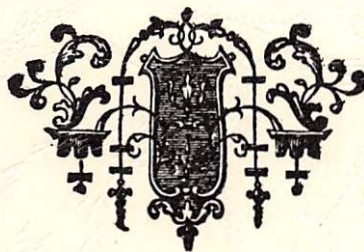


**THE LIFE
OF
JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE**

FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS



by

CANON JOHN BAPTIST BLAIN

Translated by

Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC

THE LIFE
OF
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FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

De La Salle House

LA VIE
DE MONSIEUR
JEAN-BAPTISTE
DE LA SALLE,
INSTITUTEUR
DES FRERES DES ECOLES
CHRE'TIENNES

TOME II.

PAR MONSIEUR ***



A R O U E N,
Chez J E A N - B A P T I S T E M A C H U E L,
ruë Damiette.

M. D C C. X X X I I I.
AVEC APROBATION ET PRIVILEGE DU ROI.

**THE LIFE OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS**

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CANON JOHN BAPTIST BLAIN

**Translated by
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Volume 2, Book 3

at Rouen

Published by John Baptist Machuel

Rue Damiette

1733

With the approbation and the authorization of the King



LE PORTRAIT DE M.^{re} JEAN BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE
Prêtre, Docteur, en Théologie, et Instituteur, des Freres des Ecoles Chrétiennes.

FOREWORD

Volume 2, Book 3 of Canon John Baptist Blain's Life of John Baptist De La Salle brings us up to our Founder's last illness and death and ends with the granting of the Bull of Approbation giving papal approval to our Institute.

As far as we know, this translation by Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC, of Books 1, 2, and 3 of Blain is the first time this work has appeared in English. Book 4 was published in English in 1895 under the title of Spirit and Virtues of Blessed John Baptist De La Salle. Some of us oldsters remember that book as required reading in our novitiate year.

Book 4 is scheduled for re-translation and publication in 1988. In addition to dealing with the sanctity of St. La Salle, Book 4 also contains an appendix devoted to the lives of some of the saintly Brothers in the fledgling Institute as well as with the lives of some of the not so exemplary Brothers of that era.

For some 150 years after De La Salle's death, Blain's life of our Founder was the sole source of biographies on the Saint. We are deeply indebted to Brother Richard Arnandez for his painstaking work in presenting to us for the first time in English this historic opus.

A word of appreciation goes, too, to Brother Richard Rush, FSC, for reading the original typescript and making valuable suggestions which we have incorporated in the final product. Thanks, too, to Mrs. Carol Hamm of the Christian Brothers National Office, Romeoville, IL, for her proficient typing of the text as you see it here.

Brother Hilary C. Gilmartin, FSC
Editor
100 De La Salle Drive
Romeoville, IL, 60441

January 30, 1986---Feast of Blessed Brother Mutien-Marie, FSC

BOOK THREE

In Which De La Salle Is Presented As a Great Promoter of Christian Instruction and Education for Poor and Neglected Youth.

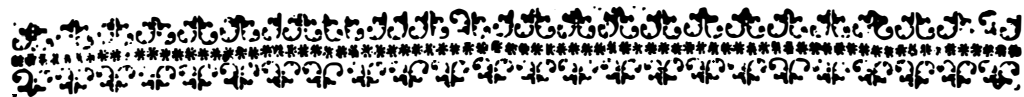
Various Trials Come upon Him from All Sides and Lead to Several New Foundations.

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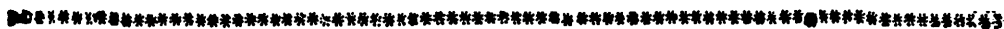
Jesus Christ declared: "Unless the grain of wheat dies, it brings forth no fruit." The truth of these words finds confirmation first of all in the One Who pronounced them; it was His death which gave back life to the human race; His cross is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven. Once He was nailed to it, He drew all things to Himself; the very instrument of His sacrifice He made the trophy of His victory. His members must follow in the footsteps of their Leader. The more they die to themselves, the more His Spirit gives them life. Death to nature procures for them the life of grace. Persecution, while purifying their virtues, makes the latter bear fruit, grow and multiply.

In fact, it was the persecution which dispersed the Apostles that made these conquerors known to the whole universe. By forcing them to wander from city to city it led them to bring the faith, the Gospel and the name of Jesus Christ to every nation of the globe. What the Church witnessed at its birth has been repeated in every succeeding century. The individual members of this great Mystical Body find no other principle at the origin of their spiritual progress. They grow and wax strong, like Him, through contact with the cross. The choicest plants in the new land, the Kingdom of Heaven, are rooted on Calvary and grow only in the shadow of the cross. They thrive only insofar as they are watered by the blood which the nails, the scourges and the thorns draw from the Savior's veins.

Thus, the cross, which tests the virtue of the Saints, also perfects their undertakings. At the very time when the enemy of the human race seeks to eradicate the plant that the Heavenly Father has placed in the field of His Church, His almighty hand sustains it with even greater power and helps it strike even deeper roots. As we shall see in this third Book, the whirlwind of persecution brought the Institute along with its Founder to various cities of France; and wherever he was obliged to flee, De La Salle left behind him more Christian schools.



LA VIE
DE MONSIEUR
JEAN-BAPTISTE
DE LA SALLE,
INSTITUTEUR
DES FRERES DES ECOLES
CHRETIENNES.



LIVRE TROISIEME,

Où Monsieur DE LA SALLE est représenté comme le grand Zélateur de l'Instruction & de l'Éducation Chrétienne de la jeunesse pauvre & abandonnée.

Diverses tribulations qui le suivent de tous côtés, & qui donnent lieu à divers établissemens.



ESUS-CHRIST l'a dit : *Si le grain de froment ne meurt en terre, il ne produit point de fruit.* Ce n'est que par sa mort qu'il renaît & qu'il se reproduit au centuple. La vérité de cet oracle trouve sa preuve dans celui-là même qui l'a prononcé ; car c'est sa mort qui a rendu la vie au genre humain ; c'est sa Croix qui est la clef du Royaume des Cieux. Aussi-tôt qu'il y a été attaché, il a attiré toutes choses à lui, & il a fait de l'instrument de son supplice, le trophée de ses victoires. Les membres suivent le sort du Chef. Plus ils sont mortifiés, plus l'esprit les vivifie : c'est la mort de la nature qui leur procure la vie de la grace. C'est la persécution qui en épurant leur vertu, la fait fructifier, croître, & multiplier. En effet, c'est la persécution qui en dispersant les Apôtres, a montré à l'Univers ses Conquerans ; & qui en les faisant fuir de Ville en Ville a porté la Foi, l'Evangile, & le nom de Jésus-Christ sur leurs pas dans toutes les parties du monde. Or ce que l'Eglise a vu dans sa naissance, chaque siècle le reproduit. Les membres particuliers de ce grand Corps mystique, n'ont point d'autres principes de leur origine & de leurs progrès spirituel. Ils croissent & ils se fortifient comme lui au milieu des croix. Les plantes choi-

La Vie de Mr J. B. De La Salle,

fies pour la terre nouvelle qui est le Royaume des Cieux , prennent racine sur le Calvaire , ne croissent qu'à l'ombre de la Croix , & ne se multiplient qu'autant qu'elles sont arrosées du sang que les cloux , les fouets , & les épines , ont tiré des veines du Sauveur. Ainsi , c'est la Croix qui en éprouvant la vertu des Saints , perfectionne leurs œuvres. Dans le tems même que l'ennemi du genre humain secouë avec plus de fureur la plante que le Pere céleste a mise dans le champ de son Eglise , sa main toute-puissante la soutient avec plus de force , & lui fait prendre de plus profondes racines. C'est ainsi qu'on va voir dans ce troisième Livre le vent de la persécution porter l'Institut avec l'Instituteur en différentes Villes du Royaume , & M. De La Salle laisser des Ecoles Chrétiennes dans les lieux où il est obligé de fuir.

C H A P I T R E P R E M I E R.

M. De La Salle obligé de quitter la grande Maison , va s'établir au Faubourg saint Antoine en 1703. La persécution l'y suit & l'en chasse.

1703. **L**Es visites fréquentes & dangereuses que l'émisnaire de l'ennemi du Serviteur de Dieu faisoit dans la grande maison du Noviciat , après avoir long-tems fatigué , éprouvé & exercé la patience des Freres , leur devinrent enfin insupportables ; & depuis long-tems ils sollicitoient celui qui en étoit l'objet , de céder le terrain , & d'aller chercher la paix ailleurs.

Y.
Les Freres
pressent en-
core M. De
La Salle de
quitter la gran-
de maison pour
se dérober
aux persécu-
tions de son
ennemi. Il a
peine à y
consentir. Quoique l'homme ennemi eût en vain épuisé tous ses artifices contre le vertueux Instituteur , il n'avoit cependant que trop bien réussi à jeter dans son champ la zizanie , dont le fruit pernicieux avoit été la chute de huit ou neuf de ses principaux Disciples. Les autres attachés à leur vocation , qui avoient moins de talens & plus de vertu , témoins du naufrage des Deserteurs , trembloient & vouloient se précautionner contre la tentation. Le Maître n'étoit pas du sentiment de ses Disciples. Il avoit un grand attrait pour la grande Maison qu'il habitoit avec eux , parce qu'elle étoit toute propre pour une Communauté : elle sembloit même être faite pour celle de M. De La Salle en particulier. Proche d'une des barrières de la grande Ville , dans un air pur & serain , vaste & spacieuse , avec de grands Jardins & de grandes Cours , éloignée de tout bruit , elle favorisoit toutes les inclinations de l'homme de Dieu. Quand il auroit été lui-même Maître de se choisir dans Paris ou aux environs , une maison à son gré , celle-là auroit fixé ses desirs. Aussi avoit-elle déjà été occupée par une Communauté de Religieuses qui portoient le nom de Nôtre-Dame des dix Vertus : Elles étoient de l'Institution de la B. Jeanne de France. Son image peinte sur un mur d'une des Salles , avec celle du P. Gabriel *Maria* (de Jesus) Carme Déchauffé¹⁾ , qui avoit dirigé cette Maison , se voyoit encore du tems que les Freres l'habitoient , avec une cave souterraine sous la Chapelle où l'on enterroit les Religieuses. De plus , M. De La Salle desiroit depuis long-tems d'avoir une maison en propriété , où le Noviciat pût être fixé à Paris & dans un lieu commode. Cette Capitale du Royaume en étant le centre , il desiroit aussi en faire celui de sa Société par toutes les raisons qu'il n'est pas difficile de deviner.

Cette maison étoit alors en vente , & l'acquisition en eût été aisée à un homme moins pauvre que le Supérieur des Freres. Le Propriétaire le pressoit depuis

Chapter I

De La Salle Is Obligated to Leave the Grande Maison. He Establishes Himself in the Faubourg Saint Antoine in 1703. But Persecution Pursues Him There and Again Obliges Him to Withdraw.

The frequent and dangerous visits that the enemy of the Servant of God incited his emissary to pay to the novitiate at the Grande Maison had wearied the Brothers, put their patience to a severe test, and at the end became so intolerable that for some time they had been begging the one who was the real target of these vexations to give ground and seek peace somewhere else.

Although the Founder's enemy had in vain exhausted all his artifices against the saintly priest, he had succeeded only too well in sowing discord among his disciples; and the unfortunate result had been that eight or nine of the main ones had left the Society. The others, more firmly attached to their vocation, and having perhaps less talent but more virtue than the deserters, witnessed the latter's misfortune, feared to imitate them, and sought to shield themselves against similar temptations.

De La Salle did not share the apprehensions of his disciples. He was very fond of the Grande Maison where he lived along with them, because he found it well adapted to community life. It really seemed to have been built just for his Community. Located near one of the gates of the metropolis, in a spot affording plenty of fresh air, and spacious enough with its large gardens and courtyards, it was still far removed from the noise of the city, and favored all the Founder's inclinations. If he had been in a position to select in Paris or in its environs a house suited to his tastes, this one would have been his choice. The house had once been occupied by a group of nuns called "Our Lady of the Ten Virtues."* Their Order had been founded by Saint Joan of France, whose portrait was painted on one of the walls along with that of Gabriel Marie of Jesus, a Discalced Carmelite who had been the spiritual director of the nuns. These portraits were still to be seen during the time the Brothers occupied the building. Underneath the chapel was a subterreanean vault where the nuns were buried. For a long time De La Salle had wanted to own a house in Paris in a commodious location, where the novitiate could be established. Since the capital of the kingdom was likewise its center, he wanted to make it the headquarters of his Society, for a number of reasons which are easily surmised.

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*Also known as the Order of the Annunciation; Saint Joan of Valois (1464-1505) was the daughter of Louis XI.

At the time of which we speak, this house was for sale; it would have been easy, for anyone less poor than the Brothers' Superior, to purchase it. The proprietor had been urging him for a long time to sign a contract of purchase, and was willing to let him have it for 45,000 livres, although the property was worth at least 100,000. In fact, the person who finally bought it for the first mentioned figure was able to resell it shortly thereafter for double the money. But where could the pious Founder find the sum asked? His poverty made it out of the question for him to even think of it. He did not even dare to approach God with his desire for such an expensive house, and he limited himself to praying and having others pray to the God of all goodness to provide him with a fit shelter for his novitiate.

With this in mind he had, from the time they had first gone to live in the Grande Maison, instituted a special procession at which he assisted every day vested in his surplice. It took place after the recitation of the Little Office of the ~~Most~~ Blessed Virgin, in the garden when weather permitted. They sang the psalms: "The earth is the Lord's and its fullness" and the Miserere; the litany of the Most Blessed Virgin followed by the Memorare and the Church prayers: "O God Whose Providence..." and "God Who art offended by sin..." His prayers and those of the Community were heard, ~~because a certain~~ individual, inspired by heaven, left him in his will the sum of 50,000 livres for the express purpose of establishing a novitiate. But, who would believe it? The influential enemy of the Servant of God succeeded in getting ~~hold of~~ this money and deprived the legitimate legatee of it, as we shall explain farther on.

Thus the house was for the Servant of God something like the Promised Land for Moses. On the point of taking possession of it, he saw himself deprived of it. Still, it would seem that heaven had indeed intended it for him; for when he had taken it over, it was neglected and uncultivated, and it returned to this condition in a short while after he left. The one who bought it so cheaply was not able to adapt it to his requirements, so he sold it; and its last owner neglected the property so much that it has become entirely desolate at present. True, common gossip maintains that the place is haunted. This has given the house a bad name and may be one reason why it remains unoccupied. However, the ghosts never bothered the Brothers; only after the Brothers' departure did the ghosts begin to cause problems for the new inhabitants, as we shall relate.

So, the pious legacy, which had so opportunely come to De La Salle for the purchase of a house he so much longed to have, fell through. This left him and his Community on the street, so to speak; for the house was sold, and the purchaser told him that he had to leave. That new misfortune happened about seven months after the difficulties that had embroiled De La Salle with the archbishop. Although he had recovered that latter's good graces, he had not been able to conclude peace with the enemy who had declared war on him. He found at least some advantage in having to give up a house which heaven had so visibly intended for him, and which his enemy had so unjustly deprived him of; for the move placed considerable distance between them and kept the latter's emissary away from the Brothers.

A fresh problem arose. Where could he go on leaving the Grande Maison? The Servant of God was caught in a difficult situation, for the new proprietor wanted the Brothers out of his house as soon as possible, so that he could lease it to others. He, therefore, insisted that the Brothers and their Superior must get out. The latter did not know where to turn, for he was at the end of his resources. But Divine Providence, Which never abandoned them, arranged things so that nobody offered to rent the house.

De La Salle, taking advantage of this delay, begged the new proprietor, a worthy man, to give him time to look for another house suitable for his Brothers. The owner agreed and did not even ask him to pay rent for the time he remained. The only conditions he placed were that the Brothers should not gather the fruit from the large orchard, and that they should give lodging to the gardener and his small family. The gardener, eager to look out for his master's interests as well as for his own, chose for his lodging a spot which gave him an uninterrupted view of the orchard, and there he established himself as a sort of sentinel to keep close watch over the fruit!

It would seem that this unflattering suspicion with regard to so mortified a community was not to the liking of the ghosts who, it was said, put in an appearance from time to time. They undertook to make the gardener and his family move out without delay. The fact was that his choice of that particular section in which to live was a source of considerable annoyance for the Brothers. Apparently, the ghosts were zealous for regularity, and were displeased that a family of lay people had come to interfere with it.

According to the account left by two virtuous, but perhaps somewhat naive Brothers, it was a Sister Saint Fiacre, one of the nuns buried in the vault beneath the chapel, who made the most racket. She was spending her purgatory there, as she herself revealed to the two Brothers when she told them her name. They saw her often and spoke with her. The two good Brothers believed that they did so and would have been shocked had anyone relegated their visions and conversations to the realm of reveries and fairy tales. It was no doubt to put their imaginations to rest that De La Salle said a requiem Mass for the repose of the soul of that religious and had all the Brothers receive Communion for the same intention. However, all their prayers did not banish her from the place. She still appeared to the two faithful believers.

The very first night she caused great commotion in the room occupied by the new guests, whom she did not regard with a favorable eye; for it was always at night that the living saw the dead come back among them. The shades of night are more propitious than broad daylight to inspire dreams or to make them seem more plausible.

Before the Sister's ghost made any noise, she would let these good people go to bed quietly, hoping to enjoy a restful night; but scarcely had they shut their eyes when she would start her operations. She woke them up by upsetting everything in the room, so that they could not sleep any longer. Everything was turned topsy-turvy: dishes, sideboards, chairs, clothes-presses and other pieces of furniture. She did more than that. After having maliciously

surprised those unbidden guests in the darkness when they were first falling asleep, she took their little baby and laid him down in the middle of the room. That new occurrence made those people find the night very long indeed, frightened as they were half to death. They waited only until day returned in order to clear out.

Still, as daylight sometimes brings back common sense by curing excessive fear or an overactive imagination, the gardener who, with daylight, recovered some of his courage, resolved to sleep soundly the next night, hoping that he would experience no unpleasant dreams, or that at least he would be better prepared to withstand the visits of a ghost. But in vain did he propose to fight it out with the phantom. He had to give in and yield the place without delay. He then moved to some rooms above the stables, behind the main wing of the building, a long way from where the Brothers lodged. The ghost, satisfied after the retreat of the gardener, left him alone.

On his side, this poor fellow, having been severely punished for wanting to intrude among the Brothers and for having suspected their honesty, was no longer tempted to stand watch over them, and was even happier to leave their quarters than they were to have him go. The ghost, the Brothers' friend, wished to indicate her displeasure when they finally left, and tried as best she could to prevent their leaving; for while they were all looking on she shook the last wagon carrying their furniture, for the space of a Miserere, and did it so violently that the conveyance was about to topple over. At least, that is what some of the Brothers thought they saw while the wagon stood at the door with nobody anywhere around it.

Having taken advantage of the new owner's charity for about six weeks, De La Salle finally left the Grande Maison on August 20, 1703, and went to occupy another, much less convenient, building in the Rue de Charonne, in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, not far from the convent of the Religious of the Cross. The expense occasioned by the move, which was considerable because of the distance between the two houses, left his poorest of communities a prey to real distress.

The holy Founder had rented the new dwelling with the advice and consent of the pastor of Saint Paul's parish to which the Faubourg Saint Antoine then belonged. When he had gone to pay his respects to the pastor and to ask for his approval, he had been received most cordially. The pastor knew of the pious Founder and was delighted to have him in his parish. He agreed with and approved his project and told him very frankly that while he was not in favor of new establishments and had in fact turned several away from his parish, he wished to go on record as favoring this one, and would grant it his patronage.

It does not seem that De La Salle took a lease on that house where he remained only about a year and a half. It was as though he could foresee that he would have to leave it before long. Nor did he request permission to celebrate Mass there, either because he was inspired not to do so, or because he had at his disposal, just across the street, the chapel belonging to the Sisters of the Cross, where he said Mass and whither he brought the Brothers

to hear it and to receive Communion on the appointed days. Distance did not prevent the Brothers teaching in the schools to spend their Sundays and feast days at the novitiate, as had been customary. The fervor that filled them on those occasions, and the joy they felt in being under the eyes of their beloved father, made the long trip from one end of the Faubourg Saint Germain to the farther end of the Faubourg Saint Antoine seem short to them.

Although the holy priest was careful to remain in obscurity and never sought to attract special attention, an air of holiness distinguished him, especially when he stood at the altar. His fervor at such times betrayed his humility and, by disclosing the piety which shone out on his countenance, it revealed that he was one of God's favored friends. The Sisters of the monastery did not take long to notice this. Majesty, piety and recollection accompanied him to the altar and, by making them understand who the unknown priest was, inspired them with a vehement desire to profit by his presence. At first the curiosity so natural to Sisters made them eager to attend his Mass and watch him celebrate. For them he was a prodigy of devotion, renewed day after day, which stirred up their own fervor. They fancied they beheld an angel exercising the sacred function. Later, several of them wished to place themselves under his spiritual direction and earnestly begged for this favor.

Such a request was not much to the pious Founder's liking, for he had always been reluctant to assume the spiritual direction of outsiders, especially of nuns, whose guidance required more leisure than the government of his Community left him. But these good Sisters obliged him, as it were, to grant them out of gratitude a favor which he might have found many good reasons for refusing. This charitable group of Sisters showed itself the main resource of the new Institute and its principal source of funds from 1703 until De la Salle left for the south of France in 1711. That was how Divine Providence supplied the needs of the one who abandoned himself to Its care.

God is admirable in His designs and incomprehensible in the means He uses to sanctify His servants. De La Salle, abandoned by his best and oldest friends, found new ones whom he had not previously known when he took refuge in one of the remotest corners of Paris. Obligated like the Prophet Elias to flee before persecution, he found these Sisters who seemed to have received from God the order to nourish His own, just as the widow of Sareptha had been predestined to feed Elias.

Those charitable religious women did not give the Servant of God time to explain his needs; they spontaneously offered their help when they were informed by various persons of the Brothers' necessities; and they gave him abundant alms to provide for his family which had been transplanted from one end of the city to the other, and which, unknown and unappreciated, was suffering all the privations attendant on poverty. The Sisters' generosity followed De La Salle wherever he went with his sons. Persecution, which sought him out everywhere, did not take long to drive him from the Faubourg Saint Antoine, after making him leave the Faubourg Saint Germain. The Sisters' charity did not limit itself to their own neighborhood; and the departure of the Servant of God did not cause it to dry up. Distance did not bring about any change in the dispositions of their hearts.

Even the disasters and calamities brought on in 1709 by famine and the prolonged winter did not diminish the generosity of the Sisters of the Cross. The pious Founder found in them an assured source of help to keep the Brothers from dying when hunger and cold threatened their lives. In those dark days those saintly women used their resources to succor a Community reduced to the last extremity; and as if they had resolved to make their own funds common between them, they shared all they had with the saintly priest. The novitiate was then at Saint Yon, just outside the gates of Rouen, and the novices were suffering complete abandonment and were a prey to the deepest want. In so rich a city, hearts and purses were closed to men who for several years had been gratuitously serving the children of the poor. No one took pity on them; they met with nothing but rejection and scorn from the great, whose charity they humbly solicited. They would have perished of cold and hunger if De La Salle had left them any longer a prey to the public's forgetfulness and hard-heartedness.

In Paris, virtue reigns at the same time as vice; a goodly number of its inhabitants practice truly munificent charity, with open and generous hearts. Although it is the showplace of all the distresses of the kingdom which seem concentrated there, the capital appeared to the holy priest a more secure refuge against the hardships of the times than a provincial city like Rouen, wealthy indeed, but where alms drop from the hands of the rich only in strict measure, after long seeking, and with great deliberation. So he brought his novices back to Paris from Saint Yon, hoping to find in the capital hearts more easily touched by his children's needs. In this he was not disappointed, because he secured from this one monastery of the Sisters of the Cross more assistance than he had in the flourishing capital of Normandy.

When the Servant of God was at the end of his resources, he would make his way to his benefactresses and would say with a smile, "Let us go to the Cross," and he would leave bearing their liberalities. As soon as those kind religious saw him, they did not give him time to open his mouth to explain his predicament; they hastened to share what they had with him, and did so more in proportion to their charity than to their wealth. This recognition is only what is due to such a charitable group of religious women in the history of the Founder of the Christian Schools.

Once De La Salle took up residence in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, he did not remain undisturbed for very long. The schoolmasters declared war on him again with renewed fury, and this time successfully, because the parish priest of Saint Sulpice no longer shielded him from their attacks. Still, it was De La Chétardye who had given orders that the charitable schools should admit indiscriminately all children who requested gratuitous instruction. His order was right; for who can distinguish, in a great city, the families which can afford to pay the teachers' fees from those that cannot? But it was precisely the decision to admit to the gratuitous schools all the children who wished to enter that disturbed the Parisian schoolmasters. That in 100 poor children who frequented the Christian schools three or four might be found belonging to families in easy circumstances was all the reason they needed to cause trouble for the Brothers and pitilessly to close down all their classes.

The schoolmasters' pretensions might have been judged reasonable by the public if, while requiring fees from the children of well-to-do families whom they instructed, they had been willing to teach gratuitously the ones unable to pay.* But did they ever do so? They would have been very reluctant to admit to their schools a crowd of children who could bring nothing with them but vermin. They would have thought that such charity might injure their own interests by driving away from their classes the children who brought in all the profit. If the schoolmasters had been willing, out of a sense of equity, to apply their own rules to the gratuitous schools, they would have concluded that their own establishments were not being harmed by those of the Brothers, since the latter were filled only by the children with whom their own paying pupils would not associate.

However, as people grow suspicious when their financial interests are threatened and forge vain and fantastic prejudices for themselves, the schoolmasters remained convinced that the Brothers were cutting into their own revenues because they taught all children free; so they always entertained a certain amount of ill-feeling against them which was ready to break out on the slightest provocation.

Held in check by the influence of De La Chétardye, who had the authority to enforce the orders he had given, they did not dare cause any trouble; when they had ventured to do so, they had been made to regret it and thereafter kept quiet. They remained firmly resolved, however, to reopen hostilities as soon as the death or the disaffection of the Brothers' protector might give them an opening. They thought they perceived such an opportunity in the indifference that the pastor of Saint Sulpice began to exhibit towards the new Institute. He had let the novitiate leave the Grande Maison and had not tried to keep it in his parish; he no longer had much to do with the Brothers' Superior and seemed to have lost all confidence in him. His generosity towards the Community had all but dried up, and his zeal for gratuitous schools seemed exhausted.

All this the schoolmasters learned through the grapevine; and after having verified these facts, they realized that they no longer had anything to fear from the man whom they most apprehended, and who had been the Brothers' staunchest defender. They did even more. To sound out his dispositions, they sent a numerous delegation to him and omitted nothing to make him feel sorry for them. They explained that the protection which he had up to then given to the gratuitous schools had caused the latter to be filled by children from their own schools. By offering free instruction to the poor children, he had taken the bread from the mouths of the schoolmasters and their families, thus increasing the number of the poor in the parish. We do not know what De La Chétardye replied; but if we may surmise, basing our opinion on what happened later, he seems to have listened to them favorably; and by not opposing their schemes he gave them free rein to dare all and to undertake whatever they liked.

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*As a matter of theory, the masters of the "Little Schools" were supposed to do just that. The obligation was occasionally recalled to them by the precentor; but as might be expected, it remained largely a dead issue.

The new campaign began by a complaint addressed to the lieutenant of police,* dated January, 1704. In it, the schoolmasters complained of the activities carried on by De La Salle, a priest, and by several other individuals whose superior he claimed to be. These men, without any authorization or qualifications, conducted various schools, supposedly charitable schools. The complainants begged that the abuses which had been introduced to their detriment be stopped. They added that even if it were true that the Brothers had the right to teach in charity schools, they should be obliged to admit none but the truly poor students. Far from abiding by this rule, however, they had admitted to the more than 20 schools** that they conducted in Paris and its faubourgs all the children who sought admission, whatever social class, zone or parish to which they might belong.

To prove their assertions the schoolmasters joined to their petition a list of the names, professions and addresses of the parents of the students who, according to them, did not need to have recourse to charity. The main ones were these: a man living on the revenues from his investments, two surgeons, one butcher, a locksmith, a wine merchant, a groceryman, a jeweler, and two restaurant owners. All of these, they claimed, were people in easy circumstances. I suppose that the schoolmasters had inventoried the possessions of all those people and, penetrating their family secrets, had made the heads of the households give them an exact account of their income. Without such information provided in due form, how could the schoolmasters assure the judge that these people who, they claimed, were in easy circumstances, were actually such? How often do the walls of a house disguise seriously straitened circumstances which remain unknown to the public? How many indigent people suffer in secret the hardships of poverty while having a reputation of being well-off?

This petition, filled with false allegations, was nevertheless believed. Consequently, the lieutenant of police allowed the schoolmasters to cite the Brothers and their Superior before the court. This was done without delay. De La Salle could have easily defended himself by pointing out:

1) That he was authorized by His Eminence to direct a Community of Brothers for teaching in Christian and gratuitous schools;

2) That this authorization made him their Superior and empowered him to open gratuitous schools;

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*The lieutenant of police was actually a magistrate who worked with the local police force and usually handled civil cases.

**The figure is obviously erroneous. The Brothers did not have more than six or seven schools in all of Paris at this time. Is this figure an error on Blain's part, or a deliberate exaggeration on that of the schoolmasters? Possibly it may refer to "classes" rather than schools.

3) That it was not possible either for him or for the Brothers to identify from the large number of poor children who came seeking a free education those who might belong to fairly well-to-do families;

4) That even if it were possible to do this, he could not judge fairly and equitably about their financial position without having made a juridical inquiry into their possessions and income;

5) That since he had no right to make any such inquiry, it would be highly rash of him to pass judgment on a matter so hidden, private, and difficult to determine;

6) That if he and the Brothers undertook to discriminate between rich and poor children, not only would they run the risk of making mistakes, but they would also be open to all sorts of insults and outrages;

7) That the fact that some people are called surgeons, masons, butchers, locksmiths, wine merchants and so on does not imply that all of them are in fact in easy circumstances; many poor people exercise these same roles;

8) That some of those listed as wealthy might have large families to provide for, something that soon exhausts the resources of those who live by a trade or who have only a limited income;

9) That every day illness, business reverses and other misfortunes bring to the poorhouse people who belong to all those professions, and who moreover are both skilled and diligent workers.

He would have embarrassed the schoolmasters a good deal if he had asked them whether they were willing to go bond for the fortune they attributed to those whom they had listed among the rich, and whether they were ready to pay out of the own purses what might be wanting to those people whose wealth they had exaggerated.

Finally, he might have concluded that there was little likelihood that parents who were rich or well-off would be willing to send their children to schools frequented by the sons of soldiers, hod carriers, wheelbarrow pushers, and other members of the lowest classes of society.

Such replies, so apt to reduce the schoolmasters to silence, were not employed by a man who felt that, in the circumstances, he should say nothing and let those speak up whose responsibility it was to do so. De La Salle did not look upon the cause of the gratuitous schools as one that concerned him personally, but as one affecting the public and the poor; so he felt that it was not up to him to answer the summons, and he declined to appear in court.

The writing masters* did not fail to make the most of this inaction and they pressed the charges vigorously. As neither De La Salle nor any of his followers appeared in court, they were condemned by default on February 22, 1704. The sentence forbade them to admit to the charity schools any children but those whose fathers were "genuine paupers"**, and certified as such; and nothing was to be taught them except what was considered proper to their families' social standing. In addition, De La Salle was condemned to pay the costs and a fine of 50 livres; the same fine was levied against each of the Brothers.

This sentence, which gave the writing masters everything they wanted and which caused so much injury to the charitable schools, did not intimidate the holy Founder and did not keep the Brothers from proceeding with their teaching as usual. We do not know whether De La Salle ever paid the fine or not. In all likelihood the writing masters had to be content with the hope of collecting it some day, and to wait for the reimbursement of the costs until the Brothers' fortunes took a turn for the better. For the time being the Brothers, more deserving of pity than of envy, gave their rivals no hope of recovering these expenses for the lawsuit from a Community which lived on alms, and whose extreme poverty placed it out of reach of any pecuniary exactions.

Things remained as they were for the next three months, after which the writing masters presented to the lieutenant of police a new complaint dated June 7, 1704. In it they reiterated all the accusations already made against De La Salle and his disciples; in addition they incriminated him for infringing the terms of the judgment rendered on February 22. They asked that this latter sentence might be carried out under pain of a fine of 500 livres for damages and interest levied against each of the guilty parties. In addition, they demanded that De La Salle be immediately fined 2,000 livres for damages and interest against the said community of the writing masters, on account of the considerable harm he had caused it; and finally, that all parents owning property, and consequently not authorized to profit by the establishment of the charitable schools, should be forbidden to send their children to the said schools or to have them taught by any persons other than those publicly authorized to fulfill such functions.

