Merry and Saint-Benoit.4

Reminded of their obligation, the Lords High Judges made plans for an establishment destined especially for foundlings. Houses of Port Saint-Landry "near the episcopal residence and at the end of a street leading down to the river" were put at their disposal.

The Couche

Parliament ordered an inspection of the establishment which the general public had begun to call "La Couche." The inspectors offered suggestions for needed repairs to the "Gentlemen of Notre-Dame" and approved their project in 1570. They also recommended that meetings be held from time to time so that the Lords High Judges of the city "might confer and draw up policies and regulations for the government and administration of the work." Three women and a gentleman of the bourgeoisie were selected to take charge of watching over, feeding, and raising those children. A treasurer was appointed to handle the money.

Political circumstances did not favor the implementation of the wise directives and the good will of the Parliament and of the Chapter. The
year 1572 witnessed the massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day. The siege of Paris, first by Henry III and then by Henry IV, prevented the development of this Christian work or at least its functioning according to the organizational plan established in the beginning.

In The Seventeenth Century

Historians are unanimous in depicting the situation of the abandoned children as very deplorable in the seventeenth century. Their plight was an evil that called for redress, particularly in Paris where it was most prevalent.

The upkeep of abandoned children still depended too much on insufficient and precarious help obtained through public sympathy. Bouchel, who lived in the early part of the century, thus described the ingenious originality with which appeals were made to solicit public charity:

On the left side of the large church of Notre-Dame there is a wooden bed fastened to the stone floor. On feast days, foundlings are placed on it in order to excite the people to charity. Two or three nurses standing near the bed hold a basin to receive the alms of the wealthy who pass by. The so-called foundlings are sometimes requested and taken by good people without children who assume the responsibility of feeding and raising those children as if they were their own.

Almost daily in the midst of a society known for its exquisitely polite mores, newborns were abandoned either on the sidewalks or on the thresholds of churches. Those little ones were sometimes already dead or dying of hunger under the eyes of passers-by. Others were picked up by the policeman of the district who carried them to "La Couche." Police records show that three or four hundred of these little ones were thus abandoned every year. In 1649, Monsieur Vincent deplored the fact that "not a single one had been found alive in the last fifty years."

Abandoned children were still being brought to the Couche but because of a lack of resources, the widow who had succeeded the first women destined for the work found herself in the impossible situation of continuing efficaciously the care and feeding of the said children. Furthermore, the two servants who helped her in this work took very bad care of the children. Without the slightest scruple, they handed them over to anyone who needed a baby for any purpose whatever. Such conduct
provoked some very sinister rumors among the people about the fate which awaited these unfortunate babies placed in that shelter. Saint Vincent de Paul has left one of the best descriptions of their plight:

These poor little creatures were badly cared for: one wet nurse had to suffice for four or five of them... They were being sold... to scoundrels who broke their arms and legs in order to arouse the compassion of passers-by and incline them to give alms and they were then allowed to die of hunger... They were given laudanum pills to put them to sleep.11

What distressed him even more was the deplorable fact that they died without hope of being saved since the widow entrusted with their care admitted never having any of them baptized.12

Saint Louise Alarmed at the Fate of the Foundlings

Louise de Marillac, Superioress of the Daughters of Charity, who had assisted the Ladies at the Hôtel Dieu since 1634, was overcome with emotion when she heard of what was going on in that house of “La Couche.” Her first biographer states that it was she who notified Monsieur Vincent about the conditions there.13 His answer was not long coming.

I intend, he wrote, to speak at length to the Procurator General about finding means to succor these poor creatures in the foundling establishment. Madame Goussault has perhaps told you about the suggestion that was made to me in that regard. We shall talk it over with you in three or four days.14

Collaboration of the Ladies of Charity

Louise and Vincent agreed that “to succor these poor creatures” would be impossible without the collaboration of the Ladies of Charity of whom Louise was one of the most important.15 They had already improved the condition of the children at the Hôtel Dieu. In 1634, for want of wet nurses, the Ladies had been obliged to resort to artificial feeding, and had some goats brought for that purpose to the Hôtel Dieu, because “they were easily milked for those little ones.”16 Later on, when funds were more plentiful, they rejoiced in being able to do more by engaging three wet nurses for the hospital and paying their wages.
Why should they not do as much for the poor abandoned children of the "Couche?" To propose such a thing in the seventeenth century to the ladies of the nobility and of the bourgeoisie was a very delicate matter. Vincent and Louise well understood the prejudice which branded illegitimate children as reprobates of their society.\textsuperscript{17} They would have to combat that unchristian attitude of the ladies and their lack of understanding of illegitimate children when they categorized them as fruits of sin in spite of the babies' personal innocence.

Monsieur Vincent spoke to a small group of the ladies inviting them to visit the "Couche" in order to discover for themselves the abuses that prevailed. He was convinced that once they saw the poor little ones they would be moved to assist them. Vincent was right as Monsignor Calvet testifies:

\begin{quote}
Those women of the aristocracy were big-hearted; but they were entirely out of touch with all this misery and had not even suspected the depths of its horror; it had to be shown to them in concrete, human terms \ldots When they understood and were really moved, they were capable of real generosity.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Such was the case with the foundlings for whom, by dint of persistency, the holy priest awakened a charitable love in the hearts of the Parisian bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Having won the confidence of a few, Vincent then assembled all the Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel Dieu. He had to struggle against the manifest repugnance of the greater number among them. He rose above all prejudice. He pleaded the cause of those little creatures of God with an enthusiasm that became contagious. The Assembly formulated a resolution to the effect that a tentative trial of the work with the foundlings would be made.\textsuperscript{19}

\section*{A Small Beginning}

The Ladies were of the opinion that no one was better prepared to organize the service of the foundlings than Mademoiselle Le Gras and her Daughters of Charity. Because of the shortage of wet nurses, they wondered whether it would not be better in the beginning to take only two or three infants so that they "might feed them with cow's milk." Vincent confided to his helper the consolation it was for him "that Divine Providence addressed Himself to you for that work."\textsuperscript{20}

On her part, Louise was only awaiting that approbation to receive into
her home the very first of those thousands of children who, throughout the centuries and in every country, would experience "the affection which good mothers have for their children" under the white wings of a Servant of the Poor. If, at times, Louise experienced moments of discouragement and repugnance at the thought of serving "crying and dirty brats, born of wicked mothers who gave birth to them while offending God and then abandoned them," she would regain courage on rereading the words of Saint Vincent: "You repair the offense of those wicked mothers who thus abandoned their children, when you serve them for the love of God and because they belong to Him."22

The saint who understood only too well the repugnance which such a work can make one feel, quickly added that "only the love of God can induce anyone to undertake it." Consequently, he urged the Daughters to proceed and even outlined for them the manner in which they should render that service.

