

PREFACE.

THEY who know any thing of the saintly character and heroic deeds of Vincent de Paul regard him, and with truth, as the father of the orphan, the friend of the poor man, and the tender nurse of the sick; but only they who have studied his career by the light of the times in which he lived are aware how eminently he was distinguished as a zealous and successful reformer. To him belongs the glory of raising the Church of France from the deep degradation into which it had been her unhappy lot to fall; a degradation which was shared no less by clergy than by people—into which, indeed, the latter could not have fallen but for the worldly habits and shameless vices of their unworthy pastors. “The world is sick enough,” indignantly cries Adrien Bourdoise, who was associated with St. Vincent in the laborious work of reformation; “but the clergy is not less so: frivolity, impurity, immodesty, are every where paramount. . . . The majority of our priests stand with their arms folded; God is forced to raise up laymen — cutlers and haberdashers — to do the work of these lazy ecclesiastics. Seldom now-a-days do we meet with a man who is of good family and at the same time an instructed servant of God. Whence is it that God makes use of such laymen as M. Beaumais the draper, and M. Clement the cutler, as His instruments for the conversion of such numbers of heretics and bad Catholics in Paris, but that He finds not bachelors, licentiates, or doctors, filled with His Spirit, whom He can employ for the purpose? It is the heaviest reproach,