

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.



THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL is a Society of men associated together for mutual encouragement in the practice of a Christian life. The first object is the sanctification of its members, and as the best means of doing so is to love God and one's neighbor, they try to be friends of the poor—visiting them in their homes and relieving them in their necessities, instructing them in religion, visiting hospitals, prisons and similar institutions,

distributing wholesome reading, conducting libraries, teaching catechism and night schools, and giving such kinds of help as may be required. It is a primary rule that no work of charity is foreign to the Society.

Members are active or honorary. An active member is required to attend the weekly meetings of the Conference, at which there is a voluntary and secret offertory, and to visit the poor families to whom he is assigned. Honorary members incur no obligation, but the contribution of a fixed sum annually or otherwise to the Society's funds. All men are eligible as members provided they are in a position to contribute anything, howsoever small, to the Society's funds, and are so far practising their religion that they may be expected to edify their fellow-members, and be edified by them.

The Society was founded in Paris in 1833 by six students, from 19 to 22 years of age, and Mr. Bailly, a man of 40, whom the young men, in their modesty, put at their head to guide their inexperience. Of the six Frederick Ozanam was one of the most zealous, and attained most renown, and his name is always connected with the foundation. Gatherings of students for the discussion of literary or other subjects connected with their studies were in those days called "conferences," and when Ozanam and his young comrades decided to form a society for practical works of charity they called it "The Conference of Charity," and the name has always been retained. They placed the first Conference under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, and later under that of the Apostle of Charity—St. Vincent de Paul, whose name they took for the Society.

The need and popularity of the Society was soon recognized, and in two years it spread to different parts of France, and a few years later reached other countries. At present wherever the Church flourishes the Society is represented, and Conferences are multiplying every year. As

the Conferences increased the officers of the first Conference were formed into a Council General for the direction of the whole Society; and as necessities arose the Council General instituted other Councils to aid it in this work of direction. In the order of their authority they are Superior Councils, having supervision over the Conferences of a country or province; Central Councils, over one or several dioceses; and Particular Councils, over a city where there is more than one Conference. Thus the Society, whilst giving to its local Conferences the fullest liberty of action, has the strength and power that come from a solidly united body under one authority dictating a combined plan of action and work.

In 1845 the Society received the Apostolic sanction of the Holy See, and was granted many precious indulgences. The Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory XVI., in conceding these indulgences to the members of the Society, sanctioned its Rule, and gave the Council General the right of allowing to participate in these favors the faithful whom it admits into the Society, whether admitted directly or through the mediation of the Councils it has instituted or the Conferences it has aggregated. Each Conference must therefore receive formal authority from the Council General, whose seat is in Paris.

This authority is expressed by a document under the seal of the Council, signed by its officers, and called "Letters of Aggregation." The members of the Conference are then entitled to participate in all the favors and indulgences granted to the Society by the Church. With these spiritual treasures she has endowed it, with a most lavish hand. On reading the briefs of the Sovereign Pontiffs we must conclude that they did not wish to leave a single act of the charitable life of a member of the Society without a reward. Every attendance at a meeting, or at the funeral of a poor person; every visit to a poor family, to a hospital, to a prison, to a school, or any other work in the spirit of the Society, has an indulgence attached to it, and these spiritual favors are even extended to those who are connected with the members—their fathers, mothers and wives.

The Society was introduced into Canada in 1846, when a Conference was formed in Quebec, and that city now possesses the Superior Council of Canada, which has jurisdiction over the whole Dominion.

On the 10th November, 1850, the Conference of Our Lady of Toronto—the first in Ontario—was organized with the approval of the Chief Pastor, Bishop de Charbonnel; and there are now in the Province five Particular Councils, thirty-three Conferences aggregated and four Conferences awaiting aggregation. The Report of the