"Give yourselves to God, my Daughters, in order to serve them with great charity and sweetness. Make it a habit of seeing God in them and of serving them in God and for His Love."23

Louise Better than Anyone Could Understand Their Misfortune

Divine Providence who had entrusted to Louise the care of so many adopted children had prepared her for this mission. Born in 1591, in the Marillac family whose name resounded familiarly in the court of Louis XIII, she had been weak and sickly from the cradle.

Weak

She was an unfortunate child who had experienced the effect of the maledictions of the Lord weeping over Jerusalem: "It will be hard on pregnant or nursing mothers in those days." (Mt 24,19) France had just undergone the miseries of civil wars waged over the succession to the throne of France. As a result, Louise was condemned to bear throughout life a very fragile and weak body which would cause Saint Vincent to exclaim in 1647, that he "considered her as naturally dead for ten years and that her only life was that which came from grace."24 Her physical
debility only increased her moral energy. In the midst of continual alternatives of weakness and infirmity which tormented her to the extent of bringing her to death’s door, she seemed to rise from her bed of agony morally greater and more disposed than ever to her life of suffering and work.

Orphaned Early in Life

Besides her physical weakness, Louise tasted the sad bitterness of never having known her mother. These combined to produce in her a spirit of melancholy against which she had to struggle constantly, and a ceaseless yearning for tenderness which was seldom satisfied. Her personality was tinged with a quasi-sadness so characteristic of orphans and with which she “might have degenerated into bitterness if religion had not taken a hold on her heart and made her find in her own sufferings a source of compassion for the sufferings of others.”

On January 12, 1595, when Louise was hardly four years old, her father had married Antoinette Camus. That did not give the little one the experience of carefree abandon in motherly arms, for her step-mother seems to have reserved all her affection and solicitude for the children of her first marriage. Peace and tranquility were not the keynote of the new de Marillac home because between the years 1595 and 1602, the family changed lodgings seven times. It is not known where Louise spent the first years of her life, especially after her father had married again. It is very probable that he wanted to withdraw her from a home where she was unwanted. When she was a little older, Louise was sent to boarding school at the royal monastery of Saint Louis in Poissy, where she had a cousin, Louise de Marillac, who was a member of the Dominican community and a woman of great virtue and of unusual literary ability.

Without giving either date or reason, the saint’s first biographer simply states that her father withdrew her from the monastery, a very extravagant and ostentatious dwelling for his more modest means, and placed her in Paris under the guardianship of a “clever and virtuous lady from whom she was to learn all that a young girl of her condition should know.”

The haziness that covers this period of her life makes it impossible to know where she was on July 25, 1604, when as a serious child of thirteen she heard the news of her father’s death. What is known is that in his will, Monsieur de Marillac stated that Louise had been his greatest consolation.
in life and that she had been given to him by God for his "tranquility of spirit in the midst of the afflictions of life."³⁰

One thing is certain. In 1604, Louise experienced a second time the sufferings of being orphaned. In later life when she spoke of her childhood she would say, "God made me know early in life that I must go to Him by the Cross. From the time of my birth and at every age, He scarcely ever left me without occasions of suffering."³¹

Such melancholic impressions of her youth certainly helped her to understand better in 1638, all the love which must be bestowed on those babies abandoned by their mothers and being entrusted to her and to her Daughters.

A Mother Herself

The Providential preparation begun in Louise's childhood and youth continued in her life as a Christian wife. Married on February 5, 1613, she experienced the joy of motherhood when she gave birth to a son, Michel Antoine, on October 18, 1613. She tried to raise and educate her son for God's service but God led him along another path which his mother, who loved him too tenderly perhaps, found strewn with more thorns than roses. Her director made repeated references to her maternal tenderness:

You have more tenderness, he wrote to her, than any mother I have ever known—I have never seen a mother so much as you are. You are not nearly so much a woman in other things. In the name of God, leave your son in the care of His heavenly Father who loves him more than you. At least, lessen your anxiety.³²

Louise understood the lesson. The love which nature had enkindled in her motherly heart in the midst of the fears, sorrows, anxieties, and consolations she experienced for her son Michel would last as long as she lived but that love would rise above the natural level and be poured out on all the poor of Jesus Christ in order to help them both in soul and body.

Spiritual Motherhood

In 1633, Louise was to experience another type of motherhood of an entirely spiritual nature. In her home in the Parish of Saint Nicolas-du-
Chardonnet, where some village girls had assembled, she suffered the pangs of birth that accompany the giving of life, be it natural or supernatural, as she brought forth the new society destined for the service of the poor. "What must she not have suffered of the love of sacrifice and of a non-earthly maternal affection which had its flame centered in the heart of Christ, in the bosom of God who is Charity itself."^33

After having asked Mademoiselle Le Gras to infuse in these good village girls the life and spirit of "Servants of the poor" and to teach them to substitute the Charity of Christ for the generosity of the century, Saint Vincent had, five years later, confided the foundlings to her motherly heart.

Thanks to her cooperation, a new work, whose benefits have not been exhausted after three centuries, was about to be introduced in the city of Paris, where all the miseries of the century would, one after the other, seek their counterweight in the charity of Vincent and Louise. Properly speaking they made no innovation with the foundlings. They picked up a work in its embryonic state and, thanks to their sense of organization, made of it a national work for the welfare of children.

Method of Helping the Foundlings

Realist that she was, Louise foresaw from the very beginning the great difficulties, the agonizing confusion and especially the great expense of the enterprise. In spite of that, she agreed to make a tentative trial at it and began it at her home on a very small scale, accepting only two or three children, for whom one wet nurse "could suffice for the time being and longer."^34 However Vincent had a wider field of vision and urged her to "experiment with a greater number of foundlings." The Ladies also were busy but each one according to her own fancy. Louise was not slow in seeing that this haphazard situation had to be corrected and she established a well-ordered plan to present to the Ladies. The latter agreed to the principles included but remained divided as to methodology.