They further asked that the new sentence might be made public by being affixed in public places wherever necessary, and that the culprits be cited to appear in court. All that was carried out. The new citation, however, did not succeed in making De La Salle break his silence or appear in court. The

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*Blain suddenly speaks of the "writing masters" whereas up to this point he had been calling the Saint's adversaries the "schoolmasters," i.e., those who taught in the "Little Schools." Probably the two groups had made common cause against De La Salle and the Brothers.

**"Genuine paupers," i.e., people listed on the official city register of paupers and certified as such, usually by their parish priests. In some places they had to wear a distinguishing sign!

cause being that of the public and of the poor, he felt that it was up to the magistrates themselves, responsible for safeguarding and preserving the common good, to defend it. Perhaps he thought that, since he lacked all influential friends and highly placed protectors, the courts would inevitably condemn him if he appeared and tried to defend the rights of the poor in his own name.

His silence resulted in complete victory for his enemies; they finally obtained what they had wanted all along: the condemnation of De La Salle and the Brothers by default. The sentence issued against them on February 22 was confirmed; for having infringed its terms, De La Salle was fined 100 livres; each Brother teaching in the schools was fined 50 livres for damages and interest, to be paid to the guild of the writing masters, in addition to the costs of the proceedings.

Fathers whose children did not need to frequent the charity schools were forbidden to send their offspring there to learn how to write, under penalty of paying fines, costs, damages and interest to the said community (*i.e.*, of the writing masters). Finally, "Mister" De La Salle was ordered to remove within three days the sign which he had placed over the door of his house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, indicating that in it he was training Brothers or schoolmasters, although he had not been authorized to do so by any duly registered Letters Patent. The sign which so offended the eyes of the writing masters bore only the simple words: "Brothers of the Christian Schools." It had been there ever since the school had been opened. The court's sentence was immediately posted in the public squares in all the sections of Paris where the Brothers had classes; but the posters were no longer there the next day, thanks to the efforts of several zealous persons, indignant over the harm this sentence had done to the most necessary initiative of all for poor, neglected Christian children.

In vain the writing masters multiplied their expenses and demanded fines and reimbursement from a Community and a man who, because of their extreme poverty, were in no position to pay anything. However, if they could get no money from the Brothers, they at least enjoyed the churlish satisfaction of sending people to attack them with ladders, hammers and other tools used in pillage. The sign was torn down; the benches, tables, books and all the other material used for teaching drawing, reading and writing to over 200 young men on Sunday and feast day afternoons were carted off in wagons, all without meeting any resistance. De La Salle and the Brothers witnessed the vandalizing of their establishment without complaining or trying to stop the marauders.

Quite soon the noise that the pillage created alerted the Sisters of the Cross and enabled them from their convent to take notice of what was going on. In vain did their tears flow unchecked on beholding such a spectacle. The sight was indeed unusual. A charitable institution, having nothing but the public good as its object, uniquely dedicated to the gratuitous instruction of poor children, was requited for its efforts by being vandalized. It was indeed a spectacle deserving tears, and they were not spared. People looked on with astonishment and compassion as the house was besieged as though by the

enemy, and then devastated as though it were conquered territory. Right-minded people bewailed what was happening; the poor, those most directly interested, realized that it was they, rather than the Brothers, who were being victimized. But they did not dare make a public outcry or manifest their complaints publicly. They joined indignation to their complaints; and it was the public, so deeply interested in the fate of the charitable schools, that caused those who had won the case in court to lose it in the long run because of such violent and unjustified behavior.

The Sunday school came to an end as a result of this devastation, after enjoying remarkable success for some six years. The good results it produced cause it to be regretted even to this day by all those who love what is good and care about the salvation of souls. Eagerness to learn drawing, geometry, mathematics, penmanship, arithmetic and reading drew to it from all over Paris a large number of young men belonging to various trades, who had neither the money to pay for such schooling nor the time to devote to it except on Sunday and feast day afternoons. They reaped the double advantage of becoming better Christians while becoming better workers, for pious exercises sanctified their hearts after their minds had been cultivated by good teaching.

They were kept away from dangerous companionship, cabarets and other dens of debauchery. They learned how to participate in religious services. They lost all taste for vice while acquiring a liking for piety. The salutary instructions they received opened their eyes to the evil of their past life and inspired them with horror for their sinful ways. General confessions and the reception of the Sacraments were likewise promoted, and the final result was a life changed for the better. That is what the public lost when the Sunday school was ruined. Jealousy, rather than pecuniary considerations, had led the writing masters to seek its destruction; for there is no doubt that none of the young workingmen who came from far and near to this school had any desire, let alone the chance, to spend part of their time and money for lessons that they would have had to pay for.

Hence the complaint formulated by the writing masters in their petition against this school was totally unfounded. According to them, it was causing them serious financial loss; but what loss could they suffer if they did not even have in their classes these youths who had neither money to give them nor time to attend their classes (which are open only on working days)? The regret occasioned by the disappearance of that good work has not yet vanished from Paris. People still desire very earnestly to see it reestablished. Every now and then passers-by stop the Brothers and ask when they plan to reopen the Sunday school. But all the troubles fomented by the writing masters were only the prelude to the gathering tempest which soon burst upon the Founder and on his Institute. De La Salle could foresee that the attack on the schools in the Faubourg Saint Antoine would extend with even greater violence to those in the Faubourg Saint Germain. He prepared for another onslaught with invincible courage, and when it came it found him as immovable as a rock.

Chapter II

The Brothers Are Called to Marseilles to Conduct Charity Schools; Then to Darnétal near Rouen, and Finally to Rouen Itself

The Brothers' newly formed Institute, which was slowly being strangled in Paris, went elsewhere in search of breathing space. The winds of persecution drove De La Salle from Paris and brought his Institute to various places: Marseilles, Rouen and Dijon, three of the most flourishing cities in the kingdom. We have already related the beginnings of the school in Avignon. In a short time it became so well known that it led to the opening of an establishment in Marseilles. The order, silence and modesty which could be observed in the Brothers' classes, among a school population made up of naturally boisterous, giddy and stubborn children incapable of sustained attention, were sights people never grew tired of. The townsfolk came to the school to satisfy their curiosity and to see the urchins, so prone to cutting up, soon become recollected and attentive to the lessons given to them with such great economy of words. Strangers in Avignon were led to visit the schools when they heard of the unusual spectacle they offered. Friends brought them to see for themselves, if they appeared to possess a certain amount of piety and might be inclined to further the interests of religion.

Morelet and Jourdan, two wealthy merchants of Marseilles who were also gentlemen of exemplary piety, had the pleasure of seeing with their own eyes and of verifying whether all that they had heard in praise of the Brothers was true and whether or not there was anything exaggerated in the latter's reputation. Having witnessed in person the way the classes were arranged, the discipline in force among the students and the assiduity of the teachers, they remained greatly edified by the atmosphere of piety which pervaded all the school activities, and they were delighted over the new method of teaching with so few words and by the use of signals. They accordingly felt inspired to help Marseilles share in the good fortune of Avignon.

When they went home, these two gentlemen spoke of their project to Trovillard, who is at present vicar general of Arles. The latter advised them to set up a committee composed of about a dozen persons who would be in charge of finding ways and means of raising the 400 livres a year needed for the living expenses of two Brothers. The proposal was approved as soon as made, and it was carried out without delay. De La Salle immediately sent from Paris two Brothers who, on their arrival, opened a school in the parish of Saint Lawrence for the children of the sailors. They found a small building which was quite adequate, and it was donated to them by one of the founders. The charitable gentlemen who had called them guaranteed the Brothers' stipend; and to make sure of its continuance, most of them took care to leave enough capital in their wills to assure this. Jourdan did not long survive the foundation of the school which he and Morelet had started; but he did not fail to leave it two zealous protectors in the persons of his father and his brother, the prior of Saint Lawrence. On his deathbed he entreated them to take the interests of this school to heart and to replace him in fostering its progress; they have done so with great zeal in imitation of his example.

That school, opened in 1704 just when the greatest upheavals were threatening De La Salle and his new Society, succeeded just like all the others; but for a long time the parish of Saint Lawrence was the only one that benefited by the Brothers' efforts. Marseilles, rich and populous as it is, where it should have been easy to multiply such necessary foundations, had only one Brothers' school for 16 years. More than once plans were made to found others, plans which were actually attempted at the time De La Salle visited the city; but only after his death did the project succeed. God willed that the saintly Founder should water this opulent city with his sweat and sow in it the seeds of his virtues and sufferings, before his Community could reap a harvest there.

So, from 1704 to 1720 the school of Saint Lawrence was the only one the Brothers had in Marseilles. Only after a horrible pestilence, which carried off the greater part of the inhabitants, was it decided to establish other schools. The epidemic which caused new ravages and presented new spectacles of desolation day after day did not spare the two Brothers. One died; and the other, having returned by a sort of miracle from the very jaws of death, employed the life God had given back to him in serving the people in his area stricken by the pestilence.

Then the illustrious and charitable bishop, H. F. Xavier De Belzunce De Castelmoron, who had been acting in Marseilles as Saint Charles had acted in Milan during the pestilence there, resolved to put the crowning touch on all the examples of charity and virtue which he had given during this time of terror in the city, by establishing new charity schools in the four other parishes of the metropolis. Several pious persons contributed thereto, Morelet among others. This virtuous merchant, who placed the largest share of his wealth in reserve for eternity by devoting it to good works, had always shown outstanding zeal for the instruction of youth. He had already founded a school in his own parish, which was called "The Greater," and had put an ecclesiastic in charge of it; but subsequently he found another position for the cleric and entrusted the school to two Brothers, after setting aside a sufficient revenue for their upkeep, which he later augmented by 40 livres a year.

All the parishes of Marseilles were then provided with Brothers engaged in the instruction of the poor children of the city; it was only right that those living at the Hôpital* should likewise be afforded the same privilege. Some years later, in fact, the administrators of that institution took steps to provide such an advantage to those children. For that purpose they invoked the influence of their pious bishop and enlisted the help of his zeal, ever favorable to the instruction of the ignorant. The project, however, presented various difficulties. In the mind of the Brothers' Superior a number of objections and dangers militated against his desire to cooperate with the administrators.

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*Hôpital in 17th-18th-century France was not so much a place for caring for the sick as a place of refuge for the indigent, adult and children, the latter mostly orphans, a sort of "poorhouse," or general hospice for the poor.

He was afraid that if the Brothers became involved with other people having a different mentality and a different profession, they would become the objects either of the latter's envy and aversion if they took part in the governing of the establishment, or of their scorn and disrespect if they remained without any authority. He feared even more lest the Brothers, mingling with the secular people in this institution might, through too close contact, become overly familiar with them, imitate them, and become like them. When the Jews lived in proximity with the Gentiles, they imitated the latter's example and learned to live like them. It is precisely what too often happens to those who by vocation are supposed to remain apart from the world, but who find themselves in close contact with seculars. Little by little they lose the spirit of retirement, recollection and mortification, and instead become filled with the spirit of the world which they had had so much trouble in getting rid of.

Still, the gentlemen on the committee, desiring with such laudable eagerness to see the Brothers assume the care and education of the children in this institution, insisted so strongly that the Superior could not turn them down. On their side they were kind enough to agree to the conditions he specified: wise precautions destined to keep the Brothers in perfect regularity. After all, only time would show what the Brothers' virtue had to fear in a situation which, while conforming to certain rules, was still not a regular community, and what good they could do in an establishment where order, subordination and piety had not, as a rule, struck deep roots into hearts, and where servile fear, human respect and self-interest were the primary motives that actuated those who lived and labored there.

If they wished to avoid envy and jealousy, which are found wherever men go; to secure the good will of those in charge without flattering their passions; to uphold their authority over the children whom they instructed so that nobody could undertake to deprive them of it; to win the respect even of those whom they could not win over and to live a life of solitude in the midst of boisterous and undisciplined youngsters---the Brothers needed to act with great caution and singular prudence. At all events, if the passions of others and human malice made it impossible for them to do any good in such a place, where there was so much to be done, and obliged them to withdraw from a situation which they had entered only with reluctance, the experience would be a proof for them that their special charism was not for work in such poorhouses.

What we have been saying demonstrates the enthusiasm that the city of Marseilles displayed for the founding of gratuitous schools. Sixteen Brothers, working in various sections of the town, taught the children of the poor with great success. Their needs were provided for by foundations which at the present time the charity of the city councilmen and the magistrates has undertaken to augment by an annual grant of 800 livres. With that in mind the officials drew up a petition to secure the court's approval and asked the Superior General to present it to Cardinal Fleury.* In addition, since the

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*Cardinal Fleury, 1653-1743. Bishop of Fréjus and preceptor of Louis XV who held him in high esteem. From 1726 to 1743 he effectively acted as prime minister.

Brothers were too crowded in the house they occupied, the gentlemen belonging to the illustrious Confraternity of Our Lady of Good Help (in which most of the principal citizens hold membership) provided them with a beautiful and commodious house, nearly completely furnished, which is called the "House of Confraternity of Our Lady of Good Help." Finally, so that nothing might be lacking to provide the Brothers in Marseilles with a first-class establishment, their Community was admitted, in 1727, to membership in the roster of regular religious Communities by the bishop and the city authorities.

I do not think there is now another city in France where the Brothers have more reason to feel satisfied than in Marseilles. Not surprisingly, they entertain for that city sentiments of deep gratitude which they seek to turn to the city's advantage by their prayers and supplications to the Lord. This is all we have to say for the moment about the establishment of the Christian Schools in that city.

Before following De La Salle to the capital of Normandy where he will encounter new crosses and establish new foundations, we must return to him in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, where he grieved over the destruction of the establishment which the writing masters had just closed. Seeing his Sunday school ruined, the man of God resolved to leave a house where he had nothing more to do and a city where he found only enemies; he foresaw that the storm would move over from the Faubourg Saint Antoine to the Faubourg Saint Germain, and would cause the same havoc in the Brothers' schools there, since nobody seemed interested in opposing his enemies' machinations.

He had already received, on two occasions, letters inviting him to Rouen. He felt inclined to go there, and the situation in which he now found himself invited him to do so. His poverty, as stringent as ever, did not allow him to pay rent on a house he did not need. The furious assaults directed against his little Congregation discouraged those who wished to enter; persecution had frightened off most of the novices, so that only a few remained with him. To cap it all, he still owned the considerable amount of furnishings given to him by Madame Voisin, but he did not know where to store it all. However, Divine Providence, Which never forgot him, inspired a pious person to let him use a large empty warehouse. After moving the few items of furniture he needed to the Brothers' house in the parish of Saint Sulpice, he stored the rest and went to live there with the novices who were very few indeed at the beginning of 1705.

He did not stay long, because an opportunity of leaving, which he longed for, soon presented itself. He was asked to send two Brothers to take charge of a school in the parish of Saint Roch. He was delighted with the invitation, sent the Brothers, and went to live with them along with two or three priests; he always had several priests with him in the various places where he resided. That school did not last very long, only two or three years. Young student-teachers were put in place of the Brothers. The reason was that the Brothers were required to be present during the catechism lessons which the parish clergy taught in the church; they were supposed to keep order, silence and discipline among the children. The idea was perhaps not such a bad one; but it was hardly appropriate for men bound to a regular life who, by fulfilling this function, were exposed to great distractions and had to omit many of their exercises of piety.

As far back as September, 1704, De La Salle had received letters from Rouen requesting him to take charge of a school at Darnétal, a large village just outside Rouen. That locality was thickly populated and widely known for cloth weaving. It was there, many years previously, that Madame De Maillefer had founded a gratuitous school for girls. The gentlemen belonging to the Jesuits' Congregation* supported a schoolmaster for boys in the town. The teacher had recently died, and they were looking for a replacement. Abbé Deshayes, a member of this sodality, who today is the parish priest of Holy Savior, gave the gentlemen such a glowing account of the Brothers and of their Superior whom he had known at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, that he won their approval for his plan. They, therefore, agreed to ask for two Brothers, if they would be satisfied with a stipend of 50 écus and the lodgings previously occupied by the deceased teacher.

Abbé Deshayes, who was asked to handle the negotiations, forwarded the proposal to the Servant of God in Paris through Chardon De Lagny, a priest who resided in the parish community of Saint Sulpice where he had charge of the converted Protestants in that parish---a mission he continued to fulfill till his death. Having been a Protestant himself, he knew all about such people. In fact, he carried out this ministry with zeal and success. He even composed seven or eight duodecimos, very learnedly written and carefully researched on many topics. The one entitled "Treatise on Communion under Both Species" is one of the best he wrote; in it he lays bare the deceit and bad faith of the Protestants who claim that the use of both species is essential.

Only a man as detached from monetary considerations as De La Salle would have accepted such a proposal; for while asking him for two Brothers, they were really leaving him the responsibility of supporting them. They wanted two Brothers, yet they offered only the modest salary of the deceased teacher, which was barely enough for one man. Thus the Servant of God had to rely on some other source of income, rather than on the gentlemen of the Jesuits' sodality, when he agreed to their request. He was right in so doing, for this foundation petered out a few years later, as we shall see. He counted only on Divine Providence; for he saw clearly that he would have to abandon his disciples to God's care if he wished to establish them in the capital of Normandy.

It is indeed amazing that today there are 12 of them, ten teaching in the gratuitous schools, who for the past 30 years have been keeping the charitable schools operating on pure charity. It is even more amazing that in such a wealthy city no one has thought of endowing these schools or multiplying them, or even trying to help them. Most amazing of all, the Brothers have, during all this time, been so generally and constantly abandoned to their poverty that the alms they have received have come from elsewhere. That is the only city in the kingdom where no attention has been paid to the need for the

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*Undoubtedly a sodality made up of former students of the Jesuits.

Brothers' schools, to the great contribution they make to the public weal. However, this place where they were so despised and neglected is the one which Divine Providence chose to be the theater of the greatest blessings poured out on them, as we shall see.

Another difficulty might have hindered De La Salle from agreeing with the proposal made to him. He had always held to the inviolable rule of not accepting foundations in country places because he considered these dangerous to the Brothers' salvation. They might have found, in their isolation, away from the companionship and the example of their fellow religious, more liberty and more occasions for falling into relaxation. But this difficulty was dissipated as soon as he learned more about the locality where his disciples were wanted. He found out that Darnétal is contiguous to Rouen, and that the town is more wealthy and populous than many other places that call themselves cities. Moreover, De La Salle foresaw that once the Brothers were established at the gates of Rouen, they would soon enter the city itself, and that they would be invited there as soon as people learned about their methods of teaching and of educating the young.

In fact, De La Salle felt a holy desire to establish himself in Rouen; he had thought of that ever since the founding of his Institute. Rouen seemed, in a way, the root from which it had sprung, and it was only fair that it should reap some benefit from his Institute. Adrien Nyel had conducted the charity schools in Rouen before going to found the first one in Rheims. It was the saintly Madame De Maillefer who, while living in Rouen, had the idea of opening such schools in her native city, and who had sent Nyel to undertake the project. It was then only natural that, just as waters following their normal course always return to the sea from which they arose, so too the Brothers should come to take charge of the Christian schools in the place where, so to speak, their Institute had been conceived.

Thus, considering the city of Rouen as the origin of his Society, De La Salle thought he should serve it with generosity and entire disinterestedness. Unworried over his disciples' food and clothing, he agreed to everything asked for by Abbé Deshayes, with the specific reservation, however, that the Brothers sent to Darnétal would limit themselves, as was everywhere else the practice, to their functions as teachers. He took this precaution because he feared that the Brothers might be pressured into undertaking the various chores which schoolmasters usually performed in country villages: singing the Offices, wearing the surplice and assisting the parish priest in his ministry, all of which are functions forbidden to the Brothers by essential rules of their Institute. Any derogation from such rules would alter the Institute itself and modify its very nature. To that precaution the wise Superior added a second: he sent a Brother to Darnétal to inspect the premises to see if they were adequate for a school and to reach an understanding with Abbé Deshayes about having the house and everything else ready. Once that was done, and after requesting the authorization of the archbishop of Rouen, De La Salle sent the two Brothers about the beginning of February, 1705.

As soon as the school was opened, it was filled with students, and God's blessing entered along with them. Within two months the good results were

even more evident than they had been anywhere else. The reputation of the new school soon spread to Rouen; the zeal of certain worthy people was aroused, and they began to envy the neighboring village the advantage it possessed over the city. From then on they resolved to establish the Brothers in Rouen; and that project was soon realized, as we shall see. It was what De La Salle had foreseen and even foretold. Hope had led him to accept the foundation at Darnétal in spite of the very modest salary of 50 écus paid to the Brothers, and not too regularly at that. For, in fact, a few years later the money stopped coming altogether. The people who had invited the Brothers neglected to provide for them, not only failing to pay the 50 écus, but even declining to defray the cost of the major and minor repairs needed by the house. That was, people said, the penance deserved by the deceased parish priest of Longpaon for his revolt against the constitution, Unigenitus.^{*} But those who imposed such a penance on him did not seem to notice that it was not the appellant but the Brothers who had to suffer the consequences.

Be that as it may, since nothing happened but what De La Salle had foreseen, and since in sending the Brothers to Darnétal he had counted on God alone to provide for them, he considered that they had lost nothing in being deprived of their small salary, so long as they did not lose confidence in the Author of all good. Accordingly, he did not want to withdraw them from Darnétal when their salary was no longer paid. This school is still in operation today, even though its income is only 75 livres. The parish priest is deeply attached to the Brothers and has found ways to make up the difference by a collection taken up among the people every three months. The school is still as flourishing and well attended as it was at the beginning. No sooner had it opened, as we mentioned above, than it became an object of envy for Rouen, where its reputation spread, and where the results it obtained spoke for it.

In the city, people began discussing the benefits of gratuitous schools and the need for such establishments for the children of the poor; and steps were taken to secure them. The vicars general were soon made aware of the interest and were urged to found some charity schools in Rouen. They thought well of the scheme and zealously recommended it to Colbert, at that time the archbishop of Rouen. Fortunately, he had just arrived, towards the end of Lent, to confer Sacred Orders. That prelate, who loved what was good and who judged more accurately than most what was solid and really worthwhile, appreciated the initiative at its true worth; and next to the erection of seminaries, no other good work outranked schools in his estimation. He showed that in his will, in which the only bequests he made went to his minor seminaries and to the Community of schoolmistresses which he had established

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^{*}The bull, Unigenitus, issued by Clement XI on September 8, 1713, condemned the 101 propositions from the Reflexions Morales by Quesnel, an Oratorian. It was the final blow in the struggle against Jansenism. Four bishops and a number of priests "appealed" against the pope's condemnation and were known as appellants.

at Ernemont.* Those were the establishments he had at heart above all others; they were his own foundations which he considered of the first importance, of superior rank; hence, they were the only ones he enriched with his liberalities. So, being well disposed towards all great undertakings, he cooperated with the project of his vicars general. Their plan was approved as soon as it was proposed; for there are undertakings which need neither time nor long discussions to find adherence; they win over the minds and hearts of those who have a real religious spirit as soon as they are broached, because of the great advantages and the valuable results they promise. The only question remaining, therefore, was how to get the Brothers to Rouen as soon as possible.

Archbishop Colbert felt renewed zeal for the execution of this project when he beheld at his feet the Brothers from Darnétal who had come to pay him their respects and beg for his blessing. Well-disposed towards them on account of all the favorable reports he had heard about them, he welcomed them with great kindness and expressed the desire to have other Brothers for his See city.

The Darnétal school, which was just beginning and was already producing such good results, promised more of the same for Rouen, and hence made the archbishop eager to secure them. Thus, when inquiring after the Brothers' Superior, he asked if he could send some Brothers to Rouen to open gratuitous schools there. As De La Salle desired this no less than Colbert did, the Brothers, who were aware of his wish, were not risking anything when they assured His Excellency that their Superior was indeed prepared to satisfy him on that point.

On hearing their response, Archbishop Colbert ordered Abbé Couet, his right-hand man, to write to De La Salle asking him to come to Rouen as soon as he could, if possible before the prelate's departure (since he was scheduled to leave on Easter Monday for his clergy conference) in order to confer with him about establishing a Brothers' school. The holy Founder's determination to transfer the novitiate from Paris to Rouen was apparently no secret, since Abbé Couet mentioned it in his letter, saying that he hoped to have a chance to collaborate with him in his good work.

That letter, so favorable to the pious Founder's plans, reached him at a time when nothing in the world could have been more agreeable to him, for it came when, rejected on all sides and driven from his last refuge, he did not know where to turn or where to go with the wreck of his novitiate. He had to disappear from Paris, from the eyes of his declared or hidden enemies, so as to quell the animosity of the former and to dissipate the prejudices of the latter. The Brothers at Darnétal also wrote to the Founder, telling him of the success their school was enjoying and of the pious projects that it had given rise to, of their visit to the archbishop and their conversation with him. They urged him to come in person as soon as possible in order to conclude what had been so auspiciously begun. John Baptist did so, traveling to Rouen by stagecoach.

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*During his later years (at the time he wrote the Life of John Baptist De La Salle), Blain was the ecclesiastical superior of that diocesan Community.

He had no trouble in concluding the affair with the prelate who was quite incapable of raising difficulties against good works, but who rather labored to remove them. De La Salle departed again, almost as soon as he had arrived, and went back to Paris to inform the Brothers whom he planned to send. On his side, the archbishop took up the matter with De Pont Carré, the president of the parliament of Normandy, so as to conclude with him the arrangements needed to bring the plan to success. The project won the unqualified approval of that great magistrate who possesses a brilliant mind and an eminent piety. De Pont Carré promised to back the plan with all his authority and all the efforts inspired by his zeal. He certainly kept his word for he made himself the father, rather than the protector of the Institute, as the sequel was to show.

Archbishop Colbert's intention was not to found new gratuitous schools for the Brothers to operate, but to put them in charge of those that already existed, which Nyel had once directed, and which came under the control of the administrators of the Hôpital. The plan involved a good deal of difficulty; and great as was the influence in his diocese possessed by the archbishop, the son of one of the most eminent ministers that France ever had;* great as was the advantage that his dignity gave him in the meeting of the council over which he presided, he would have despaired of securing approval for his project if he had not been able to count on the authority, zeal and eloquence of De Pont Carré.

That outstanding magistrate speaks with such facility, wit and grace that it is difficult to resist him and not to be led where he wishes to bring you. Such was the powerful asset provided by the president that the prudent prelate wished to utilize. He thought it would suffice for the head of parliament to appear and to address the meeting of the administrators, in order to win the members' unanimous vote. With that in mind, they called a meeting and both were present. The archbishop explained what he had in mind, and the president displayed the oratorical talent he possessed, urging the adoption of the measure.

Who would believe it? Such a pious design, so advantageous to the public, was not approved by the administrators when it was laid before them by the two principal men on the board. The latter's presence and authority alone, the simple expression of their desires, would no doubt have won unanimous agreement if anything else but a good work had been at stake. I do not know what malignant fatality makes it happen, but everything good, everything that involves the glory of God must suffer contradiction. Was it because of some prepossession against all new establishments, or the fear of seeing a strange Community come into a city which considered itself overburdened with those already existing there? Was it concern over losing the vested right of naming the teachers in those schools, as though the positions were a sort of benefice? Was it secret aversion and antipathy for

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*Colbert, minister of finance and industry in the early years of Louis XIV's reign. A protégé of Mazarin, he served the young king faithfully and well, but eventually fell into disfavor because he tried to curb the latter's extravagance.

strangers? I really cannot say. However, the archbishop's proposal surprised the administrators; and the archbishop in turn was no less surprised at their surprise. He had expected some objections, but he had not expected to find these men so apprehensive over the proposal he had just made, as though he wanted to introduce the enemy into the city. On both sides there was a certain amount of bafflement.

However, when they began to deliberate, the prelate tried to soften the prejudice in their minds by the solid arguments he advanced. He pointed out that the Brothers would not be a burden; the men whom he wished to invite into the city were not good only for themselves, but men dedicated to the instruction and education of the poorest and most neglected children. He showed them the difference between groups which are, so to speak, useless mouths in the State, communities whose presence creates problems---either because they have to be supported by the localities where they exist; or because they occupy extensive lands; or because they possess vast wealth, or because of the scandalous and ill-regulated lives of some of their members---and institutes the immediate end of which is the public good, charity towards their neighbor, and especially the gratuitous service of the poorest and least fortunate members of society. He made them understand that the debauchery, immorality and corruption of the lower classes and the disorders in the State that result therefrom all stem from a lack of instruction. It was strange, he added, that in a Christian country one could find men who do not acknowledge God, who know nothing of Jesus Christ and His mysteries, who perhaps do not understand the difference between themselves and beasts, between vice and virtue, and who care nothing either for the science of salvation or for their civic duties, all because they have grown up without any religion or culture, because no one has taken any interest in their education.

He said that one did not need prolonged reflections to realize how much the prince had to apprehend from subjects who did not fear God, or how much the ordinary citizens suffer from men who are governed only by their bodily senses; and how little the State can hope for from people of whom the vast majority are blasphemous, intemperate, violent and irreligious. Nobody can deny that such evils, the greatest affliction of the State as well as of the Church, have no other source than ignorance and bad education. He concluded that the State is no less interested than the Church in seeking a remedy for such problems, and that the necessary and effective remedy was to establish gratuitous schools for those unable to pay for their instruction. Such cogent arguments gave great weight to the pious cause for which the archbishop pleaded and should have made a deep impression on the administrators, who are usually men of good sense and considerable merit. His pleas gradually brought them to where he wished to lead them and made them realize that as good citizens, as well as good Christians, they should be glad to have the Brothers and should promote, by love for the State as much as by the spirit of religion, an Institute so necessary for the public weal.

In addition, there existed gratuitous schools with endowments, administered by the board; and the administrators had the right to name the teachers. The choice was theirs; but in conscience they were obliged to

select the best ones available, the ones most capable of educating and instructing the children of the poor. Such a task is eminently suited to young clerics, but the funds available to pay them were not sufficient for their needs. The funds were likewise too modest to suffice for laymen who were not completely ignorant of the teaching profession. Each of the teachers had to live on what he was paid; if that was not enough, he had to make up the difference by outside undertakings, sometimes illegal ones. Thus, if a charity school, supposed to be gratuitous, cannot provide the necessities of life to the teachers, the latter will try to supplement their income by other activities, or by secretly demanding fees and other compensations, acts which do away with the gratuitous character of the school.

The result is that the purpose of such modest endowments is either not carried out at all or is poorly achieved. This reason alone, if carefully weighed, should settle the matter; but nowadays people get up in arms as soon as you mention a community of men; and when it comes to concluding an agreement with them, people think they are binding themselves with chains. Yet only a community can guarantee to provide competent teachers for the schools on a permanent basis. Educated and trained with this in mind, the Brothers know far more about running schools than all the others who undertake this task. They take pride and pleasure in this work because they engage in it as a vocation. Since nothing but charity calls them to it, they ask only to be provided with the strict necessities while they devote themselves to it.

If one considers the matter carefully, one can see that it is always an advantage to have the Brothers. In their hands the students are well instructed and well brought up, because theirs are charitable hands. When other teachers are sought to instruct youth, if one wishes to have capable and devoted masters, one must be prepared to pay them double or triple what the Brothers receive. Since the Brothers' Society provides very competent teachers for reading, writing and arithmetic; since their method for learning is the shortest and best; since silence reigns in their classes, a child learns in a short time what he would take much longer to acquire with the writing masters, for not one of the latter, if he is at all capable, would consent to teach for less than double a Brother's stipend. Hence there is no doubt that hiring the Brothers is extremely advantageous.

I repeat: in the Brothers' schools the children learn faster, are better brought up, are more carefully drilled in good manners and in their Christian duties, are more adequately prepared for their First Communion. All these advantages, entirely gratis and so necessary for the children of the poor, cost the benefactors, whose zeal provides these benefits for the youngsters, only a small salary. Thus, common sense, the benefit accruing to the poor, the board's own interests, all spoke through Archbishop Colbert's lips when he proposed to entrust the charity schools to the Brothers. But that was precisely the choice that would not be accepted by those men whose minds were mesmerized by phantoms. Only with the greatest difficulty did the archbishop make them understand the advantages presented by the plan he was suggesting. However, in the end there occurred a certain meeting of minds; and whether out of consideration for the prelate or deference for the president, or out of a realization of the cogency of the latter's arguments,

the board agreed to lodge the Brothers at the Hôpital so that they could teach the children there, and to entrust to them the endowed charity schools of the city, which Nyel had formerly directed.

