Chapter XIV

THE PILGRIMAGE TO ARS *(continued):*
III. The Curé d'Ars as a Confessor

DURING the space of thirty years ever changing crowds of pilgrims invaded the old church of Ars, the flags of which became polished and worn by the feet of visitors, even as the boulders over which the waves of the sea pass and repass without ceasing.

And let no one imagine that there was an appreciable diminution in the number of visitors during the winter months when the cold makes itself so cruelly felt on the uplands of La Dombes. From November to March M. Vianney spent not less than eleven or twelve hours each day in the confessional.[1] "Even were he never to leave the church at all," Catherine Lassagne writes, "he would not be able to satisfy all those who come. For this reason he always keeps on his rochet when going out, for, were he to enter the sacristy to take it off, he would have to remain, because of the crowds that would at once press round him." On the margin of Catherine's manuscript the Abbé Renard has jotted down this commentary: "The narrative of the directress is quite according to facts; I have often come to Ars in the summer, the spring, the autumn, and even the winter, and have myself witnessed what she describes."[2] M. Dufour, missionary of Pont-d'Ain, writes: "The first time that I entered the church of Ars—it was in 1851—there were two rows of women penitents, from the chapel of the Blessed Virgin to that of St John the Baptist, and I never saw a gap in those two rows."

M. Jean-Félix des Garets, brother of the Mayor of Ars, writes in his turn: "The concourse of pilgrims increased steadily between the years 1830 and 1845, in which year it reached its climax. At that time the number of daily arrivals amounted to some three or four hundred. At the railway station of Perrache, the most important of Lyons, a special booking-office was always open for the sole purpose of issuing tickets for Ars. These tickets were good for eight

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1 *Procès de l'Ordinaire,* p. 300.
2 *Petit mémoire,* première rédaction, p. 8.