The cause of much of the disorder came from one of the Ladies, a Miss Hardy, who wished that the Ladies might take charge of the "Couche" without changing its location or the procedures established there. A very strong-willed individual, Miss Hardy urged Saint Vincent to assemble the Ladies who upheld her viewpoint and had promised to help her. Vincent did not agree with her and thought it wise to seek the advice of his co-worker.
It seems to me that it would be better to abandon the resources of this house rather than to be subjected to so many accounts to render and so many difficulties to overcome. Let us establish an entirely new work and leave this one as it is, at least for the present. What do you think?35

The establishment of a new work, less restricted and more Christian, although more costly, also seemed preferable to Louise. The good priest found himself in the sad necessity of either displeasing Miss Hardy or of acting against his own judgment in his attempt to satisfy her. After much thought he felt it would be better to follow his plan, hoping that the offended lady might at least be reconciled by Louise's compromise offer of having a "wet nurse and some goats."36

The Ladies, who had seen for themselves the real misery of the poor little innocent ones of the "Couche," were eager to uphold Louise's proposal and suggested that the number of children accepted be increased according to the resources on hand. Twelve were then chosen, drawn by lots "in order to honor Divine Providence, not knowing what His designs were for those poor children."37

The First Infant Home on Rue des Boulangers

The Ladies rented a small house on Rue des Boulangers near the Saint Victor Gate. Thus, in February 1638, the Daughters of Charity became the mothers by adoption of the abandoned children of the capital.

The Ladies of Charity had stipulated that of necessity "that house should be under the charge of the Superioress of the Daughters of Charity and that she should spend seven or eight days there" so as to set the work in operation.38 Vincent, seconding the suggestion, wrote Louise at the time of the transfer: "Here is work laid out for you, on account of the transfer of the foundlings and the need for organizing their new establishment."39 Henceforth, Louise supervised the work and directed the details of this service with the most ingenious and constant solicitude.

The Ladies Maintain the Administration

For the organization of the new establishment, her first care was to draw up a memorandum which she communicated to Saint Vincent. This he examined at "two assemblies in the presence of the Lady Officers of
the Hôtel Dieu” and later used it as a basic text to set up a kind of rule. The Ladies only retained the right to defray the expenses necessary for the upkeep of the establishment and to provide for the temporal administration. “The direction of the Daughters, the nurses and the children who survived” devolved upon Louise.40

It was absolutely necessary to define the role of Mademoiselle Le Gras in the government of the work at its very inception because, from the very beginning she was to encounter difficulties with the governor of the house, Sister Pelletier, a woman of great independence, who would have done far better never to have entered the Community, where she stayed but a short time.41

That sister had been placed at the Hôtel Dieu in 1636, when Saint Vincent felt “that a person of rank or of high esteem was needed, as much for the contacts to be made on behalf of the children as for showing tact in dealing with the Ladies.”42 She had therefore already had experience with the foundlings brought to the Hôtel Dieu before being sent to the “Couche.” Was it on account of this experience that she was named governor of the House on the rue des Boulangers or was it on account of the generous help given to the work by one of her relatives?43 Documents of those times offer no solution to this.

Whatever the case might have been, once Sister Pelletier had been installed in the new lodging she wished to subject herself neither to the rule nor to Community life.44 Furthermore, having to render an account to Mademoiselle Le Gras “every week or at least every two weeks”45 of what was happening in the house did not please her in the least. On the contrary, she went to great length in appealing to ecclesiastical and civil authority, against either Saint Vincent or the Ladies of Charity, in order to have the administration and resources of the work entrusted to her alone. When Louise informed Saint Vincent of those undertakings, she expressed her confidence that “God would know how to derive glory from the unfortunate circumstances.”46

The Sisters

A day came at last when Vincent had the joy of sending the documents relative to the establishment to the Superioress, as well as the keys of the house. All was settled very cordially, if we are to judge from the fact that Louise entrusted the charge of the Mother House to Sister Pelletier in the
month of September 1638, for the duration of her absence from Paris.\textsuperscript{47} Louise spent the first few days with her sisters in the little house on rue des Boulangers in order to get the work under way, to see that everything was in good order and to regulate expenses. It was doubtless during this sojourn that she drew up the budget of expenses, which was a masterpiece of efficiency, containing minute details of the new work. Rent for the house amounted to 300 \textit{livres}, and the upkeep of the four nurses was provided for at eight \textit{écus} each, with an additional three \textit{sols} for bread, while the governess and the three Daughters of Charity were allotted only two \textit{sols} apiece for their bread.\textsuperscript{48} The care given to all details in the budget reflected Louise's foresight and her spirit of good order, which manifested itself so many times in the following years.

\textit{The House is Requisitioned}

As soon as Louise had left, difficulties of a different kind presented themselves. The military authorities were demanding some of the rooms in the house to lodge soldiers. When Louise heard of that, her maternal solicitude for the safeguard of the purity of the sisters and the children, as well as her desire to avoid the least scandal, prompted her to write to Saint Vincent begging him to appeal to Madame, the Chancellor's wife, "until your charity is able to obtain protection from the queen."\textsuperscript{49} The Chancellor's wife was unable to do anything in the matter, so the saint addressed himself to the Duchess d'Aiguillon. While awaiting a favorable answer, he felt it essential that his helper return "to spend a few days in the house of the foundlings."\textsuperscript{50}

That was a consolation for Louise to find herself once again among those innocent little ones to whom she had become greatly attached. What saddened her was not to be able to adopt a greater number of them. In spite of the sympathy which the work aroused, it was progressing very slowly. The responsibility of the undertaking seemed at times to go beyond the strength of the Ladies. There were but twelve or fourteen hundred \textit{livres} of revenue assured each year and the children were still but twelve in number. The Ladies were very faithful replacing "the empty places"\textsuperscript{51} as soon as there was a vacancy, but the mortality of the children was still very great. Louise was greatly distressed and Vincent shared her worries. "There may be something to what you tell me," he wrote to her. "We shall have to take advice once and for all as to what should be done in the matter."\textsuperscript{52}
The saint greatly desired her to be present at a proposed assembly of the Ladies. In spite of the difficulties of the work they both understood that the time had come when even more had to be done. The General Assembly of the Ladies at the beginning of the year 1640, would finally fulfill the hopes of the two saints.

1640: The Work Expands as All Foundlings Will Be Admitted

Vincent was eager to inform Louise of the good news. As she was absent from Paris at the moment, he wrote:

Oh, how necessary is your presence here. . .the General Assembly of the Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu was held last Thursday. Her Highness the Princess and the Duchess d’Aiguillon honored it with their presence. Never have I seen the company so numerous nor their witness to modesty so striking. At the assembly the Ladies resolved to take over all the foundlings. . . You may be sure, Mademoiselle, that you were thought of at the meeting.

It was necessary, however, to wait until March 30, 1640, before such an enormous undertaking could be implemented. The little house of rue des Boulangers was far too small to shelter all the poor little ones whose number increased constantly. Louise took some of the babies to her own home and others to the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity at La Chapelle, near Paris. She had brought back the babies whom the governess of the Couche had placed in the city, and from the very beginning, she organized the placing of the infants with nurses.