Such was the news that Archbishop Colbert, on his return to Paris, informed De La Salle of; he urged him to send without delay a sufficient number of Brothers to teach the poor children that depended on the board, and to take over the charity schools of the city. The prelate's secret motive in thus trying to hasten the Brothers' departure was no doubt his suspicion that delay might compromise the arrangement, thus giving the administrators time to go back on their decision. His suspicion was well founded; he foresaw what in fact occurred.

At last the desires of the holy Founder were accomplished. For over 12 years he had been hoping to see the Brothers in charge of the schools that had been Nyel's. Under the influence of a prophetic spirit he had even declared that they would one day direct these schools. He saw with joy the accomplishment of his prophecy. His foresight extended even farther. Knowing that he needed a novitiate, and realizing that it could not function normally in Paris, he thought of transferring it to Rouen. Next to the capital, he could think of no other city in the kingdom better suited for the purpose. Rouen was a great, wealthy city, not too far from Paris. He hoped to find there the backing that Paris refused him, and to escape the harassment he had encountered there. Moreover, the excellent communications between the two cities and the ease with which conveyances ply between them made it possible to make the trip cheaply.

But while all the preparations were being made in Paris for the Brothers' departure, people in Rouen had changed their minds. Those who taught in the schools were interested in keeping their jobs and they gave themselves no rest to avoid losing them. People had come back to their first beliefs; and the administrators, forgetting in the absence of the archbishop and of the president a resolution that they had so reluctantly taken in the latter's presence, would no longer hear of the Brothers' coming.

This change of heart did not disturb the prelate who had half expected it. He told De La Salle not to worry, to send the Brothers on, and to go with them, promising that he himself would follow and would soon come back to Rouen to resolve the difficulties which he was sure to encounter on his return.

Chapter III

De La Salle Brings the Brothers to Rouen. They Settle There, but with Great Difficulty, and Only with the Harshest and Most Annoying Conditions

The pious Founder set out for Rouen with the Brothers, rather after the manner of Saint Anthony on the road to Alexandria accompanied by his monks, in

silence and prayer. This trip thus sanctified by recollection and constant prayer might have been mistaken for a devout pilgrimage performed in the most edifying manner. The Brothers observed such modesty that the fatigue of the journey, the variety of objects encountered, and the unexpected events that happened could not alter it. On the road all the regular community exercises were performed with the same punctuality as at home.

Every day the travelers heard Mass, said for them by the one who acted as their visible angel; and they received Communion from him. This new Raphael, while leading them to Rouen, was really showing them the path to eternity, and he let them behold only the road that leads to heaven. They were a spectacle to the passers-by, and everywhere left behind them the good odor of Jesus Christ. Their attitude and their behavior led people to conclude that they were indeed men of God. And since the sort of habit they wore had not yet been seen in those parts, people asked who these men were, since, unlike ordinary travelers, they trudged along without speaking and made use of their eyes only to direct their steps.

When they arrived at an inn, they became once again a subject of curiosity; for when they entered these public places where one so often finds confusion and uproar, they seemed to be entering a church. They sought the most secluded rooms, where they set themselves to pray and to find in renewed mental prayer a rest from the fatigue of a journey made on foot. The most indifferent people were stung with curiosity about the strangers who were turning the inn into a convent. In a word, such a trip was a real retreat. Indeed, that was what the Brothers who made it called it. It would seem that their every step, marked with the sign of virtue, should have led them to a city that favored them and welcomed them like men from heaven. No doubt it would have been thus if in God's eternal counsels it had not been decreed that the best works must always suffer the bitterest opposition.

For by changing his residence De La Salle was only changing one cross for another. By coming to Rouen he became a dweller in the city where his tomb would one day stand, a city which was preparing new trials for him. But since he was used to that, nothing of the kind startled him. On the contrary, he would have been very much surprised if the cross had not accompanied him there, as it had done everywhere else. The archbishop arrived shortly afterwards. When the man of God went to ask for his blessing, the prelate told him to come to the next meeting of the board. Without losing any time, the archbishop called the meeting, after again consulting the president; and the two of them were present. They again heard the arguments of the opposition and sought to dissipate them, but in vain. To the administrators their own preconceived notions seemed to be unanswerable arguments. Seeing that he could not bring them back to the resolution they had previously taken, Archbishop Colbert resolved to appeal to experience and he asked them at least to give the Brothers a trial. This was the only stratagem he could make use of to win his point, after trying in vain by all means to present the matter under the most favorable light. Since their minds were all so closed that each one tried to invoke reason in his favor, there was no way to discover where truth really lay, save in making an experiment.

The administrators thought they could see a host of objections to the admission of the Brothers. Letting them come to live in the Hôpital, they felt, would cause its ruin, or introduce disorder. On the contrary, Archbishop Colbert insisted that they would bring with them order, good teaching and good example. This deadlock could be resolved only by the test of experience.

"Try," Archbishop Colbert asked them. "Do me the courtesy of finding out whether these inconveniences you are so afraid of are real or imaginary. Only experience can demonstrate this; do not refuse to consult it and to abide by what it shows." This proposal was most plausible, and it was difficult for them to reject it without appearing unreasonable and admitting that they were moved only by ill-humor. So the resolution was adopted, and thus all the objections, apparently, were dropped. They agreed to lodge the Brothers at the Hôpital Général, which is also called the "Bureau of the Able-bodied Paupers," and to put them in charge of the children there.

At last Archbishop Colbert could congratulate himself; he thought he had won all he wanted, but in fact he was far from having done so. He was dealing with crafty men who knew how to refuse while appearing to agree. The prelate would not have been so happy over the turn events had taken if he had realized that he was the dupe in the affair. In fact, the administrators had been cunning enough to set a trap in his way. When they opened one door to let the Brothers into the Hôpital, they were careful to unlock another by which they could infallibly turn them out again. Archbishop Colbert hoped that the place would be transformed once the Brothers got there, and that the instruction and good example they brought with them would expel ignorance and vice. He had a right to expect that; and if the Brothers had been given the time and a free hand to act as they do elsewhere, he would indeed have enjoyed this satisfaction. But the administrators, who had agreed to his proposal only in appearance and out of pure condescension to him, since his wish was too reasonable to refuse, were firmly resolved to see to it that the experiment failed.

How did they accomplish this? They limited the number of Brothers to four and would never agree to increase it. They made them undertake tasks foreign to their state and incompatible with their religious exercises; and they assigned to them an impossible work load. The Brothers were obliged to be present when the paupers got up and when they went to bed, so as to make them say their prayers; they had to instruct the children in the Hôpital as well as those in the four main schools in the city proper; they were forced to come back from the most distant sections of the city in order to take their meals; they had to serve the paupers at table when they got back from school and even before they themselves had a chance to eat.

The administrators could easily foresee that the Brothers could not endure such stringent and inconvenient conditions for very long, and that De La Salle would not delay in withdrawing them from such intolerable slavery. Under this regime they would suffer spiritually and materially, in body and in soul, in their health and in their religious life. Those poor Brothers,

overwhelmed by the weight of their burden and finding their virtue unequal to the demands made on it, would not take long to cry out to their father and beg him to get them out of a situation worse than that of the Israelites in Egypt. Such was the stratagem which these gentlemen's perspicacity had laid out for the future, and which their Christian uprightness had kept concealed from Archbishop Colbert and from Abbé Couet, in spite of the latter's great sagacity.

I do not know whether the Spirit of God allowed De La Salle to discern the snare hidden beneath these conditions, and to divine that the administrators' real aim was to get rid of the Brothers while pretending to admit them. Possibly he did see through the maneuver, but resolved to say nothing. His modesty did not permit him to contradict the archbishop and refuse to go along with the arrangement the latter had proposed as a means of conciliating his opponents. Indeed, the prelate's suggestion sounded so equitable that one could not turn it down without appearing to be uncooperative. It might also have been that De La Salle could see the good side in the unfair situation itself and was not sorry to discover in the harshness of the conditions imposed the motive that would justify his rejecting them later on. After all, it was only an experiment and did not bind him to anything. It merely allowed him to make a definitive contract later, in full knowledge of what was involved. Once the trial period was over, each party would be free to make its own decision. As the holy Founder saw that he really was not running any risk, he accepted the conditions as laid down.

The Brothers came to Rouen on May 19, 1705, and five of them were admitted to the Hôpital a few days later. They were given food, lodging and a small salary for other expenses. The school of Saint Maclou* was opened in that same month of May, about three months after the one in Darnétal; those of Saint Godard and Saint Eloi followed shortly thereafter, while that of Saint Vivien was the last to open. The Brothers were assiduous in getting the paupers up and having them say their morning prayers. About eight o'clock, four of them went off to their classes. They came back at noon, served the paupers at table and kept watch to make them observe order during the meal. Then they themselves ate, after which they went back to school. Returning to the Hôpital around six in the evening, they took the paupers to the refectory and ended the day with them as they had begun it, by having them say their prayers. A fifth Brother stayed in the Hôpital and taught the poor children there. It would have been desirable that this sort of regulation would find in those for whom it was prescribed as much strength as good will; but since it was not tailored to accommodate human weakness, it could not go on for very long.

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*Rouen was divided into four sections, in each of which there was a charity school. These four areas were designated by the names of one of the parishes located in each: Saint Maclou, Saint Eloi, Saint Godard and Saint Vivien. This arrangement had been instituted around the middle of the 16th century.

The Brothers were exhausted by their tasks, and their morale began to falter under the multiple burdens they had to face. Their health suffered, as did their virtue; and it was at the expense of both that they persevered in this state of servitude for two years. De La Salle, to whom they complained, felt that he had to put up with the situation; he hoped that, in the end, the administrators would feel some pity for the Brothers and some remorse for exploiting them in this way. He hoped that they would take the initiative in asking for more Brothers or would at least welcome his offer to send some---but in vain. The administrators who had admitted the Brothers to the Hôpital out of consideration for the archbishop, were not of a mind to keep them there out of deference for De La Salle. If courtesy did not permit them to dismiss the Brothers, their policy provided them with a handy means of getting rid of them by making it impossible for them to stay. Under the pretext of safeguarding the interests of the poor which they were supposed to look after, they considered that they were right not to consent to an increase in the number of Brothers, since that would have meant spending more money. Such a plea, which is always worthy of respect in the mouths of those who handle funds destined for the relief of the poor, and which the public approves of, could not be faulted by the archbishop or by the president who, as officials of the administration, were also bound to see that the funds of the Hôpital were not wasted.

The trump card which remained in De La Salle's hand was that this dishonest pretext gave him the right to withdraw the Brothers for it was obvious that the burden imposed on them was beyond their strength. The majority of them faltered under their yoke and fell ill. The two Brothers at Saint Maclou each had over 100 students to teach; so did the one at Saint Eloi. The fourth had over 150; and the fifth, at the Hôpital had even more. They endured this overwork as best they could from May, 1705, to June, 1707. When one of them succumbed to illness or exhaustion, De La Salle sent another, more vigorous Brother, to replace him; but that could not go on indefinitely. For a long time their good father bewailed the harsh conditions imposed on his sons. Unable to do anything to give them relief, he prayed, fasted and did extraordinary penances to obtain from God a remedy for the situation, or to secure His light in order to know what he should do about it.

He had always wanted to have the schools that had been Nyel's and he had thought that heaven intended him to have them. Now that they were his, he was reluctant to abandon them. While he hesitated and remained undecided in the midst of all such reflections, he received from his disciples a memorandum which helped him make up his mind. In their document the Brothers brought out clearly how necessary it was to get them out of the Hôpital, where the spirit of their Institute ran as much risk as their health did. The advantage to the poor as well as their own required it. Nor was it difficult for them to prove their case: since they were too few in proportion to the number of students, they could not do a good job; the classes were too big, the teachers were overworked, and many of the children were neglected; overwork affected not only the teachers' health, but discipline, order, silence and instruction itself; in a word, the purpose of the schools could not be attained; fatigue, the multiplicity of their tasks, and the long hours caused disorder in their interior life so that they had no time for mental prayer and their other exercises of piety.

The conclusion was that they should leave the Hôpital, find a house in the city and live there according to the spirit of the Institute. They added that if the administrators were willing to give them the income of the capital destined to provide for the teachers in the city's gratuitous schools, they would be content with those modest appointments. It would then be possible to increase the number of Brothers so as to do the schoolwork properly; they feared less to suffer from poverty than to be wanting in regularity.

The worthy Superior, after weighing before God the reasons and other similar considerations, did not wish to decide anything without consulting the president, who was taking more and more interest in his work.

That eminent magistrate could only approve of the arguments advanced in the memorandum; consequently, he advised the Servant of God to expand these points in a petition which he himself would then present to the administrators of the Hôpital, and which he promised to recommend. That was done. De Pont Carré ran no risk in the matter, for the petition did not need his backing in order to be accepted. He saw that the Brothers did not have to ask for any special permission to leave; and that the administrators would be happier to see them leave the Hôpital than they had been when they came. As far as I can ascertain, Archbishop Colbert was not involved at that point; why, I do not know. Either he was away or he did not wish to get involved in having the Brothers leave a place where he had so much wanted them to be. The fact is that he always honored De La Salle and favored him and his disciples, and he never lost his early zeal for Christian and charitable schools. He did not disdain to visit them himself and witnessed with great pleasure the new methods that the Brothers used to teach with a minimum of words.

De La Salle was graciously received in the meeting of the administrators when the purpose of his visit was understood. The members congratulated themselves on having at last secured what they wanted, and on having excluded by their clever maneuver those whom they had welcomed out of human respect. They even had the satisfaction of seeing the very people who had urged them to admit the Brothers now asking that they be allowed to leave. Their contentment was complete when they found in the petition a way of turning the Brothers' departure to the advantage of the Hôpital, and of requiring that they provide the city schools with the same services as before, but at an even lower price.

The petition included two articles. In the first, after the reasons were explained, the administrators were requested to consent to the departure of the Brothers. In the second, the Brothers offered to teach in the gratuitous schools of the city on the basis of the existing endowments, and to be satisfied with the paltry revenue that these provided. There was no problem over the first article; it was accepted as soon as it was read. The discussion on the second article gave these gentlemen the opportunity to require of the Brothers a sort of indemnification for the time they had lived at the Hôpital, and to let them conduct the four city schools under an onerous title, as though they should have been happy to pay for the privilege of serving the poor!

While the Brothers had lived at the Hôpital, the authorities had not wished to restrict their work, but had scrupulously limited their number to five, and never agreed to increase the number. The Brothers were crushed under the burden of their duties; overwork exhausted some and caused others to fall ill. But no matter! The Hôpital was well served because the little band of Brothers was regularly rejuvenated by new members in better health who came in turn to help bear this exaggerated work load. When the Brothers left, their work would be diminished by half, and some relief would be given to them; but the first condition was that their number should be doubled: ten Brothers were asked for to run the schools at Saint Maclou, Saint Vivien, Saint Godard and Saint Eloi. The second condition required of De La Salle was that he be satisfied with half the revenue from the foundation, namely 600 livres a year. If he agreed to these conditions, they would consent to let him run the schools in question.

De La Salle agreed to everything, even though he was being asked for a great deal and was offered little or nothing in return. To understand to what lengths he carried his disinterestedness on this occasion, one must bear in mind that ordinarily each Brother is supposed to receive a salary of 100 écus (300 livres) in addition to furnished lodgings. Moreover, where there are several of them teaching in a given locality, they need a serving Brother and a Brother-Director who governs the Brothers and is always ready to replace any of them who may be incapacitated.

Thus, while he was asked to provide ten Brothers to teach in the schools, the true number was 12. If they had each been paid 100 écus, that would have amounted to 3,600 livres a year; if they had been paid the absolute minimum salary of 250 livres, that would still have meant 3,000 livres or 1,000 écus, in addition to the residence, furnished rent free. But there, for the 12 Brothers only 600 livres were to be paid; and of that sum over half, namely 310 livres, went for the rent of the house they occupied. Clearly, in Rouen they were getting only one-tenth of the salary they are paid elsewhere to teach in gratuitous schools. I am right, therefore, in saying that they were being asked for much and given little in return. The fact is that the administrators were very glad to exploit the Brothers, but did not see fit to offer them a commensurate return for their sacrifice. Their services were appraised at the lowest possible figure, and they had to accept it or leave.

De La Salle accepted, hoping that Divine Providence would make it possible for him to find in the charity of private citizens what the board refused to give him. He leased a house and occupied it on August 2, 1707, together with the Brothers who, like him, had to suffer all the rigors of poverty. But they were delighted because they finally found themselves free to take up again their exercises of piety and to follow their Rule; they felt happy in becoming even poorer, provided they could become more regular.

The terms of that agreement are still in effect 25 years later.* Time has brought no modifications in it except that the number of students has

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*At the time Blain was writing, about 1732.

increased, thus adding to the Brothers' work. Once they have paid their rent, the 12 Brothers have only about 100 écus left to live on and defray their expenses. How can they possibly do it? How have they done it for the past 25 years, with a salary of 100 écus for 12 men? That is certainly one of those mysteries which nobody can believe unless he knows Providence. Another mystery is why people permit the Brothers to wear themselves out in their service of the poor, without taking any interest in trying to help them, as though their work does not concern the public; as though the Brothers do not have the right that the Gospel gives to all workers, of reaping where they sow and of living by their ministry. It is as though they alone, in the Father's field, have to labor at their own expense.

They have been abandoned to their fate; the only rewards they have received so far for their services in Rouen are continual scorn and frequent insults. In no city in France have they had to endure such ill-treatment. In the beginning they could hardly appear in public without meeting with some kind of abuse. People seemed to take pleasure in dishonoring them day after day by hurling new sorts of insults at them. Mud, stones, blows were not spared them. The presence of De La Salle with them could not shield them from all that. Disregarding his priestly character, lacking respect for the air of sanctity which surrounded his brow, people threw stones at the Brothers in the streets; they threw them at him as well, and distributed affronts evenly between the father and his sons. They purposely stopped the Brothers, pushed them into the ditch, and tried to make them fall into the mud. They spat on them and hit them as they passed by. The rabble massed together to laugh at them when they approached, and covered them with outrages as if they were declared enemies.

Insolence in their regard was carried even farther, as shrewish women went so far as to slap them on the face in public, for the mean satisfaction of trying their patience or of provoking some response. Every day some new joke about them regaled the public. Even in their schools, which could be called the theater of their charity, they were not sheltered from affronts. More than once people invaded the classes to maltreat them. Yet in Rouen all this was tolerated; the upper classes were the first to laugh over it and to enjoy the stories about the different misfortunes that had happened to the Brothers and about the latest tricks played on them, instead of chastising the authors of these vexations and by severe penalties putting an end to these disorders.

"Ah, how happy you are, my dear Brothers, if you can recognize this; and how I should envy you if I had the grace to endure the like," said a priest one day to two Brothers whom he saw passing by amidst the hoots of the rabble. "You are treated with ignominy; but if these insults are tolerable to you, and if you can be happy under them, you are not to be pitied. What is most precious and glorious is yours, as Saint Peter declares."

However, we must admit that the city of Rouen has finally begun to change its attitude towards the Brothers. Perhaps people have grown tired of testing their virtue; or perhaps they merely grew accustomed to seeing them. Nowadays they are at least tolerated and left in peace. Men who were so hated and so despised for justice's sake, and who can say like their Divine Master that

they were hated without cause, had nothing to hope for from the purses of the charitable in order to eke out their living expenses. They were remembered only when people wished that they were out of the city. The work they did drew as little attention as their persons; and when anyone mentioned their extreme poverty, someone else was sure to reply coldly that it was a great mistake on De La Salle's part to have brought them to a place where he could not provide for their subsistence.

The cruelest indigence was their lot, and it would be difficult to list all that they have had to suffer from it in the past 30 years. Their work, unpaid and unrequited, has up to now brought them only suffering and scorn. Hunger, thirst, heat, cold, destitution and the persecutions which are the lot of apostolic men have, so far, been their sole recompense. To this day they have fought the good fight at their own expense; they have cultivated the Lord's vineyard as best they could without sharing in the fruits thereof. In a word, they have spent themselves in the service of the Church without hope of material reward.

For 30 years they have lived in Rouen lacking all things: clothes, furniture, often food and the other necessities of life. Yet never have they been unfaithful to their duty, never have they neglected their proper tasks. Exposed to hunger and cold during 1709 and 1710, they endured, with the exception of death itself, all that famine and a long and bitter winter could inflict upon them. Not that their pitiful condition was unknown; but nobody felt any compassion for them; and they received nothing but disdainful refusals from those who should have relieved their penury and taken an interest in their survival. Still, from time to time, God did inspire some worthy persons to extend their charity even to them; but it would seem that in doing so God intended to furnish them only with what was absolutely necessary for life, to keep them from dying of cold and hunger, without wishing to spare them the rigors of the one or the other.

The alms that came to them were so rare and so insignificant that they considered as extraordinary and even miraculous a gift of 22 livres that someone made to them during those calamitous times. It was received from some unknown benefactor, along with a note saying: "Do not concern yourselves with the source of this gift; put your confidence in God; take care to serve Him faithfully and He will provide for you." The advice was excellent; the Brothers would have been happy to receive it more often, accompanied by a similar offering.

Chapter IV

De La Salle Transfers His Novitiate to Saint Yon, near Rouen.

The hope for the harvest is in the seed. The duration of an edifice depends on its foundations; and the holiness of an institute results from a good novitiate. If land that has been badly sown produces nothing but briars and thorns, if a house without a solid foundation is threatened with collapse,

one must conclude that if a good novitiate is wanting, a community finds in its beginning the source of its destruction. It is a spiritual edifice lacking a solid foundation, which will be overthrown by its own members. There is no hope for holiness where the seed of virtue has not been carefully sown and has not sprung up in souls. When new subjects are professed in an institute, their commitment will not promote the glory of God or the good of religion unless they are trained in virtue. Even if they become as numerous as the stars in the heavens, the Church would reap no advantage from them; and to them one might apply the words of the Prophet: "You have multiplied your people, O Lord, but you have not increased our joy."

De La Salle firmly held to these truths. Consequently, he had nothing more at heart than to make saints out of all those who aspired to become his disciples. He himself would have labored to destroy what he had erected if he had not found a way to contribute to their sanctification. What pleased him was not the number of Brothers, but the number of saints in his Institute. From the beginning, when he had been inspired to gather his followers together, his only thought had been to form them to eminent piety, to make of them new men. They did indeed become such, or else they soon left his house; and when he saw the number of candidates increase, he sought a place of retirement where he could sanctify them at leisure through the exercises of a fervent novitiate.

The training of the novices was always the primary object of his zeal. He never allowed anyone else to replace him in this task except when it was impossible for him to fulfill it in person. It was his especially beloved mission, for in it his own interest was combined with that of the Institute. By that I mean that he found opportunities for furthering his own perfection while promoting that of the Brothers. He never had anything more at heart than to direct this academy of virtue, convinced as he was that the level of sanctity in his Institute would be measured by that achieved in the novitiate. Considering it the heart of his budding Society, he paid the greatest attention to it, just as God, the Author of nature, begins the formation of the human body by the heart, and as the Author of grace initiates man's sanctification by changing him interiorly.

In how many ways did the devil not seek to disturb the Servant of God in the direction of his novitiate! When he himself was driven hither and thither, his novitiate felt all the repercussions of the persecutions that hell stirred up in view of suffocating his Institute in its cradle. After transferring the novitiate from one place to another when he himself was forced to seek refuge here and there, John Baptist did not know where he could settle down permanently with it. In addition, the mobile and uncertain conditions, in which he had been trying to maintain it as best he could, had greatly disrupted the novitiate, and it was time to find a suitable location where he could reestablish it. He had been reluctant to move it out of Paris, the center of the kingdom, where there certainly existed the best prospects for attracting more candidates and providing them with better training; but in the end he had had to leave and to establish his novitiate somewhere else.

Rouen attracted his attention because of its proximity to the capital and the easy communications between the two cities. He had been considering this

move when Divine Providence offered him an opportunity of executing it by allowing the Brothers to establish themselves at Darnétal and at the Hôpital in Rouen. The main objective he had in mind in accepting these schools, under conditions which obliged him to support them mostly at his own expense, was that this would help him find a spot adapted for the training of the novices. He was distressed on seeing his little flock always on the move, now in one house, now in another, without being able to settle down permanently anywhere. He also observed with regret the loss of fervor suffered by his Community as a result of all this agitation. So, he ardently begged God to give him some place of repose where he might serve Him and teach others to serve Him in tranquillity. To obtain that grace he had, as was his wont, recourse to prayer, vigils and extraordinary penances.

Since he was a man who strongly held to the hierarchical principle and considered his superiors as oracles who pointed out to him the will of God, he did not wish to make a decision without first writing to Archbishop Colbert to sound him out on the matter. He informed him of the projected move of his novitiate from Paris to Rouen, and asked him to be good enough to consent to it if he thought it proper. The answer was favorable. Abbé Couet, who wrote the reply after having had the archbishop approve the project, mentioned to him how eager His Excellency was to see new schools of the Brothers opened in different places and to have them all over the diocese. The Servant of God considered this approval as a sign of the Divine Will; so he lost no time in trying to find a suitable house. After looking a long time for one within the city, he finally found what he wanted at the farther end of the Faubourg Saint Sever; he preferred that property to another which had been offered him in another suburb.

The residence, called Saint Yon, is very ancient. Its walls enclose some 18 acres of land. In bygone times it had been called the Manor of Hauteville, and in the course of the last two centuries it had passed from one aristocratic family to another, as appears from the various acts of sale in the possession of the Brothers. One of these owners, De Saint Yon, who lived there till 1615, gave his name to the property. His piety led him to construct a small chapel which he dedicated to his patron, a disciple of Saint Denis the Martyr. Such is the origin of the name given to the property.

In 1670, a certain Madame De Bois Dauphin had bought it and given the use of it to her first husband's sisters, the Sisters of Souvrai, one of whom was the abbess of the famous (Benedictine) monastery of Saint Amand in Rouen. As the original chapel was too small, Madame De Bois Dauphin enlarged it by half to make it more convenient for the Sisters. She would have wished to give the property to the abbey, but the Sisters of Souvrai would not accept it. After the death of the abbess, Madame De Barentin, a niece of Madame De Bois Dauphin, became abbess and received the use of the domain of Saint Yon. Finally, when Madame De Barentin died, the property was inherited by Madame Louvois,* the daughter of Madame De Bois Dauphin and her first husband, De Souvrai.

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*The Marquis De Louvois (1641-91) had been Louis XIV's war minister and was responsible for the reorganization and equipping of the armies that terrorized Europe. He was the brother of the archbishop of Rheims who had ordained John Baptist De La Salle.

The property was put up for lease at the time when De La Salle came to Rouen to establish Christian and gratuitous schools there. He went to look it over and liked what he saw. After speaking to Archbishop Colbert, he hastened back to Paris to ask Madame De Louvois to rent it to him. Fortunately, she was well disposed towards De La Salle because she had heard from her brother-in-law, Archbishop Le Tellier of Rheims, and from her son, Abbé Louvois, who had lived a long time with his uncle, all the favorable things one can say about a great servant of God. Happy at being able to do a favor to a man considered a saint by her family and even by her late brother-in-law, the former archbishop of Rheims, who was not one to bestow such titles lightly, she agreed to let him have the property for 400 livres a year---a very reasonable rate---and signed a lease for six years.

De La Salle concluded the transaction so quickly and secretly that his enemies, who might have tried to interfere and to make the plan fall through, were not even aware of what was going on. With the same promptness he sent off to Rouen all the furniture he had stored in Paris in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, and he used this to equip the new house.* In this way the novitiate was already established at the outskirts of Rouen before it was known that it had left Paris. The Sisters of Saint Amand, on learning who was taking over their house at Saint Yon and what he intended to do with it, generously donated the tapestries and paintings that adorned the chapel, and a number of articles of furniture. It was towards the end of August, 1705, that De La Salle and his followers took up residence in that house which God intended for them and which later did become their property.

When De La Salle left Paris, Archbishop Colbert granted him the most ample faculties, with no time limit attached, hoping to make use of a man of such uncommon merit for the benefit of his diocese, and to attach him to it. However, the Servant of God exercised these faculties with great restraint. He made it a point to restrict his zeal to his own house and not to share with strangers the time that God afforded him to promote the sanctification of his sons and the perfection of his Institute. If sometimes he went abroad, it was only on rare occasions, for some extraordinary gathering where necessity or charity made it a duty for him to be of service to others and to contribute to their salvation. John Baptist considered himself, at Saint Yon, like a man who had been tossed about by a 100 different tempests and escaped as many shipwrecks, one who finally finds himself safe in port. He thought only of repairing the losses he had sustained and of putting to good use for the well-being of his soul and the sanctification of his sons the peace and tranquillity he had finally secured.

No place on earth could have been more to his liking or suited him better; for although located at the gates of one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the kingdom, the site is solitary and secluded. It offers plenty of fresh air, an agreeable panorama, and contains a series of large gardens. The pleasant solitude favored his dominant inclination for a life of retirement and union with God, and promised him full liberty to give himself to prayer, and to live, although so near Rouen, like a hermit in the desert. This property, which was so much to the liking of the holy Founder and so well

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*De Pont Carré also contributed to the expenses of the new installation.

suited for his Institute, was equally attractive to De Pont Carré, who used to come out and walk there. That was where the first magistrate came to rest from the contention of the bar and the fatigues of his office. He enjoyed walking alone in that peaceful spot; and when he came there, the Brothers shut the gates to everyone else, so as to leave him alone with his thoughts and with God.

Thenceforth De La Salle considered Saint Yon as the place of his repose. Once he had established himself there, he took all imaginable precautions to prevent relaxation from penetrating into his Community and closed all possible avenues by which it could infiltrate this new Eden. His first care was to repeople his novitiate and bring it back to its first fervor. That was not accomplished without some difficulty, especially at first, for the various ups and downs that the novitiate had experienced for some years past had discouraged many candidates and had made them disinclined to follow a vocation that met with so much opposition. However, with time the regular life led in the novitiate attracted a good number of postulants. John Baptist put Brother Barthélemy, a prudent and very gentle man, in charge of them. But, he did not entirely stop looking after them himself. The training of the novices was always his main concern; he shared it with others only when he was obliged to give his attention to other important duties.

While thus rebuilding his novitiate, he undertook to revive the spirit of the Institute in his entire Community and to take advantage of solitude to bring his disciples back to their first grace and early fervor. He feared that the troubles, uncertainties, the long-continued agitation that his Community had undergone in Paris might have brought about a weakening of piety even in the houses situated in the provinces. To counter this trend, or rather to forestall it, during the vacation period he called to Saint Yon as many as possible of the Brothers who lived in various places and had them make an eight-day retreat with him. He was always at their head, encouraging all by his presence, and confirming by his example of consummate virtue the lessons he imparted to them on this subject. Each morning he gave them a conference, and one of the priests who lived there gave another in the evening; for the three or four priests who had joined him when he lived in the parish of Saint Roch in Paris had followed him to Saint Yon and lived there.

In this way the father gathered his children around him in solitude and breathed new life into them, rekindled their zeal, and inspired them with a new desire for perfection. He stirred up in them once more the spirit of dependence, of mortification, of penance, of poverty, and of love for their vocation. He sought to inspire them to practice all the virtues proper to their state. As the Brothers heard him recommend nothing but what they saw him practice, they were gently constrained to imitate him. Wherever they met him, and at all times, they saw in him a man deeply recollected, united with God, severe towards himself, thirsting for humiliations, with no attraction for anything except mental prayer and suffering.

De La Salle was a punctual observer of the Rule; and when the Brothers confided to him the fear they felt that everything that was being observed among them might not last, and in all likelihood would change after his death, he replied that God would ask him an account not of the future but of the

present, and that he was resolved to be faithful to Him to the end. Convinced of all this, he was far from relaxing any of his penitential practices. A retreat made under such propitious circumstances and under such an accomplished master gave the whole Community a new impetus towards the interior life, and repaired the damage caused by the recent upheavals and the continual persecutions. The Brothers, filled with the joy and consolation given by the Holy Spirit, went home with new enthusiasm; they felt, on leaving Saint Yon, that they were only now beginning truly to enter God's service.