Foster Homes

Louise always endeavored to place the children in the country when finances permitted it. It is true that she kept some wet nurses at the Sisters’ House but only as a temporary measure in order to assure the immediate feeding of the abandoned infants. Since the wet nurses were few in number, it was at times necessary to resort to artificial feeding. Louise preferred that measure to confiding them to women who were not absolutely reliable.
In Paris at First

Even in the provinces the number of nurses did not suffice. That rendered the placing of foundlings very difficult. As early as 1638, Louise had been obliged to accept the wet nurse offered her from the Hôtel-Dieu because she had been unable to find any. Several times later she had to have recourse to other nurses in the capital itself, because the lack of nurses was felt greater and greater as the number of foundlings increased. Her preference, however, was for nurses in the country!

Then in the Provinces

On March 30, 1640, Louise was able to place the first four of her large family of foundlings with nurses living in the country. The journeys to the nurses' homes were made over very bad roads. Sometimes the trip had to be undertaken in poor boats or in bad carriages. There were times when the cold of winter or the hard work of harvest time prevented one getting to the women in the country who were frequently underpaid. But Louise was not going to let herself be stopped by those obstacles to providing nurses in the provinces.

How much circumspection she showed in choosing them. She felt that too many precautions could not be taken concerning both the quality of their milk and the quality of their morals. Her preventing charity moved her to think of the future of her adopted children, of a future that would depend in part on the care which they received from their nurses. Their bodies, their minds and their good habits would be influenced by their environment even at that earliest stage of development.

She reasoned that it did not suffice to snatch the children from death or even to watch over their physical development. It was necessary to provide them with a good intellectual and moral education to produce citizens useful to themselves and to society. She insisted consequently, upon the obligation of watching over the moral habits of the children. For that reason, she personally interviewed the nurses who presented themselves.
Recruitment of Nurses

Those women had to present an attestation of morality and undergo an examination by a physician to verify their age, the quality of their milk and their general condition of health. Louise required a certificate to be signed by the pastor of the parish or the village attesting not only to the regularity of the morals of the nurse, but also whether or not she was married and whether the child who had been entrusted to her was dead or alive. For that purpose, the nurse was given a printed sheet commonly called a “bull,” a duplicate of which the sisters kept in the establishment. During the first week after the arrival of the child in the country, the nurse was to present this bull to her pastor for him to put his visa on it. The usefulness of the information given on those forms can be appreciated from the article of the rules of 1774 which states that those forms “will provide good references for the Pastors who can have them presented to them either to obtain information about the children or to find out whether they are living or dead.”

Among the documents consulted for the present work, the oldest of the bulls stated:

On this day, March 30, 1640, we have entrusted for nursing Joseph Decheunin to Marguerite, wife of Pierre Hallard, residing at la Follye, also called Goumet. We agree to pay her 100 sols a month, to be paid in advance for the first month. Her salary will be paid the following months by Mr. X, when she presents this form with a certificate signed by the Reverend Pastor of the place, which will assure us of the child’s condition. Should the child die, he shall be buried without ceremony. In that case, the nurse shall be obliged to bring a certificate giving the date of his death and return the clothes belonging to the said child.

The above certificate may seem a rather primitive document when compared to the highly organized files of twentieth-century social workers yet it contains details which are not without interest. We cite this particular document not only because it is the most ancient one extant but also because it concerns a foundling confided to the wife of Pierre Hallard by Louise de Marillac herself. The community of the Daughters of Charity possesses as one of the treasures of its Archives a manuscript which summarizes the facts stated in the above-cited document. Louise had written in her own hand the details of the placing of little Joseph at the home of “Marguerite Plassière, wife of Pierre Hallard, living at la Folie
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near Gif," as well as details relative to nineteen other children placed in foster homes during the first month. Marginal notes in Vincent de Paul’s handwriting indicate both the order of the placement and the name of the place. The memorandum is then a living reminder of the two saints’ collaboration in this great work of charity.

Of those nineteen children only four were confided to the nurses of the rue des Boulangers: "Charles, who is said to be of noble birth," a boy named "Stephen" and two little girls. Most of the adoptive mothers were peasants either living in Paris or in the environs of the city, "a laundress named Catherine. . .the wife of a porter near the Saint-Landry port. . .the wife of the butcher Denis. . .the wife of Marin Baron, sculptor. . .Michelle Damiette, an acquaintance of Madame Souscarrière." The conscientious and professional manner in which the nurses were chosen makes one think of the regulation governing the early maternity hospitals established at the turn of the century or the guidelines for control in a social welfare agency.

The Visiting of the Babies

Placing the infants in foster homes became a more and more extensive undertaking. Louise was greatly concerned about following up the little ones who were at some distance from Paris and checking on the manner in which their nurses were discharging their obligations. The certificate of good conduct demanded of them at the time they received their wages gave some assurance about their moral conduct, but that did not suffice. Louise felt it necessary to undertake the visiting of the babies.

Lady Visitors

Daily visits of the children at the Hôtel Dieu in Paris were already well organized. Similar visits to children placed in homes in Paris were established with the Ladies setting out "two by two on their appointed day, according to the note addressed to them." Vincent and Louise desired to extend a similar system of visits for the children in the country. The Ladies were therefore encouraged to visit them when an opportunity presented itself. It was even suggested that "a young man of piety" might
be sent. This might have been one of the Brothers of Saint-Lazare, as was the case in 1649. Abelly relates that the Brother sent on that occasion on a tour of inspection, “spent nearly six weeks doing so.”

Sister Visitors

Louise realized that those occasional visits were but a temporary measure. Once again it was to be to the Daughters of Charity that an appeal was made to ensure a constant, lasting service. At first, a sister set out merely as a helper of the Ladies. It was in September 1642, that the first of the Daughters for this work was to be chosen. A companion was needed for Madame du Mée, who was “setting out to visit the children in the Normandy region.” “Whom are we going to send with her?” asked Vincent.

Louise’s choice of Sister Jeanne of the parish of Saint-Germain pleased him very much.

Formation of the Sisters for Their Mission in the Country

Foreseeing the time when her Daughters would set out alone to visit the foundlings, Louise undertook the formation of the first “visiting nurses” whose work would extend the radius of charitable activity. A record of the children placed in foster homes was given to them. This contained the family name and the first name of the child, age and sex. A blank space allowed the sisters to write down their observations with regard to the physical constitution of the child and of his or her nurse, the moral habits of the little one and the care given.