That house, sanctified by the presence of the Servant of God, soon acquired a great reputation everywhere and provided a solution to the problem faced by parents who had failed to give their children a proper education. At first, the holy Founder was asked to take in as boarders a number of young people from the city and the surrounding area, to instruct them and train them to piety. This request, so conformable to his aims, was agreeable to him. The Christian instruction and education of youth being the principal object of his zeal and the end of his Institute, he was glad to welcome into his house all the children that people wanted to send him, so that they might be brought up in innocence and in the knowledge of their religion. He placed them under the guidance of one of the most capable Brothers, wrote a regulation befitting their age and social standing, and set them up in a sort of junior novitiate where all the actions of the day and the pious exercises were performed at fixed times.

The results obtained in this sort of training school did not take long to become known. When the parents came to see their children they no longer recognized them. They were indeed changed. Most of them displayed such modesty, piety and docility that their own mothers and fathers could scarcely believe their eyes. They spoke about the school, and other parents hastened to entrust their children to such a remarkable institution. In this way, within a short time the number of boarders grew beyond all expectation. Rouen was no longer the only city that furnished pupils to Saint Yon; they came from everywhere, even from Paris. When the public learned of the Brothers' success in teaching these youngsters, people advised those families struggling with stubborn, recalcitrant, depraved and unmanageable children that they could find for them at Saint Yon a place of retirement and correction, and assured them that their youngsters would be very different on leaving from what they had been on entering. Many parents resolved to follow this advice and entrusted to those teachers, more skillful than themselves, the reform of their children. Before long the house was filled.

The success met with in this re-education of unmanageable children, who had been despaired of, led to the opening at Saint Yon of still another special section for people much more difficult to handle. Confirmed criminals were consigned there, some by decrees of parliament, others by court orders, and several by the authority of their parents. The Brothers had the consolation of seeing several of those men change to a better life and do real penance in a place where they had been locked up as malefactors. It is hardly believable how many really perverse men have been converted in that house; how many rebellious and unmanageable children there lost their belligerence and impiety; how many others began to walk once more in the path of salvation and duty. Several desired to remain there the rest of their lives. A few even

asked to receive the Brothers' habit and became members of the Institute. Others would not leave except to enter a monastery. The greater number, once they had gone back home, showed by the kind of life they thenceforth led that they had left Saint Yon very different from what they had been on entering it. Finally, the majority of those brought up there have been a credit to the house, and give the example of an upright life as a proof of the fine education they received there.

All these good results, which are attributable to De La Salle and were set in motion by him, still continue today. Although since the death of the holy Founder the buildings at Saint Yon have been enlarged by two-thirds, the place is still too small to house all the boarders who would like to enroll there. There are three groups of them. The first is composed of the regular boarding students who come to Saint Yon for a truly Christian education. They are in the care of a Brother who keeps an eye on them all the time, and who teaches them reading, writing and arithmetic. Those who so desire, and who can, learn drawing, geometry and architecture.

The second group is made up of unmanageable and perverted young men who are sent there to be reformed and corrected. These are watched over even more closely; they are constantly supervised by a Brother who never leaves them and who never gives them a chance to draw aside or to escape from his vigilance. However, their education is not different from that of the first group. They all follow the same exercises of piety; the same exhortations and catechism lessons are addressed to them. They are taught how to receive the sacraments properly; those who have not made their First Communion are prepared to do so, and if they have already received it, they are taught to make amends for their past life by a good general Confession. In a word, they live as though they were in a seminary or in a very fervent religious community, following a series of exercises of piety or instruction suitable to their age and social condition. They take their meals in the same refectory as the Brothers and witness the latter's different practices of piety. That is ordinarily what touches them the most and inspires them with the desire to return to God.

The third group of inmates at Saint Yon is made up of those who are forcibly detained there, whether by minor lettres de cachet* or by a court sentence. They are confined to a room and carefully guarded. There, left to themselves, they have plenty of time to reflect---something they had rarely done before---and to go over their past life in the bitterness of their heart. Thus confined within four walls, they learn in solitude what the world had kept hidden from their eyes, and they begin to remember the truths they have forgotten or wanted to forget. As they are forced to recall that there is a hereafter and that their prison cell is merely a foretaste of hell, they learn little by little to regret the sins which caused them to be condemned, to fear God, and to come back to Him.

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*Under the "old regime" in France, lettres de cachet were sealed orders signed by the king ordering the arrest and confinement of people who, for one reason or another, had to be removed from public view for a time. Parents of "wild" young nobles often used this means to bring a wayward son to better sentiments.

No doubt, when they are first brought in, they often defile the cell which will be their prison by the curses and blasphemies suggested by rage and spite; but often enough they find there a grace which touches them and which, by changing their hearts, causes tears of compunction to succeed the transports of frenzy and despair. When they seem truly contrite, the door of their cell is opened and they are allowed to follow the exercises of piety performed in the house; and it is then that charity completes in them the task of their conversion which fear of hell had begun. Examples of such conversions are not rare at Saint Yon; and we could draw up a long list of names of those who found God there after they had lost Him.

The way De La Salle organized the house of Saint Yon, three communities were to be found there. One was made up of the three divisions of the boarders of which we have just spoken; another included the novices; and the third contained the serving Brothers and others employed in the work of the Institute. All of these had some exercises in common, and others that were special to each group. They were carried out so faithfully that in spite of the variety of occupations and the great number of those who lived in the place, no trace of confusion or disorder appeared.

The regularity that reigned was so perfect that one could not see a boarder or a Brother or a novice out of place, nor would one group mingle with another, still less indulge in aimless moving about while neglecting its proper duties. The most edifying thing was that everything went on in this house in such deep silence that outsiders on entering sometimes would not realize that it was inhabited. Yet as a rule over 100 persons differing in age, temperament, character, state of life and position, lived there (and do so today) under one roof, but separated from one another. They had nothing to do with one another except insofar as the Rule prescribed or obedience permitted.

Good example was constant and always impressed everyone. One cannot sufficiently admire a house where the number and the different categories of dwellers bring about neither trouble nor disturbance; where the novices do not know those with whom they live, and where the Brothers themselves have no contacts except with their Superior.

Nothing, most likely, won for the Brothers the good will and the protection of De Pont Carré so much as the spirit of recollection and retirement that he witnessed at Saint Yon when he went there to enjoy a little respite from the overwhelming burdens of business. He often spoke of this spirit to Archbishop Colbert, who congratulated himself on having in his diocese such a useful and edifying Community. The prelate, delighted at being able to number among his flock the patriarch of such a virtuous family, showed himself extremely favorable to him and begged him to make use, for the good of the diocese, of the extensive faculties he had given him; but the desire of the man of God was not to appear abroad and to make a spectacle of himself. He stayed in his novitiate as much as he could, and only in urgent cases did he feel himself authorized to leave it.

Chapter V

New Persecutions Launched against De La Salle and His Institute in Paris

Much as the holy priest appreciated the solitude of Saint Yon, he left it as soon as God's will called him elsewhere. He had not been enjoying it for very long when the same persecution that had driven him from Paris forced him to go back there. True, hidden as he was from the eyes of his enemies, he personally was not exposed to their thrusts; but as a father, he suffered from the attacks made against his disciples and his work.

He had thought that by fleeing from his opponents he would cause their fury to abate, and that they would be ashamed to pursue a man who abandoned the battlefield to them. He was mistaken. Hell, which had inspired them, was more aroused against his Institute than against him personally. Unable to make peace with either the one or the other, Satan launched against the schools of Saint Sulpice the same onslaught and harassments which had ruined those of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, hoping to cause the former to fail in the same way.

De La Salle learned of the new attacks at the time in his life when he felt most at peace. He enjoyed the profound tranquillity of Saint Yon. At last he had found an oasis of rest after so many and such bitter struggles. He was like a man who has come home after a long voyage, back in port after having been for so long exposed to the fury of the waves. And now he had to leave his peaceful abode and go back to Paris to face new tempests, so as to serve his Brothers as their pilot and to take in hand once more the rudder of the bark so persistently agitated and threatened with shipwreck.

He was advised that the Christian schools in the parish of Saint Sulpice risked undergoing the same fate as those in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, since the writing masters apparently enjoyed complete liberty to cause the same disruption. They came to interfere with the Brothers who were exercising their ministry and created a great ado about keeping certain pupils away. At the same time he was informed that those, on whose protection he had a right to count, were closing their eyes and affecting ignorance about the vexations carried out against the Brothers. Like people completely indifferent to the outcome, they allowed the harassing tactics to develop, and they seemed not to care which side would emerge victorious.

All this De La Salle had foreseen. After the destruction of the schools in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, he had understood that the writing masters, emboldened by their success, would next move against the Saint Sulpice schools and would try to close them also. It was as a diversionary move that he had opened the school in Saint Roch's parish. Hoping to make them forget their intentions, he had preferred to disappear and had taken refuge in Rouen with the few remaining novices. But in vain did he expect to mollify by his departure those men whose jealousy and self-interest led them to attack his Institute rather than him personally. After having, so to speak, driven him

out of Paris, they wanted also to expel his Brothers from the city and wipe out the very name of the Christian and gratuitous schools.

In reality, what pained the holy Founder most was not to see his Institute so furiously persecuted. He knew that men would strive in vain to overthrow his work if God protected it. He recalled that the first preachers of the Gospel were never more ardent in announcing the Good News than when they were in prison and loaded with chains. It was with such reflections that he comforted his disciples and induced them to be patient. He often quoted the famous words of Gamaliel: "If this undertaking is from God, who can destroy it?"

"If my work," he declared, "does not come from God, I would consent to its ruin. I would join our enemies in destroying it if I thought that it did not have God for its author, or that He did not will its progress. But if He declares Himself its defender, let us fear nothing. He is the Almighty. No arm can uproot what He has planted; no hand can snatch away what He holds in His. He upholds the entire universe and keeps it in motion. Nothing happens that He does not see, does not allow; those whom He covers with His maledictions remain accursed; and in vain do men seek to curse those whom He blesses. So, let us abandon ourselves to His guidance. If He takes our work in hand, He will make use of the very ones who are so determined to destroy it to further its progress. Indeed, it is from the depths of our afflictions that we should draw the reasons for our joy. If contradiction is a proof that an enterprise comes from God, let us be happy; our Institute is indeed His creation. The cross which follows it everywhere gives us assurance of this."

This language, inspired by faith, encouraged his disciples and when he saw that they accepted it, his joy was perfect. But at times such impressions faded, and then it was their discouragement and timidity in the face of opposition, rather than the opposition itself, which he feared. At the time of which we speak, he knew that they were frightened over the persecution which was threatening. He felt that he needed to reassure them by his presence, and to go to share with them the trials which he could not ward off from them.

When he reached Paris, he found his sons a prey to new alarms. Seeing that the devastation the writing masters had caused in the schools in the Faubourg Saint Antoine had not closed those in the Faubourg Saint Germain and had not brought about any changes in their manner of operating, they began their vexations again with a vengeance. First, in the absence of De La Salle, they tried to intimidate the Brothers by repeated threats of summonses, lawsuits and legal embarrassments. They had intimidated them indeed, because these mere words---lawsuits, sentences and procedures---frightened those peaceful Brothers who had learned from Saint Paul that "God's servants should not be contentious." In vain had the virtuous Brothers tried to pacify their rivals by gentle and humble replies, by prayers and remonstrances. As they had not succeeded, they made up their minds to keep quiet; but by appearing to be deaf and dumb they only irritated all the more those adversaries whom everything exasperated, and who wanted only one thing: open warfare, but

warfare on uneven terms, a conflict in which they wished to appear wearing all the colors of righteousness.

As we mentioned previously, the writing masters, not having succeeded in destroying the gratuitous schools as they had several times attempted to do, had to be content with demanding that the Brothers should be enjoined from accepting in their classes any students not publicly listed as paupers. That seemed reasonable enough on the surface. People thought that in founding the Christian schools De La Salle had in view the instruction of the children of the poor exclusively, since the children of the affluent could afford to pay for their education. But that notion, apparently so equitable, was at bottom pernicious, because it provided those with selfish motives a specious pretext to interfere constantly and to cause trouble in the gratuitous schools, and to quarrel incessantly with the Brothers over the choice of those children whom they would accept in their classes.

De La Salle had discerned the trap that they were setting for him in advancing a principle apparently so reasonable. He had never agreed to it, and rightly so, for if he had he would have set limits to his charity. He would, under the appearance of a compromise measure, have agreed to the ruin of the Christian schools, furnished his rivals with an inexhaustible source of dispute, and bequeathed to his disciples an eternal series of lawsuits. Every day the syndic of the writing masters or their inspectors would have maintained that such and such a child was rich, even though the Brothers declared him poor. The argument settled today over one would have arisen again tomorrow over another; and how could the dispute ever have been adjudicated? Who had a right to inventory the possessions of a child's parents to prove whether they were in poverty or in easy circumstances?

Even if De La Salle had not been aware of the bad faith of his adversaries, even if he could have believed that they had not stirred up this new topic of dispute for the sole purpose of ruining the Christian schools, how could he have subjected himself to such intolerable conditions? Was it up to him to make such distinctions of persons in admitting children to his schools? Was it his business to decide on the poverty or wealth of their parents? Could he have made such a decision in an intelligent manner? If he had taken such a responsibility upon himself, what would people have said of him? Are not all children within their rights when they request gratuitous instruction in schools open to the public? If the teachers who teach gratis have more ability than those who sell their efforts, must the child who seems wealthy---and who often enough is not so at all---choose an ignorant teacher just because his parents are not on the list of paupers duly recognized by the State?

These arguments, and the others which we have already set down in various places, show that De La Salle would have granted the writing masters the power to destroy his Institute if he had agreed to their demands. That became evident. Constantly the writing masters came to disturb the Christian schools, calling the Brothers to task for admitting children who could pay.

Under the pretext of inquiring into such cases, they called in the law, found fault with this or that, made everybody lose a great deal of time, prevented the students from entering, or forced out others who were present. That was a good way to cause the Brothers' classes to remain deserted, which was precisely what they wanted. If they had been allowed to continue in that way, the Christian schools would not have lasted much longer.

Meanwhile, they who had a right to oppose such proceedings and could have easily stopped them, did nothing. They seemed asleep and pretended to be unaware of the disruption which day after day was growing worse under their eyes. Still, the remedy would have been easy to apply. If the parish priest of Saint Sulpice had put in an appearance, he could have quelled the storm. For an agreement had been concluded between the parish priests of Paris and the writing masters' guild by which the latter were forbidden to set foot in the charitable schools without the parish priest's permission. Their flagrant violations of the provision clearly put the writing masters in the wrong; it would have been easy to shut the door in their faces and to keep them out when they came only to cause trouble and disorder.

De La Salle's enemies, who had succeeded in poisoning De La Chétardye's mind against him and in getting the parish priest to side with them, either did not allow him to be informed of the trouble or prevented him from doing anything about it. They even succeeded in getting him to close the school he had established a few years previously on the street of Fosse M. le Prince, as a gesture of appeasement offered to the writing masters. Perhaps he had hoped that by suppressing this school he would place the others beyond the reach of their attacks. What the Servant of God's enemies wanted was to oblige the Brothers to retire completely from the parish schools and to follow De La Salle himself into self-imposed exile. They hoped to accomplish their aim through their incessant vexations; and they did accomplish it, for the Brothers, disgusted and wearied by these unrelenting inspections, and bothered more than ever in their work, at the beginning of 1706 asked their Superior to let them leave and give up a position that they could no longer defend.

After taking the advice of several enlightened persons, De La Salle allowed them to do so. The Brothers simply disappeared, and the schools remained shut the next day. Nobody knew why, or what had become of the Brothers. Rumors spread, and with time the story took on additional details. At first people thought that the Brothers had given an extraordinary holiday to their students, or that illness or some important business had led to their departure. But when those theories lost credibility on account of the Brothers' prolonged absence, people began to fear lest the closing of the schools might last indefinitely and the schools themselves be permanently discontinued, to the great detriment of the public. Fear caused more turmoil than ever and led parents interested in the instruction of their children (who were already beginning to run wild in the streets and to show by their incipient mischief-making the need they had of Christian education) to go to the parish priest to ask for a solution to the problem.

A great many of them, therefore, visited De La Chétardye to make known to him how sorry they were over the departure of the Brothers, how impossible it was for them to give their children the instruction and education they needed or to send them to the classes of teachers who had to be paid for their services. They praised the Brothers' ability to instruct the children, to make them docile, well-behaved and pious, when apart from their influence they showed themselves ignorant and unmanageable, they misbehaved and were lacking in seriousness. They added that since the closing of the schools, all these unfortunate consequences were becoming obvious.

These spontaneous and touching remonstrances took effect. De La Chétardye was moved. This charitable pastor, entirely devoted to the welfare of his parishioners, a man who exhibited a special tenderness towards the poor, calmed their fears by promising them to get the Brothers back. Never did he understand better the need his parish had of those men, the good they were doing, the services they rendered to the public, and the advantage religion drew from such useful servants. De La Chétardye requested De La Salle to reopen the gratuitous schools, assured him that the Brothers would no longer be disturbed and promised that he himself would see to it.

He kept his word. He called a meeting of the main officers of the writing masters' Guild and had a document drawn up in their presence, certified by two notaries. This act stated that it was he, De La Chétardye, who had commissioned the Brothers (who were named individually) to teach in the charity schools of his parish; that John Baptist De La Salle, priest and Doctor in Theology, had been most regrettably interfered with in that regard by the writing masters, since he had employed his disciples in the work only by De La Chétardye's orders, at his expense, and in conformity with his directions; that he, the parish priest, had in the matter merely been following the example of his predecessors who had called De La Salle to Paris with his disciples to render service to the poor children of the parish; that the rent on the classroom building, as well as on the lodgings of the teachers, was paid for by the parish priest himself; finally, that it was he who had always provided the Brothers named in the document with food and lodging; that he intended them to continue their work in full liberty, and that he was having his present act drawn up so that all concerned might take note of it and be guided by it.

The document was sent to the holy Founder who was satisfied by it. Thus, after an interruption of three weeks, he sent the Brothers back to the schools. The act of authority on the part of the parish priest proved an effective restraint on the ill-humor and animosity of the writing masters, so long at least as De La Chétardye remained resolved to maintain his position. Calm was restored in the Christian schools for some time, and the Brothers were able to resume their teaching. But if peace came to them once more, De La Salle did not enjoy it; for although the battle against his disciples had died down, the opposition against him continued.

The parish priest would not abandon his preconceptions and refused his consideration to the father even while granting it to his children. The

recollection and intimate communication with God, fortified by prayer and by strength imparted from on high, he left with new courage to face new trials.

He reappeared amidst his disciples as suddenly as he had left, and he made them all happy by his return. They had been concerned about him during his absence and did not know what to think. His presence brought back calm, and they profited by the new insights that this Moses had drawn from his retreat. Like him they felt themselves moved with renewed ardor to acquire the perfection of their state and to show patience under persecution. They did well to prepare themselves for it thus, because it broke out again as soon as the Servant of God returned. As he was filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ, the cross followed him everywhere. The devil could not let him live in peace.

In vain the Servant of God did all he could to remain hidden in the Brothers' house. His return was soon known in the parish and provided his enemies with a fresh opportunity to renew their harassment in the hope of making him leave Paris and never come back. The fact was that they had never lost sight of their primary objective: to change the Institute's form of government and to modify its spirit and its Rule. As De La Salle had not been willing to go along with their desires in that regard, he had become obnoxious to them; they had moved heaven and earth to get rid of him, as we have seen above, and to make the Brothers dissatisfied with him. Not having succeeded in their attempt, they were trying to reach their ends by another way, namely, by stirring up so much trouble in Paris that he would be obliged to leave the city. They felt sure that in his absence they would be able to accomplish what they despaired of bringing about in his presence.

The reader must always bear in mind that John Baptist's worst adversaries were secret enemies who would have been greatly annoyed had their animosity been revealed openly. They were worthy men with a notable reputation for virtue and thought that by persecuting His servant, they were rendering a signal service to God. As they saw it, De La Salle had indeed conceived an idea, the outcome of genius, but that he was not capable of putting it into execution. His Institute was important for the good of the Church, but it needed someone else to bring it to its full development. Those who thought in this way considered themselves called to complete what the Servant of God had begun.

Having found him docile to their suggestions, so long as these did not alter the spirit of his Society, they had declared themselves its supporters; but later on, finding him inflexible with regard to the changes they wished to introduce into his organization, they had come to dislike him. They had misrepresented him to the archbishop as a narrow-minded man, incapable of governing. They had tried to incite his disciples to revolt against him and make them dissatisfied with his person and his manner of governing. Failing in this they had stirred up the rivalry of the writing masters in Paris against the gratuitous schools. On this point they had achieved momentary success.

Now they did not give up hope of winning the total victory so long awaited. They thought that by renewing the struggle they would oblige the holy priest to withdraw from Paris and abandon this battlefield. After that, they could lay down the law to the Brothers, introduce new rules among them, abolish their long-standing practices, and install a new superior under whose name they themselves would actually govern the Society.

The enemies of the Servant of God, who had not lost sight of their previous designs, once again tried to rob the Brothers of the protection of the parish priest of Saint Sulpice and to disparage their Superior. In this they succeeded. Even the greatest men have their weaknesses; there is always in them a human side. They are not exempt from prepossessions; when they give in to them they act out of prejudice, as others do through passion. While seeking nothing but God, it happens that they end up by warring on His greatest servants and, on the pretext of virtue, they combat the most virtuous of men.

De La Chétardye, although enlightened, full of the best intentions, and sincerely pious, did not in that affair show sufficient distrust of himself and of those who sought to turn him against the holy Founder. He became the dupe of their false zeal and their instrument in causing new grief for De La Salle. The latter suffered the trial like a true saint. No word of complaint, no murmurs, no sign of sorrow revealed his affliction to those with whom he lived. On the contrary, his joy seemed to redouble in the midst of his trials and to grow with them.

Never did he seem more unruffled; those who were ignorant of what was going on imagined that everything was happening as he wished and that finally calm had followed the tempest. With the exception of the Brother whose ascendancy over the parish priest he made use of, and of the Brother Director, nobody else knew anything about the unpleasant circumstances with which he was struggling. He kept a total silence about all that was happening to him and that concerned him personally. He spoke of it only to God.

There would be no point in detailing the various trials that his opponents caused him. To sum it all up in a word, it went so far that in the end he felt himself obliged to yield, lest the persecution might extend from his person to that of his disciples as usually happened. The latter were beginning to grow discouraged; worn out by the struggle, they began to lose heart under these violent attacks in spite of everything he could say to comfort them. Finally, convinced that so radical an evil could be cured only by violent remedies, he ordered all the schools closed and sent the Brothers two by two to various other houses. Only the Director remained in Paris to keep watch over the house and to speak with persons who might come to inquire what had happened. That was in July, 1706, when De La Salle was living in the house in Saint Roch parish.

The reason why the holy Founder decided to withdraw the Brothers and to discontinue their classes was the new campaign of intimidation launched against them by the writing masters, secretly urged on and abetted. They

constantly came to the schools to cause trouble, forced students to leave, insulted the Brothers and threatened them with prison. The pretext for all these vexations was the same old one: they claimed that there were in the gratuitous schools children whose parents were not paupers. As the parish priest knew what was going on but said not a word, the writing masters took his silence for approval, and that gave them all the liberty they wanted. They carried it even to insolence.

De La Chétardye, however, had not expected that the tragedy would end by the departure of the Brothers. If he had, his zeal for the Christian schools would have made him speak up, and do so with the authoritative tone he knew better than anyone how to assume when necessary. That would have reduced the foes of the Institute to silence and put an end to their hostility. He was, then, greatly surprised when he learned that the schools had suddenly been closed. Nor was it difficult for him to guess why, and to realize that it was his own fault for leaving those innocent men defenseless against their antagonists.

The classes remained shut for three months, to the great regret of the public. It did not take long for the ill effects the closing caused in the parish to become obvious. Most of the fathers and mothers complained bitterly to the parish priest. The poor, who were losing such a valuable opportunity for the instruction of their children, were in despair.

Meanwhile, John Baptist's enemies congratulated themselves over their victory. To make it complete, they suggested to De La Chétardye that he should look for other teachers to conduct the gratuitous schools. After all, the schools themselves were certainly needed, and the zealous pastor did not want to see them discontinued, nor did he wish to deprive the poor in his parish of so necessary a means of salvation. He had even promised those who had come to complain to him that he would set about without delay restoring the situation as it had been.

Those who had been interested in getting rid of the Brothers brought forward a number of candidates to replace them. They were mostly former Brothers who had left the Institute; but apart from the fact that there were not enough of them to staff all the classes, the parish priest was not satisfied with them. The charity that had once inspired them had given place to cupidity. They refused to work for the miserly salaries paid the Brothers who, like Saint Paul, were content with the bare necessities of life.

De La Chétardye was, therefore, obliged to try to get the former teachers back, to the great disappointment of those who had labored so hard to force them out. He let his intentions be known to De La Salle who, meek as a lamb, was prepared to obey without allowing himself any complaint or reproach to the priest who had abandoned him to the harassment of his opponents. Delighted to know that the Servant of God was prepared to send the Brothers back, De La Chétardye wrote and asked him to come back to reopen the schools as soon as possible.

John Baptist answered that he had preferred to yield rather than to be exposed to the perpetual disturbance which had caused so much harm to the Brothers. He mentioned that the way they had been treated recently had discouraged several, and that it was not possible for him to find replacements for them on such short notice. He added that he was unwilling to send Brothers back to Saint Sulpice unless he was given assurances that they would be able to carry on their work in peace under the parish priest's protection. Finally, the wise Superior, to make sure that he would thenceforth be shielded from all such vexations which, by annoying the Brothers, had disrupted their schools, ordered the Director who had remained alone in the residence to negotiate with the parish priest and to make sure that in the future there would be no further danger of similar ordeals.

The requested measures were taken by order of De La Chétardye; thereupon the holy Founder recalled the Brothers from the provinces. Twelve of them came back to the parish of Saint Sulpice, ten to teach, one to take care of temporal affairs, and one to be Director of the establishment. Their salaries were regulated on the basis which still exists today. At the request of the Brother so well liked by the parish priest, the latter condescended to pay them for the three months during which the schools had been closed and also to defray the traveling expenses of the Brothers who were being recalled. That act of charity was indeed necessary, because the poverty of the Brothers was such that they would not have been able to meet the expenses.

This reconciliation had hardly been concluded when it almost broke down because of an untoward event. De La Salle had sent the Brother so well liked by De La Chétardye on an errand to the provinces without advising the parish priest. The latter was highly incensed at the assignment, so the order had to be countermanded immediately for fear that De La Salle's enemies might use the circumstance to smear him and once more poison the mind of the parish priest against him.

The schools reopened at the beginning of October, 1706, and were at once filled. The impatience with which the people had waited for the reopening was followed by outbursts of joy on their part. Their reaction once again made plain to the public at large and to the parish priest of Saint Sulpice what an invaluable resource it is for the instruction of youth to have charitable schools taught by teachers who are as pious as they are competent.

So that in the future the writing masters might not cause any more trouble in the schools, the objects of their jealousy, De La Chétardye sent Abbé Gergy, his vicar at this time and today his successor as parish priest of Saint Sulpice, to investigate the financial standing of the pupils' families. The pious priest spent several weeks doing so and he drew up a list of the students' names, ages and addresses. The Brothers were told to admit only those who presented a note signed by a priest from the Community of Saint Sulpice designated by the pastor to verify the financial status of the children's parents.

Fathers and mothers were thus obliged to come from all over the parish to secure a ticket, which was like a key which opened the doors of the gratuitous schools for their children. The procedure disarmed the writing masters completely and deprived them of any pretext for further harassment. It protected the Brothers and their schools and brought peace and quiet back to them. And yet they did not lose a single student. The gratuitous classes were filled as usual, and no child who asked for admission was turned away. The large number of pupils was a fresh source of displeasure and disappointment for the Parisian schoolmasters, but it would no longer excuse them for causing trouble.

This issuing of tickets which protected the schools from any invidious visitations was, when all was said and done, nothing but a pure formality; for the same students whose supposedly easy circumstances had provided a pretext for the lawsuits filed by the writing masters came back to the Brothers with their tickets duly signed, since the priest in charge felt that in conscience he could not refuse them. Better informed than the writing masters about the families' resources and unwilling to conform his judgment to the masters' imagination, he did not feel justified in classifying as "rich" those people who had a little money but also had large families or people who owned well-stocked stores but owed more than they owned.

Thus this epic struggle between the Brothers and their rivals finally subsided. As all this had merely been a weapon used by De La Salle's enemies with which to strike at him, their agitation died down somewhat. This new period of calm permitted the opening of new schools, which we shall relate after mentioning the new residence occupied by the Brothers at Saint Sulpice.

For over 18 years the Brothers had lodged in the Rue Princesse, where one of the parish schools was situated. The house was very inconvenient on account of its location; it was open on all sides so that over 20 families could see what went on. The Brothers could not leave the house without being noticed, could not go out to enjoy a breath of fresh air in the courtyard during recreation without being spied on by curious and malicious eyes. This constraint kept them uneasy in a residence which did not have any garden and was too small for the number of Brothers. The difficulty was not to find a more commodious house but to get the parish priest of Saint Sulpice to agree to the move.

To bring that about De La Salle, who had still not managed to recover the good graces of his virtuous pastor, thought that while he himself kept in the background he should make use of the influence of the Brother whom the pastor liked. That Brother started looking for a more suitable residence and did not take long to find one. The house, belonging to Abbé Mascarani, was located near the Séves gate, in the same quarter with the Hospital for Incurables, and was just what the Brothers needed: it offered plenty of fresh air, was solitary, adapted easily to the Brothers' sort of life, and had a garden. The holy Founder went to visit the place in secret and liked it very much. He told the Brother who had found it to try his best to secure it for the Brothers. The Brother obeyed, and success rewarded his obedience.

De La Chétardye agreed to the Brother's request as soon as the latter explained the reasons for the change and congratulated him on finding the

right place. He was confirmed in the opinion he had formed of the house by the report made to him by Abbé Languet De Gergy whom he had at once sent with the Brother to look it over. He then gave orders to rent it. John Baptist was surprised when he was told that De La Chétardye had consented so quickly, and at the same time he felt much satisfaction because at last Divine Providence had made available to the Brothers in Paris a convenient residence, secluded and conducive to great regularity. In this event De La Salle admired the goodness of God Who out of all the afflictions and contradictions he had suffered, had drawn the Brothers' advantage, and Who had turned in their favor, at least for a moment, a heart so long poisoned against himself.

A few months later the school in Saint Roch's parish was entrusted to other teachers, and De La Salle was obliged to transfer his residence to the new house. The following year, 1709, which caused so much hardship on account of the famine and the long and rigorous winter, he was fortunate indeed in also being able to find there a lodging for the novices, who had come seeking the necessities of life in the capital. The novitiate, thus established in a place so conducive to fervor, remained there for seven years; the school, meanwhile, continued to function in the classrooms that the parish had rented in Rue Princesse. The new residence, so well adapted to requirements, cost 400 livres a year. It was occupied by the Brothers until 1722, at which date they moved to another residence near Saint Thecla's. That was an even more commodious dwelling, where they settled down in permanent fashion.

Chapter VI

New Foundations at Dijon, Mende, Alais, Grenoble and Saint Denis-en-France

Although the foundation of the Brothers' school in Dijon followed that of Darnétal, we have delayed speaking of it in order to relate in one place its history and that of several establishments which followed, and in order not to break the continuity of the holy Founder's Life.

The Christian school in Dijon was opened thanks to Rigolet, first president of the Chamber of Accounts of that city, and to his illustrious family which can truly be called a family of saints. Father, mother and children all cooperated in this good work with holy rivalry. The father began it, his wife supported it, and their children brought it to completion. Rigolet was a model for the whole city. He appeared in public only insofar as his duties required; otherwise he was a lover of retirement, prayer and good works. The life he led kept him always prepared for his Holy Communion which, it was said, he had been authorized to receive daily.* In a most obliging letter he wrote to the holy Founder, this religious magistrate offered him 400 livres a year as the salary for two Brothers and a place for them to lodge.

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*A rare privilege indeed, at a time when the prevailing Jansenistic practice discouraged Communion.

De La Salle accepted his proposal, and two Brothers left at once for Dijon where they began classes in June, 1705.

As long as the pious magistrate lived, he granted his protection to the Brothers, and the same charity which had led him to endow Christian and gratuitous schools in his native city also inspired him with great zeal to support and develop them. If he did not live long enough to do them all the good he had planned on doing, his illustrious children proved themselves true heirs to his zeal. The Brothers lost this devoted friend about 1716. When he died, he was buried with all the honors due to his rank by the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, his brother-in-law, in the chapel of Saint Charles.

His wife, a sister of the archbishop of Sens and of Abbé Languet De Gergy, was a woman of eminent virtue who deserved to be called the mother of the poor because of her tender charity towards them. After her husband's death, she continued to support the schools with a zeal like his. And equally edifying, the children, who inherited their parents' zeal and piety, joined with De Rochefort, a councillor in the parliament and a relative of Rigolet's, in enlarging the establishment set up by their parents, so that four other Brothers had to be added to the staff. Thus, Christian and gratuitous schools are now functioning with great success and the blessing of God in three sections of the city of Dijon, with the approval of the mayor and councilmen, who welcomed them by an official act.

The founding of the Christian schools in Mende, the capital of Gévaudan, was the result of the pious solicitude of Bishop De Piancourt. This city became the place where De La Salle gave proof of his heroic humility. No one ever showed a more earnest desire to have the Brothers and more zeal for the instruction of youth than this illustrious prelate, whose charity before his death despoiled him of all his property in favor of the poor and other good works.

Towards the end of his holy life, filled with merit and entirely devoted to the labors of his ministry and the welfare of his diocese, he wished to put the crowning touch on his benefactions by founding a general hospice for the poor and several gratuitous schools. Considering this double undertaking in favor of the poor as the final deed of his charity, he would have died thinking he had not done for his people all that his zeal inspired him to do, if he had not left them these two foundations to alleviate their spiritual and temporal needs.

As he himself says in his testament, dated October 19, 1707: "The salvation of people and their temporal happiness depend mainly on the proper education of youth, both boys and girls. In addition to the tokens of affection and predilection which we have given to the citizens of our beloved city of Mende by building and endowing for them a general hospice, a permanent and universal asylum for all the natural calamities and reverses of fortune which can happen to them during life, we feel that we cannot leave them a greater proof of our affection than by endowing schools which will provide them with everything which can contribute to the salvation of their souls and to their temporal felicity."

Indeed, as soon as he learned that in Paris there existed a group of schoolmasters inspired by pure charity and dedicated by vocation to the Christian education and instruction of poor children; and that De La Salle, former canon of Rheims and Doctor in Theology, their father and founder, who was in charge of this new sort of seminary, spent all his time in training and sanctifying these men, he hastened to enrich his diocese by acquiring some Brothers for it. He thus put the finishing touch on his good works by endowing gratuitous schools.

Unfortunately, at that particular time, John Baptist was not able to satisfy fully the desires of the saintly bishop because he lacked Brothers. Some had grown disenchanted, and others had been driven away by the series of persecutions we have spoken of. Still, delighted to find so much zeal in this great bishop, he did what he could to cooperate with him, and sent one Brother to begin the gratuitous school and to give the bishop an idea of what the Brothers were capable of doing. He also promised to send more as soon as possible. The Brother dispatched to Mende succeeded better than the bishop had dared hope.* So satisfied was he that he wrote to De La Salle a second time, begging him to send another Brother. Here are his words on this occasion:

"My dear Sir, I cannot sufficiently bless God Who inspired you with the idea of training schoolmasters to instruct the young and bring them up in Christian piety. Seminaries train good ecclesiastics; but good schoolmasters, who give children the first impressions of piety and religion, can help to sanctify all Christians. Nobody could be more pleased than I am with the Brother you sent who, while awaiting a second to help him, has already begun instructing our young people. I should be extremely obliged to you if you sent us another able to teach both writing and arithmetic; for this will attract all the youngsters, and thus we can impart to them the rudiments of Christian piety.

"For my part I will give the Brothers all the protection they can expect from me, so that they may be completely satisfied by their labors in this city. Brother X.... can tell you of my high regard for him and for the school. Please see to it that my regard may increase more and more, thanks to the good choice you will make of the teachers you will send me. I shall be most obliged to you. Assuring you of my most particular esteem, I beg you to believe me your very humble and obedient servant. F. P. De Piancourt, Bishop of Mende. At Mende, this 8th of April, 1707."

The second Brother succeeded as well as the first. The two of them could see the harvest growing in their hands so that alone they did not suffice for the task. A third Brother who came to help them found as much to do as the first two and had equal reason to feel consoled over the results. The pious bishop could not have experienced a keener joy as he saw his days drawing to a close. To avoid leaving his undertakings incomplete after beginning them so

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*This was Brother Ponce, one of the "stalwarts" of the early days. He had opened the school in Darnetal and had been Director of the Brothers in Rouen.

successfully, and lest death might surprise him, he made his will leaving to the Brothers an income of 510 livres as an endowment, along with the house where they lived; and an income of 250 livres for the two schoolmistresses at the girls' school.*

It would seem that God was waiting for nothing more from this pious prelate than the definite endowment of these good works before calling him to the reward due to him for all his efforts, for not long after making these arrangements, he died, to the great regret of the Brothers who had known him too late and lost him too soon. They were right to deplore his demise, for it brought uncertain days to the gratuitous schools he had founded and threatened them with ruin. The Brothers who came after the first three, and who proved very different from them, made their holy Superior practice heroic patience; and their insolence provided him with an opportunity of leaving to all his disciples a rare example of meekness and Christian humility.

This is what happened. Three unworthy followers of such a virtuous leader had been sent to Mende after the collapse of the novitiate in Provence, which we shall speak of shortly. They separated from the others and created a sort of schism in their Society. They did not wish to have anything to do with the other Brothers and refused to obey their legitimate Superior. Their irregularity was the occasion of their schism.

These tepid and relaxed religious, far from the vigilant eyes of their Superior and without the example of their Brothers and the support of the Rule, had become their own masters, did what they liked, and by following their natural bent they traced out for themselves a path to perdition. Little by little, from a life lived without constraint or restraint, they passed on to a tepid and sensual existence which led to grave disorders. De La Salle bewailed their change and like a good father did all he could to make his unruly children come to their senses. They had imitated the Prodigal in their waywardness, but they did not imitate him in his repentance.

Those incurably perverted men, who were only emboldened by mild treatment, might have been brought back to their duty by sternness and punishment, but that solution seemed too risky. The best remedy for their hardness of heart was no doubt to remove them from the place where they had grown so lax, and to send them back to the novitiate so that they could reflect on what they had done and take up again the true spirit of their state. But that was not an easy solution. De La Salle had the right to act thus, since the foundation had been made in his name and was a part of his Society. Those children of Belial knew his right and feared it, for they were resolved to throw off the yoke of obedience. To parry such a move, they managed to circumvent Bishop De Piancourt's successor as well as the city officials. They succeeded in winning these gentlemen over to such an extent that it was not possible to send the three Brothers away from Mende.

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*Bishop Piancourt was the only bishop who left a legacy to provide for the Brothers in the schools they founded.

The holy Founder, who was ignorant of all these schemes, was not a little surprised, when he went to pay his respects to the new bishop of Mende to hear the latter say, as though he were a master threatening a servant, that De La Salle was not to withdraw any of the Brothers from Mende, because he would not accept any others and would send back any who came to replace them. The Founder's astonishment grew even greater when he heard the first judge-consul, who is the mayor of this city, speak in similar terms.

If the virtuous Superior had wished to reply, he could have had plenty to say that would have opened the eyes of those gentlemen who had been circumvented by rebellious subjects. He could have pointed out that the irregular life of those Brothers showed the danger of leaving them in the place which had given them an opportunity for relaxation. He might have appealed to the testament of Bishop De Piancourt to justify his making such changes, but he was not inclined to argue. His humility led him to give in all the time and to remain silent. So that is what he did once more on that occasion; he let his silence and calm demeanor give proof that he was in the right, and thus vindicated his conduct.

During all this time the holy Superior was residing with his rebellious Brothers but did not show any ill humor over their deceitful and disloyal conduct. He dwelt with them, as with any other Brothers, hoping to win over by his good example those whom he could not correct with authority. But he was not welcome among the three men who brooked no interference, and who, impatient to resume their former manner of living, would have preferred to see him out of the way, since he prevented them from doing as they would have liked.

The presence of a saint was burdensome to them. Nay, it became a torment for those wretched men. They resented his example even more than his remonstrances, because his example covered them with confusion, became a silent monitor, and addressed to them more pungent reproaches than the most severe admonitions could have done. To get rid of the mute censor, they adopted the most expeditious means, which was to put him out of the house and send him away.

One of them took it upon himself to carry out that commission and insolently told De La Salle that if he wanted to stay with them he would have to pay for his board. Such rudeness would have shocked him if the remarks that the rebels had already caused the bishop and the magistrates to make to him had not prepared him for it. The affront might certainly have aroused indignation in anyone less accustomed to insults and less dead to himself than John Baptist. In similar circumstances even the least sensitive of men would have felt justified in taking up the contract of the foundation and showing the three mutineers the terms of the document which authorized him to put them out instead. If he had done so, one could only have praised his wisdom and firmness.

Some may think that he should indeed have acted in that fashion, because the only way to deal with the frenzy of pride is with a cauterizing iron. Proud persons must be obliged to bend their backs before the weight of

authority. It is commonly asserted that a superior who does not know how to make his subjects obey does not know how to govern, and that the art of reducing rebels to submission is the art of commanding well. But the saints act according to other lights than the rest of us. Their wisdom is from above, and it inspires them with maxims very different from those inspired by human prudence. De La Salle's wisdom led him to humble himself in all things, always to give in, and to profit by all the opportunities that Divine Providence furnished him to abase himself beneath the feet of all, even of his own disciples. His example was not the first he had given them in such circumstances; we have already mentioned several others.

To appreciate the extent to which the holy priest put aside his own dignity in that instance, we should mention that the one who treated his good father and Superior so outrageously was the son of a poor cobbler from Picardy whom John Baptist had taken in through charity and brought up carefully in his Community. He had accepted him when the young man was ignorant, incapable of doing anything, not even knowing how to read and write. He had made of him an excellent teacher, had made him, in fact, all he was.

The ingrate forgot all that; he forgot who he was and no longer recognized in his father, benefactor and Superior the one who had lifted him up and who could still set him down again as he had been before. The churlish words of the arrogant disciple deserved the reply made by an emperor to an ungrateful patriarch whom he had appointed: "O man of nothing, it was I who raised you up; man of nothing, I will bring you down again into the dust whence you came."

But the rebel knew to whom he was speaking. He knew that he was speaking to one whose humility surpassed his own pride. He had learned from other striking examples of humility given by John Baptist that on such occasions he only kept quiet and bowed his head beneath the hand that humiliated him. He saw that happen again a final time---to his own misfortune. The saintly Superior heard the outrageous words but said nothing. Even his silence, which cried out louder than the bitterest complaints or the most stinging reproaches, did not touch his hard-hearted disciple. The latter saw his father, whom he was driving from his own house, withdraw without a word, calm and full of joy, go to seek shelter under a stranger's roof.

Such impious conduct only led the defiant and ungrateful son down to a deeper abyss. Having raised the standard of rebellion, he got rid of the third Brother, had himself tonsured, hired a serving woman, and committed a thousand other scandalous infractions of his Rule while still wearing the habit of the Institute to which he no longer belonged, but which he kept on wearing through the instigation of the devil, in order to dishonor it. It is true that he could not put aside his habit without losing the endowment funds, because Bishop De Piancourt had inserted in his will the express clause that the schools which he was establishing would be attached to the Society of the Brothers founded by De La Salle. So it was not through any sentiment of religion but through concern for his own interests that this schismatic kept the habit of an Institute which he had disowned.

He perpetuated this scandal, along with his companion, for about ten years. At the end of that time, Divine Justice seemed to demand vengeance

upon them for their misdeeds. Both of them died of the pestilence which spread from Marseilles to Mende, bringing desolation with it. The schools remained closed for two years, after which time three more Brothers arrived to reopen them, at the request of the bishop and some of the principal officials of the town. That was about 1724. The scandalous behavior of the deceased Brothers had made the bishop and the city councilors regret having given them their backing. It served as a proof that the branch separated from the trunk dries up and perishes, and that inferiors who break away from dependence on their superior sooner or later become frightening examples of men whom God abandons. Although those various events happened at different times, we have grouped them here so that by anticipating a little we might present a more continuous story. That is what we have nearly always done in relating the establishment of the Brothers and of the gratuitous schools, so as not to interrupt the thread of our narrative.*

The founding of the Christian schools at Alais followed shortly after that of Mende. No city in the whole kingdom had more need of such a charitable endeavor. The remembrance of the horrible ravages that the rebellious Huguenots committed in the Cévennes has not entirely died away even now. That region, reddened by the blood of Catholics, was the scene of Calvinism's last convulsive stand in France. There, more than anywhere else heresy, combined with fanaticism, made use of fire and sword, showing the hatred that hell inspires towards the faithful members of the Roman Church. Catholics were torn to pieces, beheaded, and suffered martyrdom by new sorts of torments, inflicted with unheard-of cruelty. One can read about it in the history which has been written on the subject.

Finally, vanquished and forced into its last stronghold, Calvinism fell, a victim to its own frenzy, and had to yield to the arms of Marshal Villars, whom King Louis XIV sent there to give the last blow to the cruel hydra that Calvin had nurtured for the misfortune of his own country, and that for over a century had brought death and carnage wherever it went.

This great king, who finally exterminated the pernicious error lurking under the mask of reform which had caused his ancestors to tremble and had so long desolated France, wished to triumph over it as a Christian prince should; for the only vengeance he sought for the spilled blood of his subjects was the conversion of those who had shed it or had had a hand in shedding it. The project was laudable and truly worthy of the religious spirit of him who had conceived it. But it was not easy to carry out.

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*Later historians, especially Lucard, Guibert and Rigault, have raised serious doubts about the accuracy of Blain's account of this "schism" at Mende. Careful checking reveals serious inaccuracies in the story. The "son of a poor cobbler from Picardy" seems to have been Brother Henri who, after serving as Director in Les Vans, was sent to Mende. What exactly happened between him and the Saint is not too clear; but there was no "schism," since in 1716 Brother Henri and his companion were visited by Brother Barthélemy and signed the document preparatory to the Chapter of 1717. The two Brothers did heroic service to the plague-stricken during the epidemic and died as victims to their generosity.

It can be said in all truth that it was less difficult to defeat those rebellious fanatics than to convert them, when their hands still ran with the blood of Catholics and their hearts still thirsted for murder and carnage. People who had made a religion for themselves out of their violence and considered it a duty of piety to kill and slaughter; people who thought themselves called to fight the Lord's battles by revolting against their king; people who claimed to be inspired and moved by divine power when they became the executioners of their fellow citizens, were not much inclined to return to the bosom of the Church which they had just been lacerating.

Yet that was the laudable project that Louis XIV conceived, and to bring it about he took the right measures. Two kinds of people, very different from each other, were needed to accomplish this task: soldiers and evangelical laborers. The former had to keep the rebels subdued, while the latter taught them and tried to deliver them from their errors. Without the former, the latter were in danger of becoming the victims of that false zeal which is so easily rekindled. Without the latter, the former would have succeeded only in fomenting more disorder and in increasing irreligion.

The military forces were stationed all over the country, for there was everything to fear from subjects, apparently cowed, but who in their hearts remained rebellious. Experience had taught that this fire hidden beneath the ashes could burst into flame again in a moment and cause new conflagrations. It was therefore necessary to pose sentinels to keep constant watch and to hold other forces in readiness to extinguish the flames if they broke out again. This had to be done first and so it was. The king's troops occupied all the cities and towns of any consequence where there was danger of mutiny; they overawed the wandering preachers, who spoke of nothing but charity but who acted only from fear. They imposed on those fierce and bloodthirsty souls the peace and tranquillity needed for the proper exercise of the sacred ministry.

Once order and calm returned, the prince called for volunteer Gospel missionaries to replace those who had fallen victims of the fanatical fury of the heretics. They needed a leader to direct them in this work and guide them in their mission. This leader, according to Christ's institution, is the bishop. Hence, it was felt that to cause religion to flourish and make progress in the areas where error and fanaticism had so long ruled, a new bishopric was needed. Consequently, the city and territory of Alais were separated from the diocese of Nîmes by Louis XIV, and Innocent XII erected a new diocese there.

François Maurice, the superior of the royal missionaries in the area, was chosen to be the first bishop. His first thought was to find worthy ministers to help him in his task, men who could work with him at uprooting and planting, tearing down and building up again, in a zone where the heresy, once banished from the kingdom, had taken refuge, and where hardly one family in 12 was Catholic. Among the zealous laborers whom he recruited to help him was Merrez, a canon of Nîmes noted for his zeal for the salvation of souls. The bishop appointed him vicar general and head of the new Cathedral Chapter.

The two of them, whom long experience had made experts in the art of winning souls to God, judged that among all the new religious institutions

needed to oppose the heresy dominant in this part of France, the most necessary were schools taught by pious and skillful schoolmasters. The origin of the uprisings of the fanatics in the Cévennes confirmed them in this conviction, for in fact the history of this revolt tells us that it was an outlaw schoolmaster who lit the first fires of what became such a huge conflagration. They drew the conclusion that, to destroy the evil by the same principle which had given rise to it, they needed to call in zealous schoolmasters who would give the people an example of outstanding Catholic living.

Those trained by De La Salle already enjoyed a high reputation. Their regular life and their pedagogical talent made them known throughout the kingdom. Their outstanding merit had brought their renown as far as the Cévennes, where Merrez had learned that De La Salle, a fellow seminarian of his at Saint Sulpice, had given up all his wealth and his canonry in order to endow the Church with a new Congregation of catechists and schoolmasters capable of sowing the first seeds of religion in young hearts.

Merrez did not doubt that the followers of such a master, trained by him, would be worthy of him. Moreover, the reputation of the schools at Avignon and Marseilles had reached him. Finally, he was convinced: that men who adopt the profession of teaching as a true vocation and who exercise it only through charity have an entirely different grace than others for instructing and educating the young; that there is none more capable and more virtuous than those systematically trained from their early years in a community which has made this task its principal aim; that only a community can furnish good teachers on a permanent basis, so as to replace those who die or who can no longer serve.

With such ideas in mind, Merrez suggested that his bishop invite the Brothers of the Christian Schools into the diocese. The prelate approved this idea and asked him to write to De La Salle. Here is his letter, dated June 2, 1707:

"I do not know, my dear Sir, whether you will recall my name, and whether you still remember me; but I have never forgotten you, and I remember very well having seen you at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice when you were a canon of Rheims, about 1671. I have been informed that you gave up your canonry and dedicated yourself to all sorts of good works, among others to the founding of a community of schoolmasters who do a great deal of good wherever they are established.

"We need some of them here, where it is difficult for us to find Catholic teachers to whom we can entrust the education of the young. We need two right now at Alais. The problem is to root out heresy in this area and to establish the Catholic religion. It is an important task, calling for excellent workers. We shall have their expenses paid for by the people; thus, your Brothers will not need to ask anything from the children's parents. The salaries of the teachers are already provided by His Majesty; thus there will be nothing new about it. But we need to approach these Huguenots by showing them where their own interest lies, that these new teachers will make their children good penmen.

"I am appealing to you, my dear Sir, for some of your followers. The Jesuit, Beauchamp, praises very highly those whom he has seen at work in Avignon and in Marseilles, two very Catholic cities. The diocese of Alais is almost entirely Huguenot and so has a crying need for good workers to reestablish religion here through the education of the children....Zealous as you are, I beg you to consider this part of the country which is the corner of the kingdom where religion needs help most desperately; and I can assure you that we need schoolmasters more than any other kind of apostolic workers. We have men who can preach, but we lack catechists....While awaiting the honor of your reply I am, etc...."

De La Salle experienced no little joy when he was offered an opportunity of satisfying his zeal for the extirpation of heresy, and when his Brothers were called upon to combat it in the very places where it had taken refuge and where it had felt itself strong enough to insult the true religion and put Catholics to death. He was more convinced than anyone else of how important it was to have teachers capable of gradually liberating the children from the prejudices and errors in which they had been brought up, and of combatting such mistakes early by teaching the contrary truths. He did not delay, therefore, in sending two Brothers, who started teaching in October of that same year, 1707. For their upkeep the bishop of Alais obtained from the king's piety the necessary funds. That is why the name, Royal Schools, was given to the institutions where the Brothers taught.

The bishop soon recognized what wise advice he had been given to invite the Brothers into his diocese. Delighted with their manner of teaching, and himself a witness of the good they were doing, he wanted them alone to be in charge of the religious instruction of the young, and forbade all other schoolteachers to teach religion. He aimed at having the Brothers' classes filled with the students from the other schools, and his wish was realized. Because this measure increased the number of students, he wanted more Brothers. He would have liked to see them in all the cities and larger towns of his diocese, as he himself says in the letter he wrote on January 28, 1708, asking De La Salle for more Brothers. Here is his letter:

"We have some of your schoolmasters here, my dear Sir, and are very pleased with them; this leads me to wish that we could have more of them to place in the cities of the Cévennes and all the larger towns. If I had 30 of them, I could find work for them to do! They do a world of good. So as to maintain them in the spirit you have given them, I shall be careful to give them my best advice when necessary; and in addition I will give you a faithful account of them.

"We need another Brother here for a second class. We have to divide the one we now have, which is too large, for the convenience of the people. I feel sure that if we can spread the work done by your good and dear Brothers, it will become an infallible means of benefiting the families of our poor Catholic people. I send you, Sir, my best regards, hoping that you will lend us your help in evangelizing this unfortunate area which deserves the best efforts of your charitable zeal. You may be sure that I will not fail to aid the Brothers, and that I shall watch affectionately over their interests on all occasions.

"I ask for your prayers and wish to assure you, Sir, that it is sincerely and with all my heart that I declare myself your very humble and very obedient servant. François, First Bishop of Alais."

Delighted over the good results achieved by the Christian schools in a region where heresy was so prevalent, De La Salle sent the extra Brother whom the zealous prelate had asked for and offered to send more if they were needed. So it is that the Lord, Who takes care to measure out His consolations in proportion to the labors undertaken for His love, deigned to console His servant in the midst of his tribulations. Not that the Brothers in Alais were spared opposition on the part of the Calvinists. The spirit that animates the supposed reform is too rebellious and seditious to lay down its arms without a struggle. The Huguenots did not dare to attack the new schools by force, but they tried their best to keep their children from attending them. The children had other teachers, public or secret, and it was impossible to entice them into the Christian schools. Thus the establishment of the Brothers' school would have remained useless if the vigilant pastor who sought out the strayed sheep had not used the king's authority to proscribe all teachers of error.

He did even more, for he called upon the same authority to oblige fathers and mothers under pain of fines to send their children to the catechism lessons taught by the Brothers on Sundays and feasts. They were constrained to obey, and attachment to the false religion gave way to pecuniary advantage, a not uncommon occurrence. In this way the Christian schools were filled with students, but at the start the results were not very apparent. For if a large number of children attended the Brothers' instructions, they came mainly to cause trouble.

Their numbers, instead of bringing joy to the Brothers, served only to increase their difficulties; these children brought with them the heart and the spirit of their parents, spirit and heart in revolt against the instructions they were obliged to listen to. Fearing lest these lessons might produce the intended effect, the parents, as soon as the children returned home, took care to counteract the impressions the lessons might have left on their souls.

To such unyielding obstinacy the Brothers responded with persevering zeal; without getting discouraged they continued their teaching, presenting the remedy which their adversaries considered poison. The good bishop, whose own efforts met with similar opposition from these rebellious hearts, visited the Brothers often to comfort and encourage them; he gave them the example of a charity which never allowed itself to be vanquished. The good Brothers also found in De La Fond, a canon of the Cathedral and their zealous spiritual director, a father who upheld them, encouraged them, protected them and rendered them all the services which the tenderest charity could inspire.

As I mentioned before, the king provided funds for the school at Alais. The money came from a tax on goods brought into the city, conformably to an edict of Louis XIV which Louis XV confirmed by a new decree in 1724. These edicts provided that in all the cities and towns of the Cévennes schoolmasters and mistresses must be hired; they were to receive a salary of 150 livres a

year assigned to them by the king. In the city of Alais, Bishop Maurice De Sault never tolerated any other schoolteachers but the Brothers; if anyone else, Catholic or heretic, ventured to teach children in secret, he was put into prison. In spite of all the pleas made to him by important citizens, he never authorized anyone to teach but the disciples of De La Salle.

In vain did the Huguenots contrive intrigue after intrigue to induce him to give in on this point. He was inexorable, and the secular teachers who did not wish to die of hunger were obliged to go elsewhere to make a living by their profession. He spurned all requests presented to him on this subject, and threatened with prison those who dared to renew them. To those who objected that the Brothers at Alais were not first-rate teachers of penmanship,* he replied that he had not brought them in to make the children expert penmen, but good Catholics.

This zealous prelate continued to struggle, even to his last breath, against the vestiges of heresy that had taken refuge in his diocese, and never consented to leave the flock that Divine Providence had entrusted to him and that had such great need of his care, not even to go on to higher positions. He frequently preached during the celebration of the sacred mysteries in his Cathedral and joined the example of virtue to the instructions he gave. His successor, who inherited his zeal, showed the Brothers the same protection and kindness.

It was in that same year, 1707, that the Brothers were invited to Grenoble in the following manner. Several clerics of outstanding piety had created a Christian society dedicated to the relief of the poor and the instruction of youth. With time it came to include in its membership most of the distinguished inhabitants of the city and of the parliament, who all wished to take part in these good works. Their bishop, Enemond Alemard de Montmartin, took the leadership of this movement, and all the members unanimously adopted certain rules of conduct which they bound themselves to observe. Christian humility having inspired them with a love for obedience, they chose a superior from their ranks and were entirely submissive to him.

Whoever wished to be admitted to the illustrious body, composed of the most notable citizens, had to submit a request and remained among the postulants for a considerable time. When one of the associates died, for the repose of his soul they all attended a solemn funeral service celebrated at the expense of the group. In addition, those who were priests said a number of Masses for the deceased, and those who were not priests had Masses said for the same intention.

Those generous persons gathered on fixed days to determine measures to provide for the public weal. As ignorance and the lack of education seemed to them to be the sources whence sprang the disorders prevalent among the poor, their zeal led them to seek a remedy for this in the establishment of

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*In the 18th century, penmanship was almost a fine art; real experts produced some remarkable documents and were well paid for their work.

Christian schools. First of all, they had to provide for the living expenses of the teachers, and then to select good ones. This they resolved to do in one of their meetings, where each one promised to contribute according to his means: 20, 25, or even 50 livres, and at death to leave a capital sum invested, sufficient to perpetuate their donation.

As for the choice of the schoolmasters, De Saleon and Canel were asked to look into the matter. These two priests were men of rare merit. The first was at that time a canon of Saint André's and has since been named bishop of Agen. Having studied at Saint Sulpice, he knew De La Salle well and was acquainted with the good work done by his Institute. He resolved to ask John Baptist for some of his Brothers, and this he did during a trip he made to Paris about this time.

The second, Canel, was also an alumnus of Saint Sulpice, and by his virtue added luster to the institution where he had been educated, as well as to the parliament to which he belonged as its clerical adviser. He, too, visited Paris and repeated to De La Salle the request already made by De Saleon: to send them two Brothers until a larger number would be needed. The deep regard that De La Salle felt for these two virtuous priests did not allow him to delay in responding to their petition. However, some 15 months went by before things in Grenoble were ready for the Brothers' arrival. When all the preparations had been concluded, Canel, who was commissioned by the devout confraternity to arrange for their coming, sent De La Salle the following letter, dated August 30, 1707:

"Some 15 months ago when I was in Paris I had the honor of speaking with you, my dear Sir, to inquire whether you could give us two Brothers from your Community to teach in a charitable school at Grenoble. You were kind enough to make me hope that you would cooperate with us. I think that the bishop of Gap, who remained in Paris after I left, also spoke to you about this matter. In the meantime, we have made everything ready for their lodging and for their upkeep.

"So I am asking you to send us two Brothers as soon as you can, and to let us know what we need to provide them with, both for the journey and for their living expenses in Grenoble. We shall take the money for this from alms destined for various works of charity, for we consider this one, the schools, as one of the most necessary. If you will take the trouble to inform me how much they need for the trip, I shall have the money paid to you in Paris without delay. Believe me, my dear Sir, etc...."

De La Salle received this letter with joy and also with some surprise because of the offer made to him. He immediately sent off the two Brothers he had destined for Grenoble. What surprised him was that the founders offered to defray the expenses of the Brothers' travels---something that as yet nobody had ever thought of doing in the other foundations he had made, even though it was proper that they should do so. It is true he had not thought of mentioning this to the other founders who, no doubt, would not have objected to such a reasonable suggestion.

It was enough for the holy Founder to see God's will and His greater glory in an undertaking; after that he forgot all the rest and abandoned himself to the care of Providence. A single example will suffice to illustrate how heavy a burden these travels of the Brothers constituted for such a poor Community. Once, when he had to send a Brother from Paris to Avignon, he gave him all the money in the house; still the traveler was not oversupplied with funds, since all he got was 28 livres.

Those who contributed the most to the foundation of which we are speaking, and who showed extraordinary zeal for the Christian schools, were Bara the president, the Grand Prévôt* and his brother, Gelin, and their mother, Madame Vincent. Bishop Montmartin also used his wealth to honor the Lord through this good work. He had even promised to add to his first donation a sum of 2,000 livres; but death, which overtook him during his last trip to Paris, allowed him only the merit of his good intention, not that of executing it.

His successor, Bishop De Chaulnes, displayed a similar affection for the Brothers; and this he passed on together with his dignity to his successor, De Caullet, the present bishop of Grenoble. The latter, convinced that the Brothers have a special talent for instructing and educating youth, decided to put them in charge of the schools connected with the general hospice for the poor.

The Brothers' first school was opened in the parish of Saint Lawrence. A few years later it became necessary to open a second one in the parish of Saint Hugh to accommodate the overflow from the first school. Didier, a canon of Saint Lawrence, who also contributed to the founding of these schools, showed himself extremely devoted to the Brothers and took the place of De La Salle by concerning himself with fatherly affection about all their spiritual and temporal interests.

The following year the holy Founder sent two Brothers to Saint Denis-en-France at the request of a Miss Poignant, who gave part of the endowment fund needed to provide for their living expenses, and at the urging of De l'Hôtellerie, prior of the famous monastery of Saint Denis. It was not without some reluctance that John Baptist acceded to this request, for he did not especially like these little towns where two Brothers, left to themselves, are in danger of becoming mediocre religious. Also, he was getting disillusioned with these minor foundations that had to struggle so hard to subsist.

Because he could not turn down the pleas addressed to him, however, and because he had reasons for thinking that the foundress would increase her first donations, thanks to which it might be possible to add to the number of Brothers, he accepted the offer somewhat against his better judgment. But

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*Prévôt: title given to various dignitaries in the judicial and administrative departments of government. The Prévôt of Paris was the king's direct representative in the capital.

Miss Poignant died without having had time to complete what she had started, and thus this establishment has remained up to the present in its original condition. It had been planned as early as 1705; in fact that was one of the reasons why the zealous Superior had returned to Paris that year; but the negotiations were concluded only in 1708.

About that same time the Servant of God found the funds necessary to reopen his training college for country schoolmasters. He had never lost sight of that important institution, nor given up hope of succeeding with it. He always thought that something would be lacking to his Institute, or that the Institute would fall short of rendering to the Church all the services due to it, so long as it did not prepare for country places, as well as for cities, pious teachers capable of giving young people the instruction and education needed for their salvation.

Thus he tried for a third time to set up a training college and bought a very fine house in Saint Denis for the purpose. But that foundation became for him a source of new difficulties. The municipality opposed the project as soon as it became known. The parents of the donor filed suit against him, accusing him of having taken advantage of a minor. He was dragged into court, condemned to forfeit the house, to pay all costs, and even obliged to flee. All the trouble happened in 1712, as we shall relate in a moment. Thus for the third time the project so dear to the holy priest's heart turned to his shame and confusion.

It is true that God does not always will that the most worthy designs which He inspires His servants to undertake should be carried out. Sometimes He decrees that these projects must be executed by others. Barré had been the first to plan the establishment of training centers for schoolmasters, yet it was not he but De La Salle who was chosen by God to create this great work in the Church. The saintly Minim attempted it several times, but in vain, because God had not selected him to be the one to accomplish it. Likewise, De La Salle on three different occasions set about founding a training college for country schoolmasters, and each time the project failed. Why? God's judgments are inscrutable, and it is not for us to inquire into them. Perhaps in His designs someone other than the Founder of the Brothers is to succeed in this work.