Lallemand has published such a report. It concerns a visit made in Picardy and in Normandy by the sisters of the Foundling Hospital. It was written by Sister Nicole Haran, who was of the number of the Daughters formed in virtue and in the work of the Institute by the foundress herself. In 1659, Louise was to praise her “great charity for the little ones.” The report states that “the sisters found all the children in the country fairly well taken care of with the exception of ten, who were taken away from the nurses who had been neglecting them and were entrusted to others who would take better care of them.” They reported “that in the Normandy area, where nearly 400 were given in keeping, they were much better fed that the 232 children in Picardy.”

Meanwhile in Paris, Sister Cailly, treasurer of the Enfants-Rouges
Establishment, had been repeatedly requesting that the children from the "Couche" and the nurses contaminated by the unfortunate little ones be transferred to the Vaugirard Hospital because there was no adequate treatment room in the house. Quite unusual for the seventeenth century, she took the precaution of having all their belongings taken along with them.

Louise carefully kept in touch by correspondence with her Daughters on their visiting tours. "Blessed be God," she encouraged two of them, "for the strength and courage He is giving you in all your labors. You are doing marvels. As soon as I hear the Ladies' decision, I will inform that good and charitable clerk. Do not fail to send us back all the children who can walk alone, and have all those who are over eighteen months old weaned."70

The following month these two sisters, Barbara and Marie Daras, returned home in good health "from the visit of all the foundling children placed in foster homes, where they have been for six weeks."71

Sister Barbara showed herself particularly apt in making these inspection tours. Two years later72 and several times afterwards she was sent to visit the foundlings, a work for which she showed no repugnance.73 Her devotion to those little ones was truly a cult, a cult of Him who became a little child for us. At the conference held on the subject of her virtues, one of our first sisters related the following: "She had a great fondness for children and used to say that in them she beheld the Child Jesus. She never complained of any trouble with them. She carried that love so far that at night she would hold them in her arms for lack of a cradle."74

Those at Home

At times sisters living in the villages, where children had been placed in foster homes, had to exercise great vigilance over the little ones and over their adoptive mothers. Once when she was absent from Paris, Louise wrote to a sister at the Mother House for a list of "the names and places where all the children in this region may be found so that I might inquire concerning them."75 In 1652, she wrote to the sisters at Chars, "Sister Margaret will keep an account of what you give to the foster parents. Send us I beg you, a report of the state of that child and make sure that he is brought back to us at the time that is stated."76 In his turn Vincent encouraged Sister Jeanne Françoise at Etampes, telling her that
she had done well to send the older children to the village. He also admitted to her that the Ladies “are becoming tired or bored at having to meet such expenses. Nevertheless, I shall see them tomorrow in order to have them try to send something so that you may be able to continue to feed and raise the little ones for sometime yet.”

Difficulties—Lack of Money

The cooling of charity and the depletion of resources of the work rendered the direction of the personnel at the Foundling Hospital a very difficult problem for Mademoiselle Le Gras. The plight was aggravated by civil war. The sisters were obliged to reduce the number of nurses in the house to two. There was no money to be able to place the children with nurses in the country. “Seven little ones cannot tolerate bottle feeding. . .and there is no way of providing sheets and clothing.”

A little later, the situation became worse and Louise was forced to write, “The nurses of the villages are beginning to threaten us and to bring back the children. Debts are increasing so much that there is no hope of paying them.”

Vincent knew that only too well. Sister Genevieve Poisson was hounding him for money to pay the salaries of the nurses at the House. He could only suggest, “be patient for some time and do the least harm possible.”

Louise continued to worry about the nurses in the villages. We should like to know, she wrote, if the poor nurses will have some money for the feast days, and if the children whom they are bringing back for lack of payment can be placed with nurses by using some of the money given in order to place new foundlings.

Although Vincent was moved by the cries of distress of his collaborator, he was not resigned to abandon the work. He reminded Louise that “the work of the foundlings is in the hands of Our Lord.”

It was cruel anguish for Louise but she dared not appeal again to the wealthy. She declared that she was tired of letting the great ones at the Court and in the city hear her sighs and her moaning. She even refused to address herself to Madame Séguier, saying that it seemed to her that she had already too frequently made known the sorry plight of both children and nurses. She feared that she was becoming importunate and that she was saddening hearts that were tender and charitable.
She had even addressed herself to the Chancellor himself so that he might know "that a hundred of those poor little ones who are exposed to so many needs are without bread."84

An Appeal is Made to the Ladies

Finally, she felt obliged to write to Mademoiselle de Lamoignon to express the urgent necessity of an assembly of the Ladies and the need of supplementary collections to support the work.

Similar cries of distress concerning the lot of the poor nurses filled her letters at the beginning of 1650.

There is no longer a way, she wrote, of resisting in conscience the pity which the poor nurses in the country provoke by asking what is their just due, not only for their trouble but likewise for having made use of their own supplies. After their charity they find themselves dying of hunger and forced to come from great distances three or four times without being successful in collecting their money.85

There seemed to be no other alternative than to propose to the Ladies, "not to take any more foundlings in order to be able to take care of those on hand, and to withdraw from the country all those who are weaned."86 With the help of the Procurator General, the children were given temporary lodging at the Enfermés. Louise sent two sisters to take charge of the children there. "We are greatly responsible for supplying food for the nurses," she explained. "However, if things continue as they are, it will certainly be necessary to end the work."87

Loans

According to her first biographer, there was no effort that Louise did not exert in order to make ends meet. She borrowed money . . . She and her Daughters, "even deprived themselves of the necessities of life and limited themselves each day to one meal of the coarsest type of food."88 A few months previously she had written to Vincent telling him that it had been necessary to use all the money they had to pay the expenses of the house amounting to fifteen or twenty pounds. . . ." and we do not foresee
receiving anything at all for another month." Without consulting the rules of human prudence or simply human laws in all of this, Louise followed but the promptings of her zeal and relied on her unalterable confidence in Divine Providence.

**Lack of Nurses**

To add to her already heavy burden of worries, another greater cause of anxiety arose. She was forced to engage nurses about whom she had some fear. She said of them, "Although we try to choose good-living women, it seems that most of these persons are not forced into retirement by hard times but rather because of bad behavior and that many of these women, brought together from the four winds, indulge in bad language and licentious conduct."

**Saint Louise and Saint Vincent Encourage the Dedication of the Sisters**

To counterbalance the harmful influence of those nurses, Louise spent herself unreservedly in providing an excellent formation for the Daughters of Charity whom she appointed to be adoptive mothers. From the Foundling Home, she wrote to the sisters in Paris: "Oh how I wish that all the sisters were here and had the same feelings which God gives me toward this great work."

Louise did not confide the service of children to just any sister at all. Monsieur Vincent upheld her whole-heartedly when she insisted on the importance of the delicate work of choosing the right ones. He suffered keenly on being told that some malicious person had remarked that, "When a Daughter of Charity was not fit for parish work, she was sent to the Foundlings."

He set this point aright in the following terms, "Now remember this, my Daughters, that Mademoiselle Le Gras never had such a thought. On the contrary, she is careful to send to the Foundlings such persons as those who would take the place of their father and mother. Please tell me, have we any better girls than those, who for the love of God, are willing to render Him service in the person of these children. I can see no better sisters than those who are at the Foundling Home."
Vincent often poured out his heart quite freely with regard to this work which was so dear to him. He went into great detail in his talks with the sisters entrusted with the care of the little ones. As early as 1643, he devoted an entire conference to that service. He exalted first of all the sisters’ mission of charity towards those little ones who are the children of God, who “is both father and mother to them and sees to their needs.” It is He who takes pleasure, “in listening to their babbling.” He told them what a great honor God bestowed upon them in choosing them in preference to so many others, “you, poor village girls without experience, without knowledge, called to the exclusion of many in order to render Him this service.” Then he continued, “from all eternity, He has chosen you, my Daughters, for their service. What an honor for you! If fashionable people consider themselves honored to serve the children of the great, how much more should you feel honored who have been called to serve the children of God!”

He pointed out that the nobility of their employment entailed duties to be fulfilled. The saint then stressed the need of taking “great care of those poor little ones and of supplying all their wants.” He warned them “not to show more affection for some rather than for others, because preferences cause envy and jealousy, to which the little ones might become accustomed.” Finally, he advised them “to consider yourselves their mothers and as such to take pleasure in serving them and to do all that you can for their welfare.”

In order to sustain their courage in this work, which could easily be troublesome and repugnant, he showed them the great recompense it promised:

If God had not called you to His service, if He had left you amidst the troubles of the world, you would have been mothers, and your children would have given you far more worry and trouble than these do. And for what? Like most mothers you would have loved them with a natural love. . . . What reward would you have had for that? Quite simply, a natural reward: your own satisfaction. . . . But for having served those little children abandoned by all, what will you receive? God throughout eternity.

In a conference of 1654, the saint spoke to the sisters of the virtue they must practice to prevent giving scandal to those poor little ones. Referring to their role as adoptive mothers, he said to them, “If she is good, they will be good. If she is bad, they will be bad. If you become angry, they will become angry. If you murmur, they will murmur; and if they should
be damned, they will hold it against you. Do not doubt it, for you will have been responsible for this."

In other conferences, he referred again to the thought that the sisters became, "virgins and mothers at the same time" when they accepted to discharge the duties of a mother toward the foundlings.

Louise Follows Solicitously the Activity of Her Daughters

The writings of Louise de Marillac, in particular her letters to the Daughters of Charity, testify to her affectionate solicitude in their regard. How much exactitude and zeal did she not require of them. She insisted that the future of the children would be greatly influenced by the manner in which the sisters performed their service to them. She wished that her Daughters might possess, even more than those precious qualities already singled out, those of foresight and vigilant affection so that no care, no fatigue might stop them. In other words, she hoped that they would love with a maternal love. To help them achieve that aim she reminded them from time to time of how agreeable their service was to God and how dangerous it could be if performed negligently. She then suggested to Vincent that he prepare two or three meditations specifically on the subject of the service of the foundlings.

In 1648, she wrote to him on the same subject, "The work of our poor sisters here is almost unbelievable, not only because it is heavy but also because of the natural repugnance which one feels for this type of work. That is why it is so necessary to help them, to encourage them and to make known to them what their work is before God. It is good also to help them with our prayers."  

Her frequent visits to the Foundling Home afforded her many occasions to encourage and to counsel the sisters. Nor did she forget them when she was away from Paris. From Nantes, she wrote to Sister Jeanne Lepeintre, "to have great care of our sisters at the Foundling Home and to see that they receive the help they greatly need."  

When she heard of the mortal anxiety in which some of the sisters were living, threatened by bands of undisciplined soldiers, she recommended to them that they keep together and be very careful to keep the older girls within sight in the school "even though you may get no help from them."
Louise’s personal influence over the sisters was greatly felt during the stay of the children at the chateau of Bicêtre, upon which she looked askance.

As early as 1643, the Ladies of Charity had striven to take possession of that chateau. Louise related the fine reception they had received from the Chancellor and the advice which he had given them to refer the matter "to the Queen and to have letters patent drawn up." It was, however, not until July 7, 1647, that Louise received the order: "Tomorrow, Sunday, at one o’clock send four children, two boys and two girls, with two Daughters of Charity to the chateau of Bicêtre. Take the children’s clothing but no bed linen. Take also whatever may be necessary to sustain them on that day and the next."104

The Ladies planned to study the details of organization on the spot. Although Louise was resigned to having the children transferred to Bicêtre, she did not favor it. Furthermore, the plans that the Ladies were making were not of such a nature as to dissipate her fears. Already, she had set forth the difficulties which this transfer would entail: the inconvenience of a house that had been inhabited by people of bad reputation, the dangers of the neighborhood, the distance from Paris, the great expense necessary to put the place in a condition suitable for living quarters, and the difficulties involved in trying to visit the children.105

A few days after the installation she renewed her objections even more strongly: "Experience will prove that it was not without reason that I feared the lodging of Bicêtre. They are choosing for the sleeping quarters tiny rooms in which the air becomes fetid almost immediately, leaving the larger rooms empty, but our poor sisters do not dare say anything. They do not wish that Mass be celebrated there but that our sisters should go to Gentilly. And what will happen to the children in the meantime, and who will do the work?"106

A small detail perhaps, this worry about "tiny rooms in which the air becomes fetid almost immediately," but defective hygienic measures mattered greatly to Louise who was always concerned about the cleanliness, the convenience and the good living conditions of an establishment. She felt that cleanliness was essential everywhere, but especially so in a children’s hospital. This may seem a small detail for our century so accustomed to excellent hygienic conditions for the newborn, but Louise de Marillac belonged to the seventeenth century. For that very reason,
one must ever admire her precise directives regarding cleanliness and her insistence on making others aware of it. Even the departure of a foundling occasioned from her the recommendation "that he be clothed in a very clean manner from his undershirt to his bonnet."107