Chapter VII

God Leaves De La Salle and His Disciples in the New Residence in Paris a Prey to Poverty, yet He Does Not Abandon Them during the Year, 1709. In Order to Provide for the Novices at Saint Yon, Since the Famine Is Worse There, John Baptist Calls Them to Paris. New Crosses Which Try His Patience.

It seems that God took pleasure in granting to His servant as much suffering as he desired. Unceasingly, one cross followed another, and his

life was nothing but a continual series of trials from the time he started concerning himself with the schoolmasters. His virtue, ever pressing forward, never had a chance to relax; Divine Providence had taken care to provide him with opportunities to exercise it. But the holy priest had found a place of repose in the new residence in Paris and was enjoying the solitude it offered. He found his solace in God after the many trying circumstances through which he had come.

However, this pleasant interlude did not last very long. The repose he enjoyed would soon give way to perplexities and cares which the year 1709 would have made infinitely trying to any heart less steeled against adversity than his. In short, during a year when famine, joined to a long and rigorous winter, reduced so many to beggary, all the woes that follow such calamities besieged him in his poverty-stricken house; yet never did he seem so cheerful or so satisfied as when he was without bread or money, or prospects of obtaining any. Then, lifted above himself and all the vicissitudes of life, superior to human fears and distrust, he put all his confidence in God and counted on His Divine Providence.

After all, he had been accustomed for so long to endure all the afflictions which assail a man's life and which God uses to try great souls, that by now he was inured against all that could happen, and he considered good fortune and evil with equanimity, since the one, like the other, disclosed to him the will of God and provided him with an opportunity for acquiring merit. Moreover, his long experience of such crosses had taught him that the more grievous they appear to nature, the more grace hastens to lighten them. He had received a thousand proofs of God's care for him and his disciples and was thoroughly persuaded that neither they nor he would lack what was needed unless they allowed their confidence to falter in their heavenly Father, Who in His goodness provides for the needs of His children.

Filled with such lofty sentiments he remained at peace, and his repose in God deepened as his needs became more pressing. Not that he remained idle in the arms of Providence, or failed to seek the assistance he required and which Providence sends, without external miracles, through the concourse of natural causes which It directs according to Its purposes and guides with infinite wisdom to Its own ends. He sought and he found. Sometimes he found little enough, in truth; but it sufficed for men who knew how to be content with little, and who like Saint Paul had taught their bodies through the constant practice of mortification and poverty to suffer without murmuring, and even with joy, hunger and thirst, heat and cold, the want of appropriate clothing and all the other inconveniences of life.

Observing the family of this man of God, people might have thought that everything was plentiful in his house, and that the winter and the famine, which desolated all of France and everywhere laid their victims low, had no right to exercise their rigor on the Brothers. Fervor alone warmed them in that protracted, bitter winter. In the dining room they found only enough food to keep them from starving to death, but that was enough for them. They were satisfied, and no one thought of complaining.

How indeed could they have done so? They saw their saintly Superior at their head, displaying joy on his countenance, and by his example teaching them to relish, even in the depths of their poverty, the heavenly manna which God had hidden there for them, and to seek even in enforced fasting and abstinence the merit of voluntary penance. In addition, between them and him there was this difference: whereas each of them felt only his own personal privations and suffered only in his own body, he on the other hand not only shared with them the sacrifices imposed by the shortage of food and the extremely long and rigorous winter, but as their Superior he felt in his heart the sufferings of all his subjects. They did not share the solicitude which was his of providing for their necessities.

John Baptist, the most disinterested man in the world, had accepted what people offered him for the various establishments of the Brothers; and since as a rule what was offered was barely sufficient to cover the simplest necessities in ordinary circumstances, it was far from adequate during times when food prices rose so high on account of public scarcity. Thus it was not only in Paris that the Brothers had to endure the rigor of hunger and the bitter winter; it was practically everywhere, in all their houses. Their father knew this, and his love for them made him wince at the thought of their hardships. He endured in his soul what each of them bore in his body.

Those whom he had left at Saint Yon were the ones that worried him the most. They were a prey to abject poverty. They were forgotten or abandoned in an arid and harsh region which produced no more alms than food. They fell victims to the cold and famine and had only death to look forward to. Of all the holy Founder's disciples these were the most to be pitied, because they lacked everything, even the hope of finding some help. They had indeed gone looking for succor in the houses of the wealthy, the nobility, persons who were reputed to be charitable; but wherever they went, they met with only rejection and harsh treatment.

Despairing of finding relief elsewhere, they had finally gone to the archbishop, as to their last resort, hoping that they would find in the prelate who had just succeeded Archbishop Colbert the same compassion he displayed towards the other paupers of the city. Unfortunately, Archbishop D'Aubigné was prejudiced against De La Salle and the Brothers. The Founder's enemy, who wielded such influence over the greatest prelates and entertained such close relationships with them, had succeeded in poisoning the new archbishop's mind against the Servant of God and in giving him an unfavorable impression of the new Institute.

The archbishop of Rouen, although truly religious, zealous and sincerely virtuous, showed at best an obvious indifference for the Founder and his Brothers. He thought he was doing a great favor to them by not ordering them out of his diocese. He would certainly never have called them in, if he had not found them there on his arrival.

He tolerated them because his predecessor had admitted them. That was all his preconceptions allowed him to do for them. Furthermore, he forgot about

them and did not like either to see them or to hear them mentioned. Later on we shall see what De La Salle himself had to put up with even from such a very saintly bishop who had been prejudiced against him. Given these dispositions, Archbishop D'Aubigné would hardly have received very graciously those who came to him asking for charity. The fact is that they left empty-handed.

The vigilant Superior understood quite well that his disciples could expect nothing more in a city where people thought they were doing them a favor by allowing them to labor for the young. As we mentioned previously, the ten Brothers teaching in the Rouen schools were drawing a salary of only 600 livres from the board which employed them; and by the time they paid the rent on their residence, they had less than 100 écus left. De La Salle had agreed to these terms, and he would not have been welcomed had he arrived asking for an increase in salary. When they had demanded that he supply ten Brothers, the members of the board had obliged him to be satisfied with one-tenth of what was needed for them to live on.

While requiring the Brothers' services, the board had left it to him to provide for their subsistence. He did provide for it, in fact, as well as he could; and he found in the treasury of Divine Providence the reward for his disinterested charity. The Brothers at Saint Yon shared with those of Rouen, as they still do, the food that the heavenly Father sent them, as well as the vegetables from their garden, which is very large but not very fertile. They have to water it with the sweat of their brow in order to force it to yield some return to them for their hard work.

That was how these poor Brothers lived at the time; they still live the same way. At that period there were about 30 of them there. Ten taught in the Rouen schools, and the others were employed in the novitiate, in taking care of the boarders, and in the various departments of the house and garden. They were like the Fathers of the desert, living by the work of their hands, being satisfied most of the time with bread, vegetables and very weak beer.

At the time of which I speak, they had no endowment, no revenues; their only resources were their work and the solicitude of their heavenly Father which sufficed to allow them to live, almost without the help of any charitable donations from the people of a city where alms do not correspond with wealth. Between the Brothers in Rouen and those teaching in other cities there was, and still is, this difference: the latter have income from endowments, whereas the former do not; the latter's endowments provide them with a salary adequate to cover at least the bare necessities of life, while the former still have not found anyone powerful or generous enough to provide for their subsistence.

Thus the year, 1709, which found a considerable number of Brothers at Saint Yon and in Rouen, left them a prey to hunger, cold and destitution. De La Salle was too concerned for their needs to forget them or neglect them. But how could he provide for them? He himself, in Paris, and those there with him did not have all they required. To divide his slender resources with

those in Rouen would have meant causing some to suffer hunger without really alleviating the others much. Could he consider enlarging the family which was already at the mercy of the terrible times? If he increased the number of Brothers in Paris, it would have meant bringing them together to see them all starve. But, on the other hand, how could he leave at Saint Yon those who were perishing of hunger?

After thinking the matter over carefully, De La Salle felt that he would be able to find more abundant resources for his Brothers in the capital; so he decided to call to Paris some of those in Rouen. Which ones should it be? The novices or the ten teaching Brothers? It was an agonizing choice. The Brothers, who were rendering a service to the public, were getting no help at all from the authorities. Charity forgot them while they were sacrificing themselves and wearing themselves out in its name. Mud, spittle, hoots, stones and sometimes blows were the rewards given them for what they did. It would have been natural enough to call them away from serving people who seemed so unappreciative and to withdraw his Brothers from a place where they were so shabbily treated.

Anyone but De La Salle would have decided to do so. But he, who had adopted the rule of contradicting nature in all things and of doing what was most perfect, thought that God's greater glory required him not to close the gratuitous schools in Rouen, and that he should be happy to further the interests of the poor children by sacrificing those of his family. After all, nobody had yet died of hunger; and the One Whom they served in His members was powerful enough to help them and too merciful to abandon them.

So, he chose the novices. When they arrived in Paris, they increased the number of Brothers by over 50 percent. The residence, which was reasonably spacious for the Brothers in Paris, became too small to accommodate them and the new arrivals. There were about 40 persons living there, which meant that they were in each other's way day and night. They slept on wretched straw mattresses, with equally shabby coverlets and sheets of no better quality. Those mats were stretched out on the floor in an orderly manner, in the various rooms, behind doors, and wherever there was some space available. Yet poor as this house of Providence was, it was open to anyone who wished to enter. The Superior's charity did not shut the door to anyone who showed good will and who was not evidently driven to enter by starvation. Those of his disciples gifted with a less robust faith or a less generous charity than he took it amiss that their father should share with newcomers the bread which was often insufficient for them. However, a good many of the latter did not stay very long, preferring to leave after one or two months.

De La Sale consoled himself for the loss and consoled those who reproached him with his too great readiness to admit postulants, by saying wisely: "At least, they made a good retreat, which will be advantageous for their salvation." Indeed, many postulants departed as they had come in. As they were asked for nothing when they arrived, neither did anyone ask them for anything when they left.

De La Salle counted on Divine Providence. Since our heavenly Father, Whose title as Creator obliges Him to take care of His creatures, does not find it more difficult to provide for a greater number than for a smaller one, John Baptist did not worry about having to feed 40 people every day. It did not even seem to bother him that everything was lacking in his house, a situation that recurred often, because God does not make miracles every day and is pleased to put to the test the patience of His faithful ones as well as their confidence in Him.

Those who hope in God do not always find just at the very moment everything they may need. If they never wanted for anything, abandonment to Providence would not be such a rare and heroic virtue; poverty would not put patience to the test, and the perfection of these two virtues, sublime and difficult as they are, would not be so hard to reach. There is, therefore, nothing to be wondered at if De La Salle's confidence in God did not shield him and his little flock from all the hardships of those calamitous times. Let it suffice to state that God never failed him in the end; and that after having taken pleasure in letting him suffer for a time, He took pleasure in sending him timely succor.

Here is an instance. All the provisions in the house were exhausted, as was also the charity of those who assisted the Brothers. The Brothers were without anything to eat, even bread, for the baker who had been supplying it, not having been paid, refused to do so any longer. In this extremity the man of God, as usual, had recourse to prayer.

He did not take long to experience the effect thereof, for the next morning as he was going to say Mass, he met a person on whose charity it seemed he could no longer count. When this person asked him where he was going, he replied: "I am going to say Mass to ask God to give us what we need to live, for our Community is without food and has no means of procuring any." The questioner was touched by this and replied: "Go in peace; I shall see about it myself." He kept his word, and shortly thereafter brought ten écus to the Brothers who, thanks to this alms, were able to surmount their most pressing needs.

In cases such as this, when things were really difficult, the wise Superior took care to urge his Brothers by his burning words and his example of submission to have patience and to trust in God. He told them:

"Fear nothing. God has never failed to help those who hope in Him. Everything is granted to a lively faith and perfect trust, even miracles if they are needed. Jesus Christ has obliged Himself to provide those who seek the kingdom of God and His justice with everything they need. Never has He refused it to those who serve Him. Every page of Scripture bears witness to this truth. After all, nothing happens in this world save what God permits or ordains. Good and evil, poverty and wealth come from His hand. It is He Who distributes them with constant goodness and wisdom. If we have received so many benefits from His liberality, why should we refuse to accept from His justice the chastisements He sends us? He is the Lord; let Him do what He pleases. If we conform our desires to His good pleasure, we shall find relief

in our pains, put an end to our worries, and draw from the depths of our poverty a treasure of merit. Even if we have to die of hunger, if God finds us submissive, He will at least crown our virtue in heaven and admit us to the ranks of the martyrs of patience."

Thus, joining his words to his example, he confirmed his Brothers in their submission to God's orders. If he showed so much concern for those with him, he did not forget those faraway. His charity made him present in spirit everywhere that his body could not go and multiplied him in some way in all the localities where the Brothers were. He was as attentive to the spiritual and temporal needs of each of them as if he had only that one to take care of.

As all were suffering from the current calamities, and since they received from their endowments only enough to provide them with the simple necessities of life in ordinary times, they were caught up in the vast throng of the needy who lacked bread. Their tender father knew this, and it was no slight sorrow for him not to be able to afford them any relief except through his prayers and letters.

Unable to send them any other help, with what groans did he not offer his prayers to the heavenly Father, begging Him to give them their daily bread and the grace to make a wise and holy use of their poverty. All the letters he wrote them stressed these two points. While consoling them, he tried to show them the spiritual riches the famine brought to those who seek these riches with the eyes of faith and the practice of patience.

God showed His concern for His servant and for his poverty-stricken followers; for although He left them in want, He always furnished them with the necessities which so many others lacked. At the end of this disastrous year none of the Brothers' houses was in debt, while others among the wealthiest Congregations found themselves burdened with heavy indebtedness. In Paris and in Rouen especially, Divine Providence showed Itself more liberal towards the Brothers because in those places they were in the direst need and deprived of all other resources. If in those cities God was glorified by finding miracles of virtue in De La Salle's confidence and in the Brothers' patience, one can also say that De La Salle and his followers beheld miracles of Providence in their houses on account of the unexpected help that came to them.

A relevant comment was made by a pious ecclesiastic whose house served as a charitable inn where the Brothers stopped when traveling between Paris and Rouen. "How did it happen," he used to ask them, "that in 1693 and 1709 your lives were spared when so many others lost theirs, and that although you like everyone were engulfed in the famine, you did not end up being buried in the same tomb? Who were poorer than you? Yet who in their poverty found more assistance than you did?

"How many paupers did Divine Providence not seem to have forgotten, while remembering you alone? If you suffered hunger, at least it did not destroy you. Your Community is the poorest in the kingdom, yet it survived these cruel years which, it would seem, should have put an end to it. You have neither property nor income nor endowments, yet you survived a time when famine made itself felt, or at least was feared, in the wealthiest families.

Many rich, well-endowed Communities were ruined during those times or emerged from them laden with debts. As for you, you are just what you were before. If you have nothing, at least you owe no one anything, and your numbers increased during those days of woe!"

All that was true; but if God did not abandon His servant, He caused him to suffer greatly. It seems that He took pleasure in making of him a martyr of patience, for He put no limits to the intensity or to the duration of the trials with which He afflicted him. The end of one cross signaled the beginning of another. This we have seen in the entire history of his life, and we shall observe it again in what is to follow. The extreme poverty of the house occasioned the outbreak of a contagious disease. Six of the principal Brothers contracted scurvy, a malady as difficult to cure as it is easy to catch. What ravages would it not have made in a group so tightly packed together, if the vigilant shepherd had not immediately removed the sick ones from contact with those who were well!

In that situation he showed himself active but untroubled, diligent but not disquieted. He isolated the disease and those who had fallen victims to it in an infirmary on the upper floor and assigned two charitable Brothers to care for them. He spared nothing to procure relief and healing for them. On such occasions his charity made him truly prodigal, in a saintly way. But as much as he would have liked to procure a prompt cure for them, his poverty did not allow him to purchase the very expensive remedies for the illness.

There was at that time a very distinguished doctor in Paris who had a reputation for curing scurvy; but while his treatment was effective, he sold it at a high price and demanded considerable fees for making the people suffer who put themselves into his hands. Where could De La Salle have found the money to pay a doctor who sold his services so dearly? On the other hand, his fatherly tenderness could not endure to leave six of his children in the throes of such a dangerous malady without trying to help them.

The famous Dr. Helvetius, then so popular in Paris, solved the problem for him. He had given John Baptist the information about the other doctor and had promised that he would ask him to show some charity to poor men who had no means of paying him. At this point in the story of De La Salle's life, we should certainly mention this celebrated Dutch physician. The holy Founder received from Dr. Helvetius all sorts of favors, which were always given gratis.

Helvetius esteemed De La Salle and rendered his Community all the services that the most disinterested charity could inspire him with. Consultations, medicine, treatment, visits, all these the Brothers found free at his office, together with a generous welcome and a gracious smile. When they were ill in bed, he was kind enough to come to visit them; and when he did not have time to do so---something that happened often to the busiest practitioner in Paris, he sent them in his stead another doctor who worked with him.

The one we are speaking of, contacted by Dr. Helvetius, kindly agreed to take care of the sick Brothers out of charity, following his friend's example;

and he sent word to De La Salle to bring them to him. To do this more quickly and surely, John Baptist bundled them into two carriages which he rented, and went with them himself in order to encourage them by his presence and comfort them by his words while they underwent the painful treatment which had to be administered, and which was repeated several times on different days.

The Brothers were cured, and all it cost them was the pain of the treatment and the thanks they humbly offered their benefactor. The doctor was satisfied with this payment, and his charity willingly overlooked their inability to pay. One can even say that out of respect for the holiness of De La Salle and out of admiration for the good his Institute was doing for the public, he completed the cure of the Brothers which he had begun out of consideration for Dr. Helvétius.

No sooner had the man of God emerged from this trial than he was overtaken by another, more humiliating and embarrassing than the former, which came from one of his disciples. Similar ingratitude towards him on the part of his sons was nothing new. He had already found Absaloms and Judases in his own household. No matter how religious his Institute was, it could not be proof against temptation. Since sin was found in heaven itself, in the earthly paradise and in the Apostolic College, no one can be surprised if it worms its way even into the holiest communities.

No place can sanctify those who dwell in it; the dwellers must sanctify their dwelling place. No station is impervious to the devil's stratagems or to man's malice. In all times evil men have rubbed shoulders with the good. The first man found in his own family a sinner like himself who stained his hands with his brother's blood. Noah's Ark, which saved the survivors of the human race from the universal deluge, preserved the life of one who was to repeople the earth with sinners and defile it with new crimes. The Church herself, the holy and spotless Spouse of Christ, includes in her bosom both the just and sinners, the elect along with the reprobate. There was, therefore, nothing surprising if in the family of De La Salle there were to be found rebellious sons and disloyal disciples. God wished to put his virtue to all sorts of tests, and to make use of all kinds of hands to strike him and shape him to heroic patience, the virtue which gives to the perfect the final traits of their resemblance to Jesus Christ.

The reader has not forgotten that in all the persecutions he had stirred up against John Baptist, the aim of the Founder's great enemy was to deprive him of the government of his Institute, so that he himself could take control, through some protégé of his. To attain his end he had tried the path of secret intrigue. He maneuvered behind the scenes without seeming to act himself, and in all the stratagems he devised to remove the holy priest from his house and to deprive him of his rightful office, he seemed to have in view nothing but the greater good, the honor of God and the service of the Church. According to him, De La Salle was a virtuous man, but he did not have enough sense to rule the Brothers. Austere towards himself, the Founder was too strict on his disciples who succumbed beneath the rigor of his yoke.

To give substance to these assertions and lend them a semblance of truth, he had blamed the Superior for the imprudences of a Director and of the master

of novices, as we mentioned above. From all these clouds he had fashioned a storm at the archbishop's; but after considerable noise, it had dissipated. Not having succeeded in attaining his purpose by attacks from without, he had tried, through his emissaries, to stir up dissension from within. The result had been the loss of a few Brothers, but the servant of God had not been directly affected. After a period of calm, the holy Founder's enemy now thought he had finally discovered the way to drive John Baptist from his house and to take over the government of the Institute.

The man whom the devil found ready to carry out this program was a religious of poor quality who had been in the Community five or six years. Whether he had never been really fervent or had lost his fervor, the fact was that he had grown disgruntled over the poor, humble, laborious, mortified and retired life led by the Brothers. So as to secure more bodily satisfactions and to get back the right to do what he pleased, he resolved to betray his master and to throw off the yoke of obedience.

Having conceived this plan, the rebel looked for a way to carry it out. The only sure way seemed to be to attach himself to someone able to give him the right advice and to uphold him in his revolt. He could not have made a better choice than he did of the very person who for seven or eight years had been plotting the same scheme and who, after vainly attempting to put it into execution so often, had finally let it go only because he had given up hope of ever succeeding.

It was to that person the Brother went. If the perfidious disciple did not use the identical terms that Judas did when speaking to the high priest and the princes of the Jews, what he said came close to the same thing. He described his own dissatisfaction over the frugal nourishment, the hard life and the extreme poverty he had had to put up with during several years in De La Salle's house. He let it be understood that he was tired and frustrated, and that human nature could only succumb under such an intolerable burden. He did not fail to mention the number of postulants that De La Salle admitted, even though he did not have the means to support them, and added that it would be wiser to take in fewer subjects and to feed them a little better.

He expressed his surprise over the fact that De La Chétardye was letting the ten Brothers who taught in his parish schools die of hunger by turning over their salaries to De La Salle, who used the money to provide for the entire Community. According to him, it was totally unjust to share with so many useless mouths the bread needed by those alone who worked, food which they had earned. He concluded by saying that he was looking for a more agreeable lot, and declared that he could get many of the other Brothers, in fact nearly the entire Community, to follow him if they were promised relief from their grinding poverty and given a more comfortable life.

Never did a discourse please the one to whom it was addressed more than that one. He congratulated himself on his good fortune and began again to hope that through the perfidy of this unworthy follower he would be able to gain the upper hand in the new Community, and through him to bring about what he had failed to do by his own authority. The bargain was soon struck, and measures were concerted to detach all his disciples from De La Salle.

The enemy of the Servant of God promised the traitor to rent a house for him and for those who would follow him, to see that they were well fed and taken care of, and to make him the superior, after which the two of them would put into effect the changes they thought desirable. "If you are clever enough," he said to the rebel Brother, "you will be able to win others over and create your own party in the Community. Once that is done, I will undertake to convince the others, and thus De La Salle will be obliged to remain all by himself in his house.

"I will succeed infallibly in doing this because of the salaries which the pastor of Saint Sulpice pays for the 12 Brothers employed in the parish schools. I will have this money paid to you at the new house, for you and those who will follow you. The loss of the funds, which De La Salle uses to provide for his Community, will mean the disappearance of most of his income and will leave in the direst destitution those who remain with him. Such destitution, which will be more protracted than that which you have recently experienced with him, will little by little detach from him men whom he cannot save from hunger. And if some of them are unwilling to give in, the example of the others will influence them, and we shall see them all come to our new house where you and I will be in control."

It cannot be denied that these measures, so shrewd in their wickedness, were well thought out and that the scheme might have succeeded, at least to some extent, if God had not intervened to cause it to fail. In secret the perfidious disciple set about winning over partisans. The first one to whom he broached the idea joined him; but if he was the first recruit, he was also the last. The evil did not go any further, for the Holy Spirit stifled it in its cradle by reproaching this accomplice with the enormity of his fault, and by stinging his conscience by such cruel remorse that to appease it he finally confessed the plot during the Chapter and before the entire Community.

He disclosed that a plan was afoot to drive De La Salle from the house or to entice the entire Community into another residence under the authority of the rebel Brother. Surprised and indignant, all the Brothers felt a shiver of horror at the revelation. They found it difficult to suppress their resentment against the leader of the revolt who had counted on making them follow him. The most moderate ones were the loudest in condemning the guilty one. With one voice they wanted to expel this viper from their midst, since he was preparing to wound the Community in the process of leaving it.

De La Salle alone remained calm, and by his meekness and charity he tried to reconcile this new Absalom with the other Brothers. He wept over him as another David. Forgetting and disregarding the injury offered to himself, he seemed concerned only over the loss of the Brother and put all his charity to work to win him back. But it was no use. His crime was of the kind which, committed through pure malice and in cold blood, effectually seals up all the avenues leading to regret and right sentiments, and in a sense becomes unforgivable because its perpetrator does not want to repent.

The disgrace that the traitor felt when he was unmasked before the Community did not permit him to pay attention to the salutary reflections which grace was suggesting to him through the lips of the man whom he had offended. He surrendered himself more and more to the natural instability of his heart and stirred up more trouble in the house. Although the Brother was becoming a cause of scandal, De La Salle, full of pity for his unfortunate state, could not yet bring himself to amputate the gangrenous member. He hoped against hope that with time and patience he might finally bring back his wandering sheep to the path of duty; fear of allowing a single soul confided to his care to perish prevented him from abandoning the unfortunate man. But the guilty one finally made up his mind to leave an Institute in which he felt everyone would thenceforth look upon him with horror. The scandal ended when he left, and the Community returned to its usual calm.

Chapter VIII

Opening of Gratuitous Schools in Versailles, Les Vans, Moulins and Boulogne.

The year of tribulation of which we have been speaking had not yet finished when John Baptist was requested to send two Brothers to Versailles. Huchon, the parish priest in the city, sought assistance for the poor in his parish. It was not difficult for him to secure the resources and the protection needed for a foundation from Louis XIV who, as everyone knows, until his death honored that zealous pastor with his esteem and his confidence. The first gratuitous schools were opened in a building situated in Deer Park, and in a short time they achieved as much success as they had everywhere else.

The zealous Vincentian, delighted over the great good done by his school from its beginning, worked hard to consolidate the institution. The first thing it needed was a building of its own, one adapted to the use of a school. Such a purchase did not seem too easy in a town where, because of the habitual residence of the king and the court, buildings are rarely put up for sale and usually bring very fancy prices. It was harder for him to locate a house than to gather the money needed to buy it.

However, he finally did discover one not far from Deer Park. He bought it at once and set aside an endowment to provide enough income to support the Brothers. A few years later a schoolmaster, who taught in an endowed school not far from the parish church, passed away, and Huchon wanted to replace him by a Brother. On learning that De La Salle never sent a Brother alone, he asked for two, so as not to break the rule. Sometime later a fifth Brother was assigned to take care of temporal affairs. The other four taught at the Deer Park school and at the one near the parish church.

After the death of Louis XIV, a building located near the church, which had housed the minor seminary, became vacant. The Brothers acquired the

property, thanks to the charity and concern of the parish priest who took steps to secure it for them. In this, as in other matters, he did them a great service, for the building, convenient and isolated as it was, proved very well suited for the Brothers.

Le Balli, the successor of Huchon as parish priest of Versailles, inherited the latter's zeal for the Christian schools and for those who teach in them. It can be said to his credit that the Brothers found in him the father that they thought they had lost when his predecessor died. They have been fortunate, too, in their relationships with the other priests in the Versailles parish community. The Lazarists, so devoted to the salvation of the poor and ignorant, entertain a special affection for men whose vocation is to instruct the poor.

Although that foundation, set up under the eyes of the king and the court, seemed off to such a good start, and although it promised many advantages for the Institute, it almost became a serious danger to it. For a while De La Salle thought that he would have the embarrassment of seeing such a well-located school fail, and of beholding the same hand that had done so much to establish it become busy destroying it. Huchon had started the school, and it was he who threatened to wreck it. Why and how did such a change in attitude come about? We shall explain. If the reader is surprised at this turn of events, he will be even more surprised on learning of its cause. What I shall say about it will be a lesson to the Brothers and a warning for those who encourage them to resist the assignments that their superiors want to give them.

The older of the two Brothers who had opened the school at Versailles was an excellent Brother and first-rate teacher. He had to a high degree all the talents needed in his vocation. His notable qualities soon won for him the affection of the parish priest, and the Brother was not slow in ingratiating himself into the latter's good graces. What he planned was to make a nest for himself in a place which he liked, and to find a friendly hand powerful enough to keep him there when that of his Superior might wish to withdraw him. He succeeded in what he desired, but it was to his misfortune; and he brought embarrassment to his protector.

Under the protection of the parish priest, the Brother began to take a bit more liberty than was proper. His companion, who was his inferior, either did not perceive his relaxed conduct or did not venture to admonish him for it. The atmosphere of the court, which the Brother not accustomed to it had begun to breathe at Versailles, inoculated him with the spirit of the world, with a longing for a freer manner of living, and with the desire to extend the circle of his acquaintances. He did so and began cultivating his contacts with them at the expense of his exercises of piety. Losing the spirit of retirement, recollection and mortification, he also lost that of regularity; and little by little he fell into a disorderly way of life. He was ceasing to be a Brother and beginning to become a man of the world, one entirely taken up with external values, a superficial man with no concern for his interior life and no love for virtue.

De La Salle was warned of all this; he could see what was happening as soon as he set eyes on the Brother during the visitation he made of the Versailles school. The evil was still only at its beginning, so it should have been easy to remedy it. In fact, it would soon have been cured if De La Salle had been able to have his way. The Brother needed to be removed from Versailles where the milieu was proving dangerous for him. If he had gone away to a place where a more healthy environment prevailed, he would have recovered his spiritual health. The wise Superior, convinced of this, was thinking of arranging a change. He even planned on making it at once, convinced that the ills of the soul, like the diseases of the body, are easy to cure at the beginning; but when through neglect they are allowed to develop, they become incurable with the passage of time.

The Brother guessed his Superior's intention and took steps to forestall him. As he had lost the spirit of simplicity, he also lost that of docility. He was not at all inclined to leave a position of some distinction which flattered his vanity and fell in with the inclinations of his self-will. He turned to the parish priest to support him in his disobedience and informed him of De La Salle's intention of removing him from Versailles. The zealous pastor, who considered the departure of this Brother as a loss for his parish, felt it was his duty to oppose the move. One can say that on this occasion charity led him into error, for it was charity that persuaded him that he had a right to exempt the Brother from obedience in order to keep such an outstanding schoolmaster for his flock.

It did not take him long to recognize his mistake and to regret it. By keeping the Brother in Versailles against De La Salle's wishes, he himself was working not to keep him, but to lose him. Huchon received the Brother graciously and was thankful to him for the attachment he showed to the Versailles school. He told him not to worry, that he himself would oppose his transfer. He kept his word, unfortunately, and thus authorized an example of insubordination which he would have condemned as unacceptable and scandalous in his own Congregation of the Mission, since he was retaining an inferior against the orders of his superior, or rather obliging a superior to conform to the will of his inferior. In fact, he sent word to John Baptist that if he took away this Brother, he should withdraw the other one as well.

Such an attitude caused the Servant of God considerable affliction. He was surprised to hear such a statement from so virtuous a pastor, a priest who had been trained in religious obedience and was a member of a Community in which the superior's will is law, where the choice of one's assignment is never left to the individual, and where any intrigue to remain in or to leave a given position is condemned. De La Salle feared what would happen to the Brother and bewailed in advance the loss of such an excellent subject; he considered such an outcome inevitable if the latter remained at Versailles.

Moreover, he feared the contagion of such bad example in his Institute, and with good reason. For how can a Brother's disorderly conduct be remedied when he finds powerful protectors who authorize him to disregard his superior's orders? The disaffection of the Brothers in Mende had no other origin, as we have seen. And the defection of the Brother in Versailles followed from the same principle.

De La Salle did not fail to call the problem to the attention of Huchon, but he was not listened to. The parish priest, who had in view nothing but the good of his parish, did not sufficiently consider where the best interests of the Brother himself lay, for he answered that he would take the responsibility for what might happen and would be able to ward off any evil consequences that might ensue. In saying that, he took on more than he was able to answer for and he seemed to forget that his power really did not go all that far. De La Salle thus was forced to acquiesce. He felt that he should not contradict a man determined to keep the Brother, nor that he should remove both Brothers, thus destroying the school he had just founded.

So the Brother remained in Versailles, as he wanted. What happened? Once the Rule, the wall that protects docile souls from what threatens their salvation, was breached, it did not long defend him against the temptations and the other attacks of the evil spirit. He became more liberated than ever and, by losing the grace of his state, he lost all attachment to it and to his vocation as well. So one fine morning he packed his things, doffed the Brothers' robe, and went off.

The parish priest soon heard about the departure and sent after the Brother an elderly Vincentian who lived in the parish house. The latter caught up with the fugitive as he was leaving Versailles. What did this fervent priest, long practiced in the art of winning souls to God, not do to try to prevail over the Brother! All that zeal and charity can inspire, all that can touch a heart---prayers, reason---he invoked with all his might, but it all proved useless. Everything that had so often been found effective over the hearts of the greatest sinners remained fruitless insofar as this one was concerned. The priest learned by the event that those who have received much grace and abuse it become incorrigible, and that whoever abandons his vocation often turns his back on his salvation.

What was not the parish priest's surprise? He understood, but too late, how wrong he had been to oppose De La Salle's decision, and he realized that he had counted too much on himself and on the Brother; but at least he made up for his fault and turned it to the advantage of the Institute; for having become wiser through this experience, he thereafter left the Brothers to the guidance of their Superior. Convinced, as the latter was, that the Brothers' regularity depended partly on their numbers, he agreed to increase the number of Brothers in Versailles, as we mentioned above. From that time on, the Brothers remained a source of edification in a city which so sorely needed it, and the Christian schools there continued to flourish.

The opening of the school at Versailles was followed by that in the city of Les Vans, belonging to the diocese of Uzes in Languedoc, in the Cévennes mountains, some six leagues from Alais. Les Vans is a tiny, little-known town, peopled almost entirely by Huguenots, where there is only one parish. We do not know why the founder of that school had such a special affection for the locality, nor why he chose to favor the little town and endow it with a special means of salvation in preference to so many others in the region, alike infected with the virus of heresy. For he did not live there and had not even been born there. He did not belong to the diocese of Uzes, but to that of Viviers.

This benefactor was a virtuous priest, Vincent De Saint Jean Delzé Duroure. Happening to pass through Avignon, he wished to see for himself if all the good he had heard about the schools there was true. His esteem for the Brothers of the Christian Schools having been confirmed by what he saw, he felt inspired to establish a similar school for the town of Les Vans, and he did not want to leave Avignon without putting his good desire to execution through a testament, drawn up in due form by a notary on July 20, 1708.

In the testament, after declaring that he wished to live and die in the faith of the holy Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, and to be buried with the simplicity proper to a poor priest, he made the Brothers his universal legatees, with the obligation to instruct the youth of the town of Les Vans, to train them in piety and to teach them the principles of the Catholic religion. "For I am persuaded", he added, "that most of the children in the said city, through lack of proper education become morally corrupt; and, since they are born in heresy and have no knowledge or understanding of the Catholic religion, their ignorance is the fatal cause of their evil ways and the disorder in which they live."

If the legacy which he assigned to the Christian school was not very large, that was because his wealth was quite limited. The worthy priest gave much to God, since he gave all he had, disregarding his natural heirs, to each of whom he left five sols as a formality and to keep them from contesting his will. His zeal for the instruction of youth was displayed in the terms he used in encouraging the Brothers to fulfill well their glorious ministry. Nor did he omit to beg his relatives not to be offended if he preferred the interests of religion and those of the poor to their own, and to beg the bishops of Uzez to further by their protection, authority and support the execution of the foundation, useful and necessary as it was for the good of the Catholic religion and for the city of Les Vans, which had such urgent need of help because of the sad state into which it had fallen in regard to the faith. This short extract from the testament of such a worthy priest is a testimonial to his faith, piety and zeal. It is a pity that all those who enjoy the same dignity do not show a similar spirit of religion and an equal virtue.

The testament was forwarded to De La Salle after the death of the pious ecclesiastic, which occurred two years later on September 19, 1710, in the town of Aubenas in the diocese of Viviers. Its execution was not delayed. De La Salle's zeal urged him to implement it, following the intentions of the pious founder, who on his deathbed had shown his unflagging interest in the school, and who had taken further measures to insure its permanency.

That same year, 1710, De La Salle sent two Brothers to Moulins in Bourbonnais, to teach in the school there, at the request of an excellent priest named Aubri* who had spent most of his life instructing the children of that city. Age and experience having taught him how important it is to bring up children properly, he felt that he could not find a better way to discharge that function, which he was no longer capable of carrying out, than by entrusting it to the disciples of De La Salle, whose remarkable reputation had reached him.

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*Also written Aubery.

The influence Aubri had over the minds of his fellow citizens, his piety and his long years of service, helped to smooth out all the difficulties, which anyone else might have encountered, in having his decision accepted in the city. He spoke highly of the Brothers, and he was believed because people were convinced that he, more than anyone else, was in a position to judge of their ability. On his recommendation they were welcomed into the city, and the people congratulated themselves on having done so when they saw for themselves that the good results surpassed the predictions he had made.

The school was inaugurated under the eyes of Languet, at that time vicar general of Autun; he later became bishop of Soissons and today is archbishop of Sens. He zeal made him desire to witness the Brothers' manner of teaching. He was delighted with what he saw, especially with their method of teaching catechism. He ordered the older of the two Brothers to come to the parish church two or three times to give a demonstration lesson there before all the younger clerics and the other catechists of the city whom he ordered to attend so that they might learn the Brothers' method and follow it.

The Brother did as he was told, although with reluctance, since it is not the custom in the Institute to teach catechism in church; this function the Brothers prefer to leave to the clergy whose duty it is. The vicar general was present at the head of the clergy whom he had ordered to attend. This mark of distinction on the part of a high official with outstanding merit did a great deal to enhance the Brothers' standing. The classes in Moulins are now so well filled that the three Brothers who teach approximately 300 pupils are almost overwhelmed by the work load. It is to be hoped that God will inspire some charitable soul to complete what was begun and carried on so successfully by the zeal of the late Aubri.*

The foundation at Boulogne, dating from that same year, 1710, was the last one made by De La Salle himself. No other has known such success or has encountered more difficulties. It began under the auspices of Bishop Pierre De Langle, who favored it with his protection and helped it develop by his donations. For a fairly long time it remained flourishing and at peace. But then it became involved in the troubles that the new errors stirred up and became the object of that false zeal which combats everything that does not belong to its own party.** Finally, seriously damaged by the efforts of its enemies, it came close to failing entirely.

The city of Boulogne owes the erection of the gratuitous schools to a saintly layman named De La Cocherie, who lived like a religious in secular dress, observed celibacy, and devoted himself entirely to good works. His faith was as pure as his life; he was unwaveringly devoted to the Roman Church and was an intimate friend of the bishops so long as the latter did not adopt questionable views. He conceived a high idea of the gratuitous schools as

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*He died in 1730, just a few years before Blain was writing this.

**The "new errors" refer to the Jansenists. Bishop De Langle was one of the appellants, bishops who appealed from the Bull Unigenitus to a future Council.

reputation which had never been besmirched before any tribunal. All the lawsuits filed against him by the writing masters had never touched his good name. In civil suits he had been condemned to pay fines, but his enemies had never asked for anything more. They were not out to attack his honor but his schools. Their victory did not affect his reputation.

It can even be said that in spite of the intrigues of his enemies, he was honored as a great servant of God and regarded as a saint throughout Paris. Such consideration is flattering; and no matter how humble a man may be, his self-love may feed on it. Reputation is our most precious natural treasure, and it is often the only one that even the most virtuous men find difficult to renounce. Still, God also asks for this sacrifice of His chosen ones. Such was the holocaust which De La Salle was next called upon to offer Him.

To explain what happened more clearly to the reader, we must go back to the beginning of the affair. I have before me the memorandum which, before he took to flight, De La Salle wrote about this entire episode in order to justify his conduct. I need only to summarize it; we cannot have a more faithful witness to the truth. If this document had been presented in court, as De La Salle expected it would be, thanks to the charity of those in whose hands he left it on his departure, the tribunal considering this case would not have issued against him a sentence so injurious to his memory.

In December, 1707, Clément, a priest of Saint Calais, came to visit the Christian schools in Rue Princesse. After spending considerable time examining what went on and admiring the order which reigned there, he was eager to see De La Salle and asked the Brother to whom he spoke to conduct him to the house in Rue Saint Honoré where De La Salle had put himself into the hands of a surgeon to take care of a wen which he had gotten on his knee through his assiduity in prayer.

The Servant of God was quite surprised to see this young priest who was brought in to him, and who threw himself on his knees and earnestly begged him to give him two Brothers to help him start a worthy enterprise which he had in mind. Clément mentioned that he already had a large quantity of new clothes, enough to supply several young boys between the ages of seven and 20, whom he wished to bring up, and who would be given a chance to learn some trade. They would also be taught whatever was suitable to their age and condition. This project was praiseworthy; but as the sequel was to show, it was one of those that Saint Paul calls juvenilia desideria, a young man's fancies, against which one should be on guard.

The holy priest replied that he could not give Clément any help in the execution of this project if it ran counter to the normal scope of the Institute's work. But he did not further explain what was the normal aim of the Brothers' Institute. The young man's curiosity led him to ask for a note on the subject, and in his charity De La Salle wrote one out for him on the spot.

The young priest went off with this document and, after studying it for three days, returned saying that he was not interested in the Brothers' ordinary schools, but that he liked the idea of training schoolmasters for

country parishes. Thus, his plan seemed to be to join the education of the young boys, previously mentioned, with the establishment of a training college for country schoolmasters. He wanted to combine the two projects in the same house. Since that time he has been quoted as having said that he wished to establish in the institution 20 scholarships for training schoolmasters for smaller villages.

Day after day the young ecclesiastic showed fresh enthusiasm for the execution of his project. De La Salle was besieged and importuned to join forces with him and to advance the money for the undertaking, which he eventually did, turning over the sum requested to Rogier. The latter was a friend of John Baptist's and a person in whom he trusted. Rogier was only supposed to lend his name to this transaction. He did lend it his name in all good faith; but later on he betrayed De La Salle, his friend, or at least abandoned the cause of an innocent man. As Clément's enthusiasm for the implementation of his scheme brooked no delay, he got his preceptor to help him urge De La Salle not to be so reticent over cooperating in the plan. The two of them came to see him and renewed their importunities on the subject.

At first, perhaps, the Servant of God did not take all this excitement too seriously, because in young people it disappears as quickly as it arises. Perhaps he wished to take time to consult others and to weigh the matter before God. At any rate he seemed to hold back in proportion as Clément strained forward. As young people always tend to live in the future and consider as already settled whatever they desire, this young man was even then counting on the revenues of an abbey which had been promised him. In his pious enthusiasm he determined to devote all the income to the furtherance of his project. In the meantime, he said, his father was giving him an allowance of 800 livres a year for pocket money; this he wished to use, with the exception of 100 francs, to promote his undertaking. At least, this is what he told De La Salle to win him over to the plan.

The Servant of God did not give in easily. He wished to let time show him what he needed to do and to put Clément's perseverance to the test. For a year, the latter remained constant. Two or three times a week he came to visit De La Salle, begging him again and again to take the matter up. He wrote one letter after another to him on the same topic. But John Baptist did not let all this hurry him and he never returned any of these visits.

Clément never lost sight of his project. The earnestness with which he pursued its execution seemed inspired by God, because before getting started on the enterprise, he had submitted it to the judgment of his rightful superior, Cardinal De Noailles. However, unwilling that his name should appear publicly, he asked De La Salle to go to the archbishop and speak to him or to his representative about the project so as to secure proper approbation. Clément had thought of starting his new work in a building in the Faubourg Saint Antoine which belonged to a man named Boyer who lived in the Faubourg Saint Germain. He had frequently gone to see that gentleman to discuss the purchase, but before concluding the affair he wished to get clearance from the archbishop. It was for that purpose that he asked De La Salle to contact the latter.

Since this step was according to the right order, the Servant of God accepted. He called on Vivant, the grand penitentiary at the hospital of the Quinze-Vingts,* where he preached every day during Lent, told him about the project and asked him to approach the Cardinal about it. When De La Salle went back for the answer, he learned that His Eminence did not think it a good idea to establish in Paris a training college for country schoolmasters and that he judged that it more appropriate to put it in some village near the city. Sometime later, the grand penitentiary suggested to De La Salle that he set up the training college at Villers-en-Brie, four leagues from Paris, in a large house which the parish priest there had just bought. When the parish priest met De La Salle in the street at Saint Denis, he urged him to accept his offer.

The Servant of God informed Clément of the proposition made to them, but the latter did not like the idea and turned it down in spite of the remonstrances made to him by De La Salle. The reason he gave for his refusal was that the house was too faraway and he would not be able to go there often enough. He even wrote a rather strongly worded letter on the topic to John Baptist who, in pointing out to him the unfortunate consequences of his refusal, had warned him to be careful not to miss a good opportunity while pursuing one that might turn out to be bad.

The Servant of God even went so far as to tell him that he was reluctant to get involved and feared to commit some false step in his company. The young priest understood very well what this meant, and he again wrote to De La Salle in very forceful terms to assure him that he would never go back on his word and that he would rather sell his shirt than not honor his word. And yet he did fail to honor it, as the sequel would show. It was this backing down, when Clément succumbed to pressure from his father, which blackened the reputation of the Servant of God in the eyes of those who do not get to the bottom of things. It was also about that time that the Brothers' school at Saint Denis-en-France was opened, as we related above.

Clément tried several times in vain to acquire the house of the priory by paying off the lease of the person who had rented it. He urged De La Salle to rent him the front section of the house belonging to Miss De Lâge, which the Brothers were renting in part, so as to install there the training college for country schoolmasters which he dreamed of founding. The Servant of God agreed on condition that the Cardinal would approve; he even wanted the prior to add his approval. They both gave their consent, but Miss De Lage refused to lease her house for the purpose. Clément thus had to look elsewhere.

After seeking for some time, he finally found a place suitable for what he had in mind: a house belonging to Miss Poignant, a sister of the lady who had endowed the Brothers' school. After looking it over several times, and even bringing his preceptor, Langoisseur, with him to inspect it, he finally decided to buy the house and agreed to pay 13,000 livres for it.

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*This was the name given to a hospital, originally for the blind, which housed 300 (15 x 20) of these patients. It was founded by Saint Louis.

About a month after this agreement Clément, knowing that De La Salle was at Saint Denis, went to see him with Rogier whom he had brought along with him in his carriage. He informed the Founder that he had agreed on a price with Miss Poignant. He begged him to conclude the transaction without delay and to ask the prior for a reduction in the sales-rights, while he and Rogier would negotiate with a certain nobleman who also had some claims over the property. They came back later and settled the sales-rights with the bursar of the abbey.

A few days later, in October, 1708, these gentlemen executed the contract of purchase with Miss Poignant. To make the down payment, Clément urged De La Salle to give Rogier 4,000 livres. Shortly thereafter he again urged John Baptist to advance to the same Rogier, who was lending his name to cover the transaction, 1,200 livres more. That sum was in the hands of Le Mercier, a notary; it had been donated, like the earlier sum, to De La Salle for the needs of his Community and especially to contribute to the establishment of a training college for country schoolmasters directed by the Brothers.

I do not know what made De La Salle suggest to Clément, after he had bought the house at Saint Denis, to join with Desplaces, a priest who was educating a number of ecclesiastics in his residence. He made him hope that he would find in that group men capable of directing both the training college and the children whose education he was interested in. Clément followed this advice and was charmed with Desplaces when he went to visit him. They did join forces. After drawing up a plan for the manner of bringing up these young boys, they wrote out a memorandum which they submitted to the Cardinal, who approved it. Thereafter, in Clément's mind, the two projects---the training college for country schoolmasters and the school for young boys---were two separate entities. Some time after the purchase of the house at Saint Denis with De La Salle's money, Clément wanted to give him a receipt for the 5,200 livres which had served as the down payment, since Rogier, the legal purchaser, had refused to give such a receipt. However, this paper remained in Rogier's hands. Only when Clément began to have second thoughts did he turn it over to De La Salle in order to testify to the fact that John Baptist had indeed furnished the sum of 5,200 livres, the down payment on the purchase price of the house acquired at Saint Denis under Rogier's name.

As soon as Clément bought the house, he ordered the bailiff of the abbey to vacate the premises, and he gave himself no rest until the Brothers took over the place. They did so at Easter of the following year, 1709. Not long afterwards, they welcomed three young men, the first candidates for the training college. On Sundays and feasts the students attended the services in the parish church of Saint Marcel in surplice and soutane. They remained in the house until the high cost of food made it necessary to send them home, but they were told that when times got better they would be called back.

To lighten the burden on that institution the Cardinal obtained from the Duke of Maine a written exemption from the obligation to quarter soldiers. The document was dated the same year, 1709, and mentioned that the favor was granted by order of the king. It also specified that the house was to be the residence of three Brothers, one of whom was to teach Gregorian chant. The purpose of this notation was to show that the premises were supposed to be used by the Brothers for the training of country schoolmasters.

The sale had barely been concluded when Miss Poignant wanted to get the house back. She offered to refund the money, but Clément refused. Nor did he wish to entertain Rogier's proposal to resell the house when a buyer presented himself. Finally, sometime later, Clément's father learned of the acquisition made by his son under the name of a third party. He resolved to invoke his son's status as a minor to have the contract annulled. But the son, whose conscience did not allow him to be part of such a fraud, told his father firmly that he would never make use of his age to cause any damage to anyone.

Things were at this point when De La Salle undertook to visit the establishments of his Institute in Provence, Languedoc and other distant places. Not that he lacked precise information about what was going on there, since the regulations he had established among the Brothers and the accounting which they made to him about all that the Rule prescribes did not permit the Superior to be ignorant of what was done even in the most distant houses. But he had not yet seen all those schools and he was anxious to learn from personal contact how things were going.

He left Paris on this journey in February, 1711. He was received with joy by the Brothers and with honor by the bishops of the localities where Christian schools had been established, when he went to pay his respects to them. With great satisfaction he observed all the blessings the Lord was giving to the work of his disciples. But he did not have long to enjoy his visits. Letters from Paris called him back there to defend the acquisition made at Saint Denis.

The affair was serious. His interests and his honor were at stake. The purchase of the house in question was being challenged. It was claimed that he had bought it at the expense of a minor. De La Salle was accused of having taken unfair advantage of the latter, and because of all this he was being sued in civil and criminal court.

He had no choice, therefore, but to return---not to engage in a lawsuit, because he was firmly resolved not to plead and to yield rather than go to court---to find out what the case was all about and what he was being accused of. On his return he called on his opponents, but he found them unwilling to discuss the matter. They were deaf to reason and turned down all suggestions for settling the matter amicably. In their view he was an impostor, a deceiver who had taken advantage of a minor, had misled him and defrauded him. They insisted that he must be declared such by a legal sentence. He must be condemned to all the penalties that justice levies against such offences.

In vain would De La Salle have offered to the elder Clément the house bought partly with the Founder's own funds, for Clément's father counted on getting it anyway through the sentence of the court. Even that was not enough to satisfy him. He wanted John Baptist to pay---I do not say for the fault, but for encouraging the enthusiasm of his own son---by forfeiting his honor and his liberty.

Personal citations and prison itself were awaiting De La Salle. I do not know whether his adversaries would have hesitated to demand that he be executed, dragged from jail to the gallows. Yet, what had he actually done?

He had finally yielded to the importunities of the young Clément who had pestered him for a whole year to join with him in starting a good work. He had given the young man 5,200 livres to use as a down payment on the purchase of the house which he had bought. Such was De La Salle's crime!

What is incomprehensible is how a cleric, 22 or 23 years old, could agree to join forces with his father and declare himself the adversary of John Baptist in a petition, so injurious to the latter's reputation, presented in both his and his father's names to the civil lieutenant. From the extract which we have given of the memorandum that the Servant of God drew up in his defense, it appears that the young priest had acted in complete good faith with De La Salle; that he was intelligent, had good taste and good sense, possessed a basic piety or at least showed some signs of it. He had not acted inconsiderately; he had taken proper measures and precautions; he had asked for the advice and approval of his superiors. He had undertaken nothing without the consent of his archbishop. His preceptor was aware of his transactions and had been the confidant of his projects.

Certainly, the son could have opposed the fury of his father by pointing out to him that every age is appropriate for doing good works, and that no law forbids a minor who is an ecclesiastic to engage in them so long as he causes no harm to anyone and does not burden anyone else's property. He was 23 years old and had not so very long to wait before attaining his majority. He intended, as soon as he reached the legal age, to ratify the acquisition made during his minority. He owed this ratification to his conscience, to charity, justice, good faith and his pledged word. He could not, without betraying all the rules of equity, summon before the bar a man whom he had begged during an entire year to join him in the project.

If in the purchase of the house in question someone was at fault, it was Clément, since nothing was truer than that he was the one who had purchased it. He had not done anything in the affair that his archbishop had not approved of. The purchase of the house did not in any way benefit De La Salle. Those who stood to gain from it were the country parishes which would secure therefrom capable and well-trained schoolmasters.

De La Salle had furnished Clément with 5,200 livres to make the down payment on the house. The young man could have said to his father that if the purchase displeased him, it would be easy to resell the house and let everything return to its former condition without making such a fuss and provoking so much scandal. But the fact was that those people wished to ruin the Servant of God; and Clément, whether deceived or deceiving, went along with them. Either he was very weak or very clever. In either case he acted very irresponsibly and he permitted the Servant of God to be forced to answer for a transaction in which he himself had involved the Founder much against John Baptist's will.

It is believed that the secret enemy of De La Salle had a finger in the affair and did his best to fan the flames instead of quenching them. For a long time he had wanted to see De La Salle faraway from Paris so as to profit by his absence and to take over the government of the Institute. If that was

so, as we now have every reason to believe and as De La Salle himself was persuaded, his enemy finally had his way. The Servant of God withdrew from Paris, and his adversary, taking advantage of his absence, invaded his flock and undertook to govern it as he wished, as the sequel will show.

We have already mentioned how deeply John Baptist detested lawsuits. Thus, however injurious and defamatory was the petition filed against him, however gross and false the accusations hurled at him, however well-founded were his rights in the matter of the house, he preferred to give in, following the Gospel's advice, rather than to appear in court to carry on a lawsuit. Still, so as not to be open to the reproach of having abandoned God's cause and of allowing it to be shamefully betrayed by the one who was the real author of the whole undertaking without opening his mouth to defend himself, he entrusted to several persons enjoying influence and authority a number of documents which established his own innocence---a memorandum and 13 letters from the young Clement. He asked them in their charity to see to it that justice was done him.

It has always been believed that what these persons did was to send these papers to be examined by some lawyers who were connected with the opponents of the Servant of God. For in the report they drew up and forwarded to those who had consulted them, they gave their opinions not like advocates but like declared enemies of De La Salle. The outcome of this consultation was entirely in conformity with the petition presented to the civil lieutenant. When this report was sent to De La Salle, he was indeed amazed at finding adversaries where he had hoped to find friends and defenders. He therefore concluded that his only safety lay in flight, and that he would vainly attempt to justify himself since his condemnation was a foregone conclusion. Whatever he might say, he would be held to be in the wrong; people did not want to find him innocent. They had come to believe their own prejudices and would listen to nothing else. They thought him guilty because they wanted him to be guilty.

Faced with these attitudes in his regard, he decided to let them have their way and to abandon to them his house, his honor and his reputation by withdrawing his person from their pursuits. This resolve had not yet been executed when Rogier, who had lent his name for the purchase of the house, came to tell De La Salle that he had been condemned, that the house had been confiscated, that a warrant was out for his arrest, and that he should take whatever precautions he felt necessary to insure his safety.

The Servant of God, surprised at such a rapid judgment, was even more amazed that his case had been abandoned by the persons whose protection he had implored. It is certain that if they had wished to appear and take in hand the cause of the saintly priest, they could have spared him this blow. Their influence would at least have shielded him from disgrace if it could not win for him a favorable judgment. For Rogier, who was at least as much implicated in the affair as De La Salle, if not more so, and who enjoyed neither influence nor authority, was able to obtain justice for himself.

When Rogier saw that the house had been confiscated, or at least was on the point of being lost for De La Salle, he intervened in his own name in the

lawsuit, stated that he, too, had an interest in the case, and demanded the restitution of the 5,200 livres which he had put down as the first payment. The amount was awarded him; when the house was sold he was reimbursed for what he had spent, and the rest was confiscated. De La Salle would not have been in a worse position than he, and similar justice could not have been denied him if he had not remained undefended.

Was it due to malice or to negligence that those whom he had chosen as his defenders abandoned him to such unjust treatment? It is not for us to judge. But it is a fact that their minds, too, were made up in advance, and that they were in contact with the one who wished to get the Servant of God away from Paris. Why, then, one may ask, did De La Salle place in their hands the documents which would have established his innocence? Because, lacking all other help and support, he had no one else willing to speak for him.

He hoped that prejudice might yield to charity on this occasion, and that such worthy men (for the persons whose assistance he had requested were indeed such) would set aside all human views to uphold the cause of God. They would have done so on any other occasion, but John Baptist was a man whom God wished to crucify in all things; hence the Lord permitted that nobody should take up his defense, and that he should be left in the hands of human justice, just as Jesus Christ was in those of Pilate, in universal oppression and complete abandonment.

Rogier himself, De La Salle's intimate friend, was guilty on this occasion by separating his interests from those of the Servant of God, although they were closely connected. It would have been easy for him, while vindicating his own rights, to do the same for those of his friend, and he would have saved the latter's honor and reputation as easily as he saved his own. But God did not permit that to happen, since He willed to add a new mortification to so many others.

Only his virtue afforded De La Salle any relief in the midst of so many tribulations. Accepting them from God's hands, like Job, he blessed Him Who was their true author, and Who disposes of all life's happenings according to His ends. Neither complaints nor murmurs escaped him against all the different persons who seemed to have leagued themselves to oppress him. Silence and patience, his ordinary arms in the trials of life, were the only ones he used against Clément's bad faith, against his father's anger, against the ill-will of the lawyers, against the inertia of his protectors and the betrayal of his friend.

Considering himself in Paris as though in enemy territory, and seeing everywhere only secret or open persecutors or cowardly or perfidious friends, De La Salle left the city the day following his condemnation in 1712, during the first week of Lent, to escape from the ultimate excesses of the persecution, in accordance with the advice of Jesus Christ: "When they persecute you in one city, flee to another." He went to bury himself faraway in Provence; and he did not return to Paris until he could do so in safety, that is, when his secret and implacable persecutor who had stirred up all the other adversaries could no longer do him any harm.

After the departure of the Servant of God, the Brothers received two summonses: one from Rogier, who had gone over to the other side although he had been John Baptist's intimate friend, and the other from Clément's father. In both of these documents De La Salle was treated with extreme discourtesy. In particular, they made it a point to call him "a priest of the diocese of Rheims," and "superior of the Brothers of the said house," not "superior of the Brothers of Paris and Saint Denis." All these expressions revealed the evident collusion between his legal adversaries and his great enemy.

The man who for ten years had been striving to take away from the Servant of God the government of the Institute he had created, and whose only purpose was to force him to go back to Rheims with the Brothers there so that he himself could take over the control of those in Paris, revealed his intentions by such statements and showed clearly that it was he who had once again pulled all the strings in this latest persecution. He finally succeeded in his design and triumphed over the Servant of God.

What affected the Founder most keenly was that he imagined that all the Brothers in Paris were on his enemy's side. It was a false impression because the Brothers in Paris, during his absence, remained in his regard what they had been when he was present among them: obedient and inviolably attached to his person. What gave him this impression was the fact that Brother Barthélemy, thinking that it was the correct thing to do, had forwarded to him the two summonses in which the holy Founder was addressed as "superior of the Brothers in Rheims," not Paris.

Such terms, which could have been dictated only by his rival, made him wonder about the fidelity of his disciples in Paris and fear that they might already have given in to the intrigues of his enemy. For, as he said to himself, "Why send me these documents couched in such terms, if not to hint that they no longer consider me as their superior?" His suspicion was ill-founded. Brother Barthélemy had sent him the papers in all straightforwardness, thinking that he should let him know what was going on in his absence.

The Servant of God, thus misled, did what he usually did, namely, he gave way, humbled himself, and abandoned to their own direction those who seemed to be rejecting his control, even as he had done with regard to the Brothers in Mende. In consequence of this mistake, he no longer wished to correspond with Brother Barthélemy who, he thought, had gone over to his adversary's party, and who wished to receive his letters only to betray him under this appearance of confidence. Unfortunately, Brother Barthélemy could not exercise any authority as superior because De La Salle had not appointed him his substitute in his absence and because he had not been chosen as superior by the other Brothers.

The devil did not fail to turn to his own advantage this misunderstanding and to make it a source of harm for the Institute. The Brothers in the provinces who left the path of duty no longer feared any correction; they therefore grew bolder and bolder and threw off the yoke of the Rule. De La Salle, buried faraway in the most distant provinces, let no one know where he was. Meanwhile Brother Barthélemy had no right to replace him or to make use

of the Founder's authority. Thus those among the Brothers who were not the most fervent, who were no longer giving an account of their conduct and no longer receiving from a superior either advice or orders that might have brought them back to their duty, took more and more liberties and gradually lost the spirit and grace of their state.

The evil went much farther than it had in 1702 and came close to ruining the Institute. That was what the devil sought by stirring up around the holy Founder so many persecutions which upset the Brothers and weakened their fervor. If the work had been man's work, he would have succeeded; but God allowed all the trials only to strengthen the Community and to rid it of unworthy members. Thus He brought it back to its first condition and gave it back its early fervor when the holy Founder returned. Such was the result of that great persecution.

De La Salle had been deceived by the young Clément, abandoned by those whom he had chosen for his defenders, betrayed by his friend and oppressed by his enemies. The victim of his own good faith, the object of the jealousy of a powerful rival, calumniated, accused, condemned as an impostor and suborner, he saw his own property handed over to the one who accused him of fraudulently obtaining it. He saw his good name besmirched because he had undertaken a good work for which he had laid down his money and his name. He saw for the third time the failure of the projected training college for country schoolmasters which had been off to such a good start.

Critics and those who never want to make any allowances for devout men will no doubt blame him for imprudence in doing business with a minor and for not being on his guard; but his involvement was for a good work. Is a minor forbidden to devote to such an undertaking his ecclesiastical revenues and the economies he may make on his personal allowance? Had Clément not obtained the archbishop's consent for his project? Did it make much sense for him to claim, at the age of 24, that he had been duped? Could not De La Salle have trusted a young man who for an entire year had repeatedly importuned him to join him in the proposed foundation?

It is not to be wondered at if this priest, who was responsible for all the disasters we have just described, came to an evil end. After the death of the Regent,* he was accused of plotting against the State and was exiled in chains far from Paris. As for Rogier, he recognized his wrongdoing and tried to make up for it as best he could. I say, "as best he could," because he could not undo the harm done to the good name of the Servant of God; but at least he was able to compensate De La Salle for the loss of the 5,200 livres which he had occasioned. In his will he left John Baptist an annuity of 360 livres to be paid him after the death of Rogier's maidservant, adding that he did this "for reasons of conscience."

Never did a legacy turn up at a more opportune moment for John Baptist, who by that time had returned from Provence. God made it plain by the

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*Philippe II of Orléans, regent of France after the death of Louis XIV till his own death in 1723.

arrangements of His Divine Providence that He had inspired the legacy to compensate De La Salle for his loss, and to give him the means of finally securing a fixed headquarters for his Institute, where the novitiate would be adequately installed. The maidservant, who was to draw the legacy first, did not long survive her master and when she died at the age of 50, she left this annuity to De La Salle who was over 66. At his request John Baptist was given the capital instead of the annuity; he used the money to acquire the property of Saint Yon. But all those transactions happened only several years later after his return from Provence, where we shall now follow him.

Chapter X

De La Salle Withdraws to Provence Where New Trials Await Him. On the Way He Is Received with Honor, and Everything Smiles on Him on His Arrival in a Certain City. The Local Ecclesiastics, Split over Doctrinal Matters, Seek to Win His Support. He Opens a Novitiate but Sees It Fail because He Does Not Want to Give His Approval to the Reigning Opinions. He Also Plans to Go to Rome but Abandons the Trip through Obedience. Finally He Is Obligated to Leave the City.

It was not to seek repose that the holy Founder departed to the most distant provinces. The cross followed him everywhere, and vainly would he have sought to avoid it. When he changed his place of residence by going from Paris to Provence, he merely exchanged crosses. At first his journey was agreeable enough. He was welcomed by the Brothers on the way, like a father whose children love him tenderly. They all wept and tried to comfort him in his affliction which they shared with him most sincerely.

If at first they were surprised to see him, they were much consoled by his visit and vied with one another in showing him their confidence and attachment. The reason for his departure from Paris was for them a cause of tears, and many did they shed over him while seeking to dry his. More sensitive that he to the wrongs he had suffered, they needed all their virtue to stifle in their bosoms their complaints and outcries against those who were responsible for the way he had been treated. If some expression of indignation escaped them, the holy Founder, far from approving or even listening to it, exhorted them to adore God's will as he himself did, and to consider nothing but His orders in all the happenings of life. He invited them to join him in praying for his persecutors, so as to fulfill the precept given us by Jesus Christ and to follow His example.