Regulations for the Sisters at the Foundling Home

Vincent and Louise collaborated in compiling a set of rules for the sisters at the Foundling Home. These rules contain excellent advice relative to the concern the sisters must have for the souls of the children as well as for their bodies. The laws of hygiene, primitive though they were, were to be scrupulously respected. In the observations made by Louise concerning the regulations, one can read after article six:

They will not allow the children to get up naked, as much to accustom them to decency and purity, as for the sake of their health. Neither shall they comb nor arrange the children’s hair in drafty places, such as in the yard or in their room near open windows.108

Another precaution that had to be taken was that of keeping "the children from sleeping in the sun or in some unhealthy spots in any season whatever." In the winter, "do not let the children go too close to the open fire. Rather let the little ones keep warm by playing games although it may be necessary from time to time to let them go near the fire."109

When contagious diseases broke out, the children were to be separated into three groups: the healthy children in one, those suspected of coming down with the sickness in another, and those who were ill in a third. The regulations even gave specific details for preparing a special broth. However, if the health of the children was a matter of great importance, the obligation which fell upon their adopted mothers to watch over the moral formation of the little ones was not less so.

Precautions were to be taken against jealousy and against laziness. When it was necessary to punish the children, it was stated that at first it should be done by imposing little mortifications, or better still, "say some kind words which might encourage them to be good." If those warnings did not produce the desired effect, the sister was to notify the Sister Servant, "who would herself spank the naughty child (a custom of the time) but only after having first warned the offender calmly and some time after the fault had been made known. They were to be careful never to strike any child on the head."110
The moral formation of the children was complemented by a religious and technical education. The children were to be taught to repress their passions, to respect the law, and to live well with others so that they might one day become good citizens and useful workers. If the regulations pointed out to the sisters the means of succeeding, Louise profited by her stay at the Foundling Hospital to furnish them with the necessary instruments and materials to do so. True mother that she was, she provided for even the smallest details in a most touching manner. For instance, she wrote to Sister Hellot in 1647, to send her

100 needles, 25 or 30 thimbles, and little books like those from du Pont. The needles should all be of the same kind. Send a few sheets, about a half dozen suitable for cradles. If Sister Julienne has some thread, ask her to send some. We are teaching the little ones how to sew. Ask Monsieur Vincent if there are any printed alphabet charts that might be sent to us.\(^{111}\)

Louise did not wish to leave the establishment until she had a school teacher “to teach them to sew and to read” and a priest “to instruct the boys.”\(^{112}\) She also asked Vincent to send a Brother baker “in order to instruct us and to help us to cook well.”\(^{113}\)

She noted in the regulations: “The sisters shall take care to see that all the thread and silk are carefully handled, that the children do their work, and that what is made at the house be sold. The sisters will make sure that the merchants pay them and they shall make known their profit to the Lady treasurer of the said Foundling Home.”\(^{114}\)

**Well-Ordered Service**

Louise ever insisted upon the necessity of the sisters keeping an account of the money which they handled. They were “to place it carefully in the hands of the Lady assigned to that office.”\(^{115}\) She likewise insisted that the sisters obey the laws established in order to maintain good order in their service. Thus, the Sister Servant of the Hôtel Dieu, where there was a service affiliated with that of the Foundlings, was notified to be very careful “not to admit children before having fulfilled all the customary procedures, and having received a copy of the records relating to the children’s cases to send the records with the children to the establishment where they would be raised with the other children . . .”\(^{116}\)

If Louise demanded that exactitude of her Daughters, it was that she gave them an unfailing example of such exactitude herself. Artists and
poets who have contributed to immortalize the charitable action of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac on behalf of the foundlings seem to neglect the fact that they were excellent administrators. The historical facts have become coated with legend, that has added much to the popularity of an elderly man who braved the dangers of night and the rigors of winter in order to carry foundlings picked up on the threshold of churches or on the streets of the city to the shelters provided by Mademoiselle and her Daughters, true guardian angels of the city, who awaited his arrival. The touching beauty of the scene cannot be denied but it is only symbolic of the historical fact that is even more beautiful than anything fiction can produce.

Let us rather consider the well-organized charitable action which documents prove. To offer but one striking example, we cite the request which Saint Vincent addressed to Louise around 1638:

Would we be willing to take charge of a foundling brought here yesterday by people of quality, who found the child in a nearby field? He is only two or three days old and was baptized last evening at Saint Laurent. Since he is a foundling, there is nothing to criticize in that unless you do not admit him either at the Couche or at the Hôtel Dieu. If you judge it expedient, we shall go through the customary procedures.¹¹⁷

Although Louise’s answer to this letter is not extant, her habitual manner of acting and her many counsels, still treasured in the twentieth century by her Daughters, make us conclude that the foundling was not accepted until the admission procedures were followed.

The advice of the foundress is repeated today by those who replace her. Other Daughters of Louise, who are employed in public services, who administer infant homes or who function as social workers still hear, as it were, an echo of Louise’s recommendations: “You are not free, then, to carry out this work according to your own fantasy. You must organize it in conformity with whatever instructions govern the service and in the spirit it demands of you.”¹¹⁸

That admirable genius for organization lay at the foundation of the associations these two saints founded, and which continue to perpetuate themselves without limit of time or space.

An extract from the correspondence of Saint Vincent de Paul gives evidence of the same concern for organized service in the work with children. His is a tactfully worded reply sent to Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi concerning a child found at Villepreux, whom he was trying to
place at the Foundling Hospital in Paris. "It is forbidden," wrote Vincent, "for those who are in charge of the care of said children to admit them by any other means than by the order of the commissaries. We feel that it is a matter of conscience to comply with this procedure."

Devotedness of the Sisters

It is not surprising that the Daughters understood and applied so well the lessons they learned under the common direction of two saints. Their work was certainly not devoid of fatigue, but that fatigue was sweet to them, because it was accompanied by great consolations which encouraged them to pursue their tasks with increased zeal. There, as everywhere, the charity of the sisters went even further than what their Mother prescribed.

The sisters would often carry the babies on their back in order to avoid for their little charges the violent shaking of carriages. Sister Françoise Fanchon was always the first at the door of the Hôtel Dieu to welcome "the foundlings whom the Administrators collected at almost any hour, but especially at night." She carried them whenever possible to the House of the Faubourg Saint Lazare, where the Bureau for hiring nurses was located. This charitable action she practiced her entire life even when she was placed elsewhere. It is recorded of her that as an older Sister, she was still seen trudging through the streets of the capital "laden with a basket on her back and carrying a foundling." Another of the Daughters, Sister Lullen, said that "it seemed to her as though she was kissing the feet of the little Jesus" when she kissed those of the little ones entrusted to her. Love and education accomplished great things!

Financial Difficulties Increase

It was not easy to administer such a vast and complex work as the Foundlings. Vincent and Louise often found their good will paralyzed. The Ladies became discouraged when money was lacking. Experience proved that private initiative alone could never furnish the needed funds. It was necessary to appeal to the Royal Treasury to make up the enormous deficit. Finally, the king himself became interested in the lot
of the foundlings. By letters patent of 1642, Louis XIII granted to the work an annual income of 4,000 livres, "in title of alms and property." Other gifts followed that one. The Queen Regent, Anne of Austria, declared in the name of her son, "that imitating the piety and charity of the deceased king, which are truly royal virtues, the king adds to the first gift another annual gift of 8,000 livres."

In 1643, the duchess d'Aiguillon donated 5,000 livres. The wife of the Chancellor d'Aligre and the President de Bercy contributed generously. Madame de Miramion contributed an unknown sum but it must have been considerable, according to her biographer's statement, "if one is to judge by the tenderness which she had for the poor little foundlings."

In spite of those contributions, financial difficulties continued to worry the treasurer to the point of discouragement. Louise shared her uneasiness. Vincent in his optimistic way continued to stimulate charitable zeal, and the work continued to expand. In 1643, the saintly priest estimated that the number of children helped by the Daughters of Louise since 1638 was about 1,200. He also noted that the number of sisters who were employed in that good work had increased to ten or twelve. One can well imagine how heavy the financial burden became. The Ladies, frightened by their task, had about made up their mind to abandon the work. It was at that time that Saint Vincent made his famous appeal:

Ladies, it was your compassion and your charity that moved you to adopt those little ones as your own children. You have been their mothers in the order of grace, since their mothers according to nature abandoned them. Consider whether you want to abandon them also. Cease being their mothers now to become their judges. Their life and their death are in your hands. I am going to ask you to cast your votes. The time has come to decide whether you want to discontinue your mercy toward them or not. If you continue to take charitable care of them, they will live. On the contrary, if you abandon them, they will infallibly die. Experience does not allow you to think otherwise.

The assembly responded unanimously in favor of continuing the care of foundlings. According to Abelly, it was after that talk that the Ladies obtained the buildings of the chateau de Bicêtre, where the children who had been weaned were sheltered for some time.
The “Thirteen Houses”: The First Nursery

Vincent himself had partly resolved the problem of the lodging of the little ones by having a group of thirteen houses built on the Saint Laurent field, near Saint Lazare. These were twentieth century “cottage type” nurseries in miniature. Father Coste published Saint Vincent de Paul’s declaration “that he used the sum of 64,000 livres for the building of thirteen houses adjoining one another on a sight called the field of Saint Laurent, situated in the suburb of Saint Denis of the city of Paris...which thirteen houses belonged to the Priests of the Mission of Sedan.”

On August 22, 1645, Vincent leased those houses for 300 livres to the Ladies of Charity to be used for the foundlings.

During the Civil War

There, as at Bicêtre, Louise encountered great difficulties. As troubles of the Fronde continued, the peace of the establishment was once more threatened. In 1652, the troops of Turenne and of Conde were fighting at the very doors of the house. A letter of thanks written by Vincent to Mademoiselle de Lamoignon, who proposed to put the children in a safer place, informs us that “in the heat of combat the nursing women of the establishment were so terrified at seeing before their eyes the killing of the soldiers that they all left with the girls carrying their babies, and left the other children asleep in their cribs.”

In her turn, Louise wrote to Vincent to tell him of the fear of the sisters. She let him know also that she had decided “to have wheat delivered by some soldiers, whom they would pay for their trouble, so as not to have those poor children starve.” A few days later she was able to tell one of the sisters that thanks to God, they had been frightened but not hurt in any way. “All the sisters and the children’s nurses” had been able to remain although most of the people in the neighborhood had left the suburb.

A letter from Saint Vincent de Paul to his confrere Father Lambert pointed out that during the troubled times of civil war, Louise did not limit her concern to the foundlings but that she directed tremendous efforts to alleviate the misery of the numerous refugees and poor. Vincent then described the work of the soup kitchens tended by the Daughters of Charity.
At the house where Mademoiselle Le Gras resides, the poor Daughters of Charity make and distribute soup daily to about 1,300 shameful poor. In the Faubourg Saint Denis they do the same for 800 refugees, and in the parish of Saint Paul alone, four or five of those Daughters provide soup for 5,000 poor persons, to say nothing of the 60 to 80 sick persons they have on their hands. There are other Daughters who are doing the same thing in other places.\(^{134}\)

Louise herself remarked, “We are in parishes where there are up to 5,000 poor to whom we give soup. In our own parish we distribute it to 2,000 without counting the sick.”\(^{135}\)

During the following years, the subject of the foundlings was hardly ever mentioned in the correspondence between Vincent and Louise. The difficulties of the beginning of the work had all but disappeared.

In 1654, the “Thirteen Houses” began admitting, from the maternity ward of the Hôtel Dieu, children whose mothers had either died or abandoned their babies there.\(^{136}\)

**Private Work Administered by the General Hospital in 1670**

In 1670, the king ordered the Foundlings placed under the authority of the General Hospital’s administration. With that decree there was implemented the practical principle that the support of foundlings is the responsibility of all citizens through the instrumentality of the public agency that represents them. The decree incorporated the work into the General Hospital while permitting it to function in its own right.\(^{137}\)

We do not propose to follow up the work of the foundlings beyond the time when it became a public institution. In our day much more is accomplished than Vincent de Paul and his collaborator Louise de Marillac did, but they have the great merit of having set the work in motion and of having planted the seed from which has sprung everything that society has since done in favor of foundlings.

Louise, who was always preoccupied with the future of that good work, had proposed to Saint Vincent that he suggest to the Ladies of Charity that they include bequests to the work of the foundlings in their wills.\(^{138}\) Until the end of her days, she sought means of doing more and more for the abandoned children she had adopted into her large family of poor.

Three months before her death she mentioned the foundlings for the last time in her correspondence:
My Most Honored Father, you also have been reflecting for a long time on the most effective means of caring for the little ones. I beg Our Lord to make His will known in this as He does in all other matters, and to give us the grace to fulfill it faithfully.\textsuperscript{139}

Today the Daughters of Charity still accept as a directive to be faithfully followed what Saint Vincent said to their first sisters in 1643:

I am persuaded you often feel very fond of them. O my Daughters, you cannot have enough affection for them. You may be quite certain that you will not offend God by loving them too much, because they are His children, and the reason why you devote yourselves to their service is His love.\textsuperscript{140}