He reached Avignon towards the end of Lent, 1712. The Brothers there, delighted as were all the others over having their Superior with them, kept him with them as long as they could. He was preparing to make a visitation of all the establishments the Brothers had in the area. His plan caused the Brothers considerable alarm because it was dangerous to venture too far out in

the country because of the Camisards* who occupied the countryside and who waged a cruel war on all ecclesiastics. It was well known that their great delight was to sacrifice priests to their fury and to satisfy their hatred of Catholics by shedding the blood of the Lord's ministers.

Vainly did the Brothers point out to De La Salle that he should not endanger himself to be hunted down by the rabid fanatics whose external aspect alone showed them to be human, and who under the semblance of men bore about the hearts of wild beasts. But nothing could discourage his zeal. However, with the help of Divine Providence, his trip from Avignon to Alais was accomplished safely and without incident.

The Brothers' eagerness to welcome their Superior was imitated by a large number of persons who knew De La Salle only by reputation. They sought to pay him honor because of the zeal and diligence that his disciples displayed for the instruction of youth. No one showed him greater consideration than the bishop of Alais when he went to present his respects to him. The prelate could not sufficiently testify to the esteem and honor he felt for John Baptist. Among all the graceful compliments paid by this pious bishop to the holy priest, nothing gave the latter more joy than the praise he addressed to the Brothers for their diligence in converting the children of the heretics. Since the Brothers had taken charge of instructing them, many had embraced the faith. As the salvation of souls was the sole object of John Baptist's efforts, it was also the one thing that gave him joy.

After remaining at Alais for a few days, he proceeded to the little town of Les Vans, passing through the parish of Gravières which is not far from there. He was welcomed like an angel from heaven, and in spite of his objections he was obliged to spend a few days with the prior, a great friend of the pious priest who had founded the school at Les Vans, and by whom he had been asked to take charge of the Brothers' spiritual direction. The worthy ecclesiastic paid too much honor to the humble Founder, gave him too many tokens of the profound veneration he entertained for his person and of the high esteem he had for his virtue for De La Salle to enjoy his stay with him. The virtuous prior carried this respect to the point of reserving for himself the privilege of serving John Baptist's Mass. De La Salle felt confused over this special attention but could not prevent it.

It was a real joy for the prior when he saw the holy Founder in his house, and he did all he could to have him come back. If he had kept his pious desires better hidden in his heart, he would have had the joy of satisfying them longer and more often; but by doing so much honor to a man who avoided recognition, he rather forced him to avoid his house. In fact, the Servant of God found excuses to stay away from Gravières as much as possible so as to avoid all these marks of distinction which he found so distasteful.

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*Name given to the Huguenots in revolt against the government on account of the repressive policies followed by Louis XIV.

That was why he resolved to take another road when he went through that area again.*

From Gravières he went to Les Vans and caused the Brothers there an agreeable surprise, for they had not expected to see the Superior in their part of the country. They considered his visit providential. The joy of the father and of his children was reciprocal; for on his side he was delighted to see with what patience these good Brothers labored to instruct the children of heretical parents. After exhorting the Brothers to persevere, he left them a few days later and went to Mende. That part of the journey was dangerous and difficult for him; more than once he risked his life on the way through the rugged mountains of Gevaudan with their treacherous precipices. He endured stinging and bitter cold with the result that when he arrived in Mende his health had suffered. Still, as he was not a man who paid much attention to his aches and pains, after a few days of rest he began his visits by calling on the bishop, who entertained a singular esteem for him and who gave him all possible tokens of it. The prelate told him, in praise of the Brothers, everything that was most agreeable to him. He begged De La Salle to remain and dine with him; but the Servant of God, who in order to avoid this sort of honor always found an excuse ready in the customs of his Community, asked the prelate to allow him to give the Brothers an example of fidelity to the Rule which he had prescribed for them. The bishop of Mende, edified by his modesty, preferred to accept his excuse rather than to interfere with his strict regularity.

In the city everyone wished to meet the Founder of the Brothers; such attention brought him a large number of visits which took up all his time--- for those who came to see him could not tear themselves away, so charmed were they by the gentleness of his words and by that aura of holiness surrounding his person. They never grew tired of seeing him or listening to him. He therefore decided to leave as soon as possible, without making any announcement and without saying good-bye except to a small number of people, for fear they should try to retain him. He left and returned to Les Vans, running the same perils and experiencing the same inconveniences as before. From there he left for Uzès to attend to some business and to pay his respects to the bishop.

The prelate embarrassed him somewhat at the start of their conversation by trying to extort from him something that he could not grant without infringing upon the Constitutions of his Institute. But the bishop listened kindly to the arguments of the Founder, and he desisted from his request so that the matter was dropped. The bishop felt that the success of the Christian schools required that the teachers not be transferred. On that account he was opposed to any change in the personnel of the school at Les Vans. When De La Salle explained to him the inconveniences that would follow

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*It was apparently during this short stay of the Saint in Gravières that a retired officer living in the neighborhood began sketching a portrait of De La Salle which was discovered in 1882 and is called the "Gravières portrait." It shows the Saint in secular clothes, which he had had to use as a disguise while traversing the area infested with the "Camisards."

from such a procedure, and brought them out very forcefully, the good bishop, who was only seeking the greater good as he understood it, could recognize the cogency of De La Salle's arguments. In that manner the visit was concluded to the satisfaction of De La Salle, who received from the prelate tokens of the warmest kindness and his promise to protect the Brothers in Les Vans.

Continuing his journey, John Baptist passed again through Alais and finally reached a celebrated city* which became the theater of the new persecutions that hell had prepared for him. For a long time he had been expected there. His reputation had preceded him, and expectation was universal, especially among the clergy who were eager to meet him. Everyone had in store for him compliments and offers of help. Some wished to win over a man whose great virtue had been announced by word of mouth. Others wished to make him adopt their doctrinal positions, and by overwhelming him with their kind services to lead him, out of regard for their persons, to share their opinions.

Hardly had De La Salle arrived when all sorts of persons came forward to pay to his virtue the honor it deserved and to offer him all sorts of assistance. Many ecclesiastics, among the most highly considered and distinguished in the city, wished to join themselves to him. As they seemed to be worthy men, zealous for good works and very favorable to his Institute, a meeting was easier for them. They frequently came to discuss with him the best means of spreading the Christian schools in the city and in the entire province.

Such favorable dispositions made the Servant of God conceive the idea of establishing a novitiate in the city. Everything seemed to point to a favorable outcome. The city was large, rich and supported many good works; it contained a great number of clerics, men of merit and zeal, such as Saint Paul described: "prepared for all sorts of good." It numbered many wealthy, pious and generous persons who gave liberally to charity; and finally, it showed a genuine esteem and appreciation for Christian schools.

All indications thus gave John Baptist great hope. The more he considered all these factors, the more he felt that God had driven him from Paris, through the secret designs of His Providence, only so that he might come to that city to establish a novitiate to train local candidates, who would be better able to labor in their home territory than others who did not know the spirit and customs of the area, and whose inclinations and even language were quite different.

Encouraged by all these considerations he broached the project to those who seemed to him the most zealous. The plan was approved, and everyone wished to take part in implementing it. The holy Founder was not a little surprised when he found so much cooperation in the execution of a design which he had ventured to propose only with trepidation, and which he had found so difficult to launch at Rheims, Paris and Rouen. As though vying with one another, everyone wished to contribute to the establishment of the novitiate.

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*The city was Marseilles.

Almost all the parish priests of the city showed their interest, and the bishop more than anyone else. Many persons from the city joined them. When one of the gentlemen began donating funds, the others promised to do the same in the future. Never was a godly work started with more unanimity, promptness and zeal. A house was rented and furnished without delay. Everyone sought to bring in candidates, so that in a short time there were a good number of them. Every day brought new good fortune.

Such a favorable start augured well for the future. Everybody wished to contribute to the final touches on this establishment. In fact, it was considered to be completed. De La Salle alone felt some reservations over such rapid success and feared to see everything buried underneath the ruins of such fine beginnings. The reason was that he did not see the work as founded on the rock of Calvary, and hence he wondered whether it would last. Enlightened as he was in the ways of God, he had learned from his own experience and from that of the saints that undertakings which are not founded on the cross and which are launched without difficulties either do not disturb the devil very much or do not last very long.

Thus he did not venture to let full joy occupy his heart, fearing that the present success would dissolve in the misfortunes that a near future might bring. He feared lest some secret motive, hidden under a deceitful mask of apparent devotion, might have taken the place of genuine charity and might have inspired the notable zeal which seemed to animate some of his backers. As he saw it, that would have been enough to cause the project to fail. God does not bless what is not done for His sake. If the Lord is not the raison d'être of the edifice men wish to erect, He does not take part in building it; and when He does not build, in vain do men wish to construct.

De La Salle's apprehensions were all the more solidly grounded since he was not accustomed to see his undertakings so vigorously seconded. Nothing was newer for him than this unanimity of voices in his favor, this concerted action of so many people ready to open their purses to him. The continual opposition that he had had to endure in all his other foundations made him question this one, and made him fear that the rapidity with which it was being built might be a premonitory sign of its downfall.

The happenings of life, however, do not always follow the same pattern; and from the success or the failure of one, we cannot with certainty conclude to the failure or success of another. The future is in God's hands alone, and He alone knows what it will be. Thus the holy Founder wavered between doubt and hope. On his side he did what God asked of him and left the rest to His Providence. The novitiate was filled, and everything seemed to be going well. The enthusiasm of the people who had contributed the most to the undertaking, instead of growing weaker with time, seemed to gain new strength. Every day they wanted to do something else for this work. Their zeal, which previously had been dispersed and directed to various objects, soon seemed to be concentrated on this one alone. It had become their one preoccupation; they neglected or forgot about the others. They scoured the city and the countryside in search of more alms or to persuade other wealthy persons to assist the new undertaking with their liberalities.

If the same spirit had filled all these promoters, if the desire of honoring God had really been the only motive of their activity, there is every reason to think that the novitiate in Provence would still exist today. But the majority of them were seeking only to win over the Brothers and their Superior and favored them only insofar as they would espouse the interests of their party.* If they were to remain inflexible and give no sign of being won over, the destruction of the novitiate would be decided on in advance, and open warfare would be waged on the Christian schools.

However, among the many who collaborated in this undertaking there were some who acted from right motives and who, in promoting this good cause, had only God in view. For a long time those persons continued to support the novitiate. They even took steps to establish it firmly and to develop the Christian schools in the city. There already existed gratuitous schools which were endowed, so all that needed to be done was to bring the Brothers into them. As for the parishes which had no schools, it was proposed to establish some in them.

To further this design, a zealous Jesuit, who was preaching the Lenten cycle of sermons in one of the main churches, undertook to bring the matter before his hearers and to recommend it to them as strongly as he could. He did so very successfully. What he said about the importance and necessity of giving a good education and the necessary instruction to the young was well received; several pious persons soon gathered to establish a gratuitous school.

While all this was being done to promote the growth of the Institute, De La Salle, on his side, was laboring to train the candidates that had been presented to him. He made such formation his unique occupation and did not feel that he had anything else to attend to; for since he had come to Provence to hide himself, as we mentioned, he revealed his presence as little as possible, and left unanswered all the letters from the Brothers which reached him from all sides.

He did so because he believed that the Institute's best interests required that he give up all such contacts, so that his enemies might not turn against the Brothers the resentment that they could no longer vent on him personally. Moreover, under the mistaken impression that the Brothers in Paris had not been faithful to him, he did not know whom to trust. Finally, he thought that the Brother whom he had left behind him in Paris to replace him would be able to do so and carry out all his duties successfully.

That Brother was, in fact, wise and moderate. As well as he could, he replaced his absent Founder, and he did so with great prudence but also amidst considerable difficulty, because those Brothers disinclined to submission and hoping to dispense themselves from obedience, objected that he had neither been elected by the membership nor appointed by De La Salle, as we have already said.

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*The "party" means the Jansenists who were very powerful in Marseilles.

However, De La Salle continued to correspond with the Brother who directed the novitiate of Saint Yon* for he was convinced that the garden of the novitiate should be carefully cultivated because it would make up for all the losses which he foresaw the Society would suffer through his absence. Indeed, some very good candidates were trained there and they advantageously replaced others whom relaxation or deceit led to their ruin. The former were his comfort, and to them he could apply the words of Saint Paul, "You are my crown and my joy in the Lord," and those of the beloved disciple, "I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in the truth."

He did not, for all that, neglect the guidance of the Brothers in Provence and in the surrounding areas. Since they were not faraway, he continued his ordinary ministrations to them. He had them come to him from time to time so as to renew them spiritually, had them make retreats, and tried to strengthen them against relaxation.

As for the ones who labored in the city, he called them back, as he had been in the habit of doing at Paris and at Saint Yon, and had them join in the exercises of the novitiate, thus maintaining them in fervor, dependence and regularity. The zeal he showed for their perfection, which suited those who had retained a desire for holiness and did not neglect to strive to attain it, was not to the liking of a few tepid and relaxed Brothers. They would have preferred to see him faraway instead of so near. His presence was a constraint for them, since he showed himself an enemy of false liberty.

De La Salle's strict spirit of regularity, which he exemplified in the most outstanding manner, began to weary them. It was only under constraint and for pure form that they returned to the novitiate on the appointed days. The exercises in vogue there were a species of torture for such tepid and cowardly souls. Novitiate life seemed insupportable to men who were beginning to grow relaxed and were tired of living under the eyes of a vigilant Superior who aspired only to virtue and holiness, and who spoke only of the efforts needed to attain it. Unhappy, bored and discontented with a lifestyle which fervor alone makes one find enjoyable, they began thinking, from the outset, of how to put an end to it. How could they manage to do so? That was what embarrassed them, and it was no slight problem.

If they complained openly, they would be admitting their lack of virtue, their selfish, relaxed attitude. Their self-love could not abide such humiliation. Tepid souls show more of this disposition than others, and in them self-love increases as fervor diminishes. People who at one time had some virtue and have lost it are careful to keep up appearances; they often become consummate hypocrites. By trying to preserve a reputation for virtue which they have lost, they become whited sepulchers which conceal vice and passion under a false semblance of rectitude.

Finally, after much thought, the two Brothers of whom I speak found a way to attain their objective without causing any harm to their reputation. It

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*A slight error on Blain's part; the novitiate had been moved to Paris in 1709 during the famine and remained there till 1715.

was to plead that the obligation of fulfilling their school duties made it impossible for them to go back to the novitiate. They explained their problem not to their Superior, who would not have accepted such an argument, but to the founders of the schools. They said that the welfare of the schools suffered from their frequent coming and going to the house where De La Salle lived. The excuse was cleverly framed, and it easily deceived people who were especially interested in the schools which they had founded.

When they went to make a sort of confession to those who employed them, the two Brothers were well received and were commended for the zeal they showed for doing their duty. They said that their consciences obliged them to point out that the classes were not functioning so well because they were obliged to go so often to the novitiate, and that the schools could not really flourish unless the teachers remained, as they had formerly done, within the limits of the parish. With additional malice they observed that they thought it a duty for them to inform these gentlemen that part of the revenues from the school endowments went to the novitiate to support the novices; and that since they did not wish to do anything against the desires and intentions of the founders, they felt obliged to let them know about the problem. Their remarks, so clever and hypocritical, served to mask their own self-will. They wished to remain on their own domain and live there as they pleased, away from the vigilance of their Superior and far from dependence on him. Those men, who for the last few years had been accustomed to breathe the air of independence, thanks to the distance separating them from their Superior, found intolerable the exact observance of the Rule which he required of them. Not knowing how to liberate themselves from it except through trickery and ruse, they made use of means which led to their own downfall and the destruction of all the good that De La Salle was beginning to do in Provence and in the neighboring areas.

The trumped-up charges invented by those two sons of Belial marked the beginning of a new persecution launched against their Superior. Like the small cloud that Elias the Prophet called over the land of Israel, it grew little by little and finally culminated in the storm which we shall see bursting over the saintly priest.

The persons to whom the complaints were addressed considered them well-founded and important. They lent themselves to the bad will of the two Brothers and helped them recover their former liberty. The restrictions which these Brothers found so irksome seemed to the founders a disadvantage for the schools. They believed what the two Brothers wanted them to believe, namely, that De La Salle's insistence on having the latter attend the exercises of the novitiate interfered with their classwork; that by taking up so much of their time he left them much less to devote to the students. Under the pretext of maintaining them in the spirit of poverty and detachment from all things, he used the revenues of the endowments to support the novitiate.

Thus, without trying to discover the true motive which made these two Brothers act as they did, these gentlemen paid attention only to their complaints, which they considered wise and well-founded, and thought they were doing right by helping the two religious get back their liberty. That was what the latter desired above all, but they did not wish to reveal it.

Not without sorrow, and not without foreseeing the evil results that would ensue, did the worthy Superior see the two refractory religious withdraw themselves from his vigilance. But what could he do to prevent it? Without realizing it, the founders required such a change when they demanded that the two Brothers should remain in their residence as they had formerly done. The gentlemen were insistent; and although it was flimsy, the pretext of greater good for the schools, which the rebels had so cleverly advanced to obtain their own ends, finally won out. John Baptist had to yield and let the two Brothers live as they desired.

From that time on, De La Salle began to realize that in this city he would not enjoy the plain sailing promised him at the beginning, and that these first difficulties would not be the last. Still, people were busy about the opening of the new school, of which mention has been made. Preparations were progressing, and the holy Founder had been advised to call in the Brothers who would take charge of the school. Then, when everything seemed to be ready, suddenly everything fell apart.

As mentioned before, it was a Jesuit who had first launched the idea of this school. That was where the trouble lay. If anyone else had had a hand in it, nobody would have made any objections, nobody would have opposed it. But, as we said, in that city a new doctrine was widespread and numbered many illustrious adherents. Another circumstance which in addition to the former had much to do with the failure of this school was that a prominent person in the city, a man of superior intellect and considerable merit, had secretly become an enemy of De La Salle's since he had failed to win him over to his own unorthodox sentiments.

That cleric, the leader of all the group, was the most devious, insinuating and subtle man in the world. He had approached De La Salle and seemed most friendly. He appeared to be a true supporter of the Servant of God and would indeed have shown himself such, once he had won De La Salle over to his party. The two of them, however, did not see eye to eye and remained on guard against each other.

There is a time for everything---a time to be silent and a time to speak---and that time finally came. When the prominent ecclesiastic made the first overtures, he did not get very far without noticing in De La Salle's attitude and on his countenance that the latter did not care for the new doctrine. That was enough for the man, so wise according to this world. From then on he felt for the saintly priest the same sort of antipathy that he perceived the latter to entertain for his own sentiments. He resolved thenceforth to wage secret war against him but without seeming to break off their relations.

No sooner had the Jesuit finished his sermon stressing the advantages and the importance of Christian schools than the opponents got busy and started intriguing to foil the plan. Secretly they plotted against the project and decided that if they could not stop it, they would try to turn the schools over to others than the Brothers. To succeed in their attempt they needed a leader with authority, intelligence and a recognized reputation. Such was the person of whom we just spoke; so he was the one the party chose as the most

capable individual in the city to influence people's minds. He gladly accepted the task and fulfilled it with extraordinary diligence. He felt honored in being at the head of his party and in doing it a service. He also enjoyed having a chance to spoil a scheme recommended by a Jesuit,* and in advance he gloated over the opportunity of humiliating De La Salle.

Like the clever schemer he was, however, he wished to preserve the outward forms of charity so as not to risk alienating the public. Without breaking with De La Salle, but on the contrary feigning to be closer to him than ever, he worked underhandedly to alienate those who had become interested in the project and had donated funds. He suggested that it would be preferable to hand over the school to clerics rather than to the Brothers, since the former while teaching school could also make themselves useful in the parish. As he was eloquent, clever and had winning ways, he had no great difficulty in persuading everybody that he sought only what was good and was in fact pointing out where the greater good lay.

Once he was sure of that flank he proceeded to circumvent the bishop, which he did with supreme skill, giving him to understand that the people who backed the new foundation had changed their minds about the Brothers, and that they preferred to entrust the school to clerics who could also render services in the parish where the school was to be established. He added that the benefactors were so well decided on the point that if anyone tried to dissuade them they would give their money to some other work of charity. The prelate, who was strongly in favor of the Brothers and hoped to multiply their schools as much as possible in his diocese, was not a little surprised to hear of this change, the real motive for which he did not realize. But as he had not had time to discuss the matter with the benefactors, he feared to antagonize them by an act of authority; so he let things go their way and did not oppose the change.

The actor who occupied the center of the stage then finished playing his role. He went to De La Salle with a melancholy and afflicted air, like a man overwhelmed with grief. With words of commiseration and in a doleful voice he told him that he had come on a most disagreeable mission: to inform him that the people who were backing the new school had changed their minds and now wanted to entrust it not to the Brothers but to clerics. "God be blessed," replied the Servant of God, "apparently that is how God wants it." And since upright hearts are never on guard against duplicity, the saintly priest, thinking that the man really entertained in his heart the sentiments that his lips uttered, thanked him most sincerely, feeling that he owed him a great debt of gratitude for the interest he was taking in the Brothers' Institute.

When the other had left, John Baptist prostrated himself before God to adore the decrees of His Providence, to thank Him and to submit to His action. At that moment he foresaw the storms that would arise against him and asked for strength and courage to withstand them. Convinced that sin is the only real evil and that all other misfortunes in life are, in God's plan, means for our sanctification, he thought only of profiting by those that threatened him

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*The Jesuits were the bitterest enemies of the Jansenists.

and of going forth to confront them with a submissive mind and heart. Like Job, he offered himself to the blows that he foresaw the hand of God was about to inflict on him, and like that holy man he repeated: "Let my consolation be that in afflicting me You do not spare me; multiply my bruises as You please and according to the number of my sins."

Thus prepared for whatever might happen, De La Salle did not have to wait long to hear the first rumblings of the tempest which he had foreseen. Those who had shown so much enthusiasm for the Brothers' establishments soon became the most active in opposing them. But they did not sound the tocsin for the war they were preparing until they despaired of bringing the Brothers' Superior around to the point where they had hoped to have him. So long as they still hoped to succeed, there was no ruse they did not employ to win him over.

They promised De La Salle all sorts of advantages for his Institute if he would share their sentiments. They made gifts to him, hoping to cause his resolution to waver. To their promises they joined threats mingled with flattery. They came to visit him often, and in the visits the burning questions of the day* were continually brought up. New maxims, boldly advanced, were vehemently upheld, but either the holy Founder did not listen to them or he showed his disapproval by an austere countenance, or else he refuted their views by some short, incisive remark; for he detested all quarreling, being convinced that error only grows stronger through argument.

The clerics, who held conferences regularly on certain days, were happy to have De La Salle in attendance; they often invited him to come. The discussions carried on were not always on topics of piety. The current theological issues were the matters ordinarily discussed. De La Salle was always amazed to hear from the same mouths the language of angels when they spoke of God, and the language of Luther and Calvin when they spoke of the pope and the bishops. He could find no charity in those who affected to be the perpetual panegyrists of that virtue, and he could not understand how those who so strongly urged its necessity found it so easy to dispense themselves from its practice; for they showed no mercy to anyone not of their party.

They seemed to make a virtue out of blackening their adversaries' reputations, and whoever slandered their foes most outrageously was considered the most truly zealous. The spirit of contention, passion and vanity characterized the discussion of the peculiar opinions that were considered. Each one wished to show off his theological acumen, insisted on triumphing and making a name for himself. They rarely agreed among themselves except to consign the Molinists (or at least those whom they considered Molinists) to perdition as Pelagians and enemies of the grace of Jesus Christ.

De La Salle suffered a great deal during these meetings and he usually kept silence. When they insisted that he speak up, he strongly defended the

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*These "burning questions" had to do with the Jansenistic propositions extracted from Quesnel's book of reflections on the New Testament, and with their condemnation, expected at the time, in the Bull Unigenitus.

truths that had been attacked and the persons whose characters had been torn to shreds. He declared that he was not much edified by what he saw and heard. He regretted the time wasted in altercations, invectives and the display of vain erudition. He advised them to replace such idle, unfounded and novel theories, which lead only to wordy confrontations and threaten charity, with discourses that nourish piety and contribute to worthwhile knowledge.

His remonstrances were not well received. They irritated men who had invited him only so that he might listen to them and bow before their decisions. Their pride was offended when they found a man of whom they had hoped to make a docile disciple giving them lessons. They resolved to avenge themselves and concluded that there was no longer any point in showing him friendliness, since they had nothing further to hope for from him.

Still, they had to camouflage, in the eyes of the public, the persecution they were about to start against him, and to parry all suspicions that hatred and passion were the origin of the unfavorable reports they were on the point of spreading about him. After having honored, praised and almost canonized him, they were going to decry him, blacken his name and defame him. The public would have been shocked if the way had not been prepared by voiceless rumors, by calumnies clothed in an appearance of verisimilitude and uttered by the mouths of devout people or by tongues accustomed to giving lies a ring of truth.

But what could they find to criticize in a man whose life was so upright, whose morals were so irreproachable? Exaggerated regularity, excessive severity, invincible inflexibility, harshness that repelled others, stubbornness and unyielding convictions that nothing could shake: such were the descriptions they used to oppose his extraordinary virtue, his solid doctrine, his spirit of recollection, mortification and penance. Those virtues had been considered vices in him ever since his enemies had come to look upon him as a Molinist. Not that he really was one, of course, if we understand what this term actually means, i.e., a follower of Molina; but he was such in fact in the meaning that those people attached to it, i.e., an opponent of Jansenism.

The Servant of God did not expect reproaches of that sort from people who pretended to such strict regularity in their conduct, who so boldly preached a severe brand of morality and wished to pass themselves off as the restorers of the primitive spirit of penance. In recent centuries when the Protestants claimed for themselves the noble name of "Reformers," the example of penance given by Saint Charles Borromeo opened the eyes of all who did not insist on keeping them shut, so that they could see for themselves where true, interior and supernatural virtue lay, that virtue which is inseparable from the true faith.

The same distinction could apply to this later occasion, by opposing De La Salle to the partisans of the new doctrines. The latter preached penance in public; the former practiced it in secret. They claimed the title of "Reformers," but he gave the example of true reform. They spoke of nothing but grace and charity; he strove to draw down the one and to grow in the other. By thus comparing themselves with him, they tacitly admitted, while censuring him for his excesses in regularity, reform and penance, that he

So, not having anything else to reproach the Servant of God with, they blamed his manner of governing. They disapproved the practices of piety he had established among the Brothers; they criticized as stilted and pretentious the recollected air that distinguished them; they found fault with the different kinds of penance and mortification that De La Salle had learned from the Saints and had introduced into his Community. They represented him as unconventional, harsh, unbalanced, inflexible, a man who never changed his mind. According to them caprice was at the bottom of all his behavior. He was hard-headed and agreed with nobody; and what was worse still, he wanted to mold everyone else to resemble him. He laid impossible burdens on the Brothers' shoulders and subjected them to an impractical and outlandish lifestyle. In a word, they managed to misrepresent one of the most brilliant examples of virtue that has edified France in our century.

Considering De La Salle as a tacit censor of their conduct, they resolved to force him to leave the city. To oblige him to do so, they aroused against him all the idle people and made him odious to all those whose interests coincided with their own. Nor did they stop short at words. They acted underhandedly to dissuade people from giving him further alms, after discontinuing those which they themselves had at first bestowed on him. That stratagem seemed to them the quickest way of getting rid of him and for causing his Community to disappear quietly. As famine makes the strongest cities surrender, starving one's enemies out is a sure way of conquering them.

But since De La Salle was a man who, like the great Apostle, knew how to endure hunger and thirst, who taught his disciples by his example to fast and abstain for long periods, his enemies soon realized that this method of reducing his resistance, so effective with others, would have little effect on him since he was satisfied with bread and water and was accustomed to using even them with restraint. So they tried another line of attack, which was to work stealthily to empty his novitiate. That proved easy for them to do. As they themselves had filled it with candidates devoted to them, it was not difficult for them to persuade the young men to leave. They approached most of the novices and got them to leave a house which they had encouraged them to enter in the first place. They turned away others who would have wished to join, telling them that De La Salle's way of life was too austere.

The novices who left echoed, or rather trumpeted abroad, the message given them by the founders and published aloud what the latter had been saying more or less secretly to the disparagement of the Servant of God. He was excessively rigid in his approach, had no consideration for human frailty, was as harsh with others as with himself. In the novitiate one could neither raise one's eyes nor open one's mouth nor make any use of one's senses; the slightest fault was sanctioned by some penance. People under such a regime became uncivil, uncouth, taciturn. The entire day was spent in exercises of piety and mortification. Often enough the novices, with minds and bodies exhausted, would go to the refectory to find practically nothing to eat there, or only food that inspired repugnance. To live there one should have neither will nor judgment and should pay no attention to his body. No one could stand this sort of life except De La Salle himself, who was ruining the health of those who sought to imitate him or else was driving them insane.

Thus those gentlemen, through their emissaries who presented their own experience as a proof of what they advanced, changed into crimes De La Salle's virtues of retirement, recollection, abnegation, mortification, obedience and penance, in all of which he excelled and of which he gave such outstanding examples. Under hateful names they slandered virtues which outshone theirs. They went even further and published a pamphlet filled with calumnies in which the utmost malice had gathered together whatever could make him appear odious and rob him of all esteem.

Their screed produced the effect that its authors hoped for. Since the malignity of the human heart inclines it to believe what is evil, the lying tract made everyone think the worst of De La Salle. People believed the evil that was said of him with no other proof than that they saw it in print. Such is the poison of calumny. It needs to advance no proof or appearance of truth in order to be believed. And even though detraction bears within itself the demonstration of its falsity, no matter how incredible it may be, people wish to believe it, especially when it is aimed at the most virtuous men.

Since the evil effects of the pamphlet were spreading everywhere, the Servant of God thought it his duty to try to contradict it. He issued a reply in which he let the truth speak for itself, and charity characterized all he said. He allowed no expression to fall from his pen which could satisfy wounded self-love or sting his adversaries or make them think that he had been hurt by their venomous attacks. He contented himself with unmasking the falsity of their calumnies without saying anything that might wound the calumniators. The strongest thing he said was that his experience had taught him what the Church had to fear from a party which was gaining strength day after day, and that he could foresee with sorrow the wounds that the Spouse of Christ would have to endure from such enemies.

Still, in spite of his attempt at refutation, calumny won the day. From the city it spread to the rest of the province and even reached the Brothers' establishments in the more remote places. There it produced all its malignant effects. The calumniator was believed on his mere word. Because he lied brazenly, nobody thought of questioning the facts he invented or of verifying them. What usually happens, when true piety and sincerely devout persons are involved, happened once again. People read the defamatory pamphlet with curiosity and evil-minded satisfaction, but nobody took the trouble to read the reply. They opened their ears to those who wished to slander the holy Founder, but closed them against those who sought to vindicate him.

De La Salle did have friends who took up his defense, but they were not heeded. His allies tried to parry the blows aimed at him, to mollify irritated hearts and to reestablish the honor and just deserts of the Servant of God. But people's minds were too prejudiced against him, and his enemies kept repeating the old falsehoods while inventing new ones to add thereto. Things finally came to a head when they robbed the Brothers of the hope of extending their work. The latter had been promised a school in another very large parish, but suddenly no more was heard of such a school.

The trouble spread farther and farther, and it even affected the hearts of the Brothers in the city, the province and the environs. The novitiate had

to be closed when the last novice left. Even the most resolute Brothers began to waver. Some of them abandoned the Institute in spite of the prayers and remonstrances of their father. Those who were working in the surrounding areas but did not realize what was going on believed the false reports which were being spread about their Superior. They began to join their voices to those of others who were complaining and murmuring aloud.

The notorious Brother*---the Director in Paris previously mentioned---so harsh on himself and even more so on others, who, with the master of novices, had by inflicting such indiscreet and exaggerated penances given rise to the great persecution that was the start of all the others, had been sent by De La Salle to open the school in Mende and had also been commissioned to visit the houses of the Institute in Provence. He allowed himself to be influenced by all that was happening and left the Society. His desertion was neither sudden nor unforeseen. It took place with the deliberation of a man who had been planning it for a long time. Before leaving the house, he took care to set aside as much money as he could. When he had a considerable sum to line his pockets with, he departed with the embezzled funds.

It is easy to imagine the hurt such a father felt in his heart when he learned of the desertion and fall of the prodigal who, more than any other, deserved the name of child of his sorrow. That was the cruelest blow he had to suffer during the persecution. He did not really experience its bitterness to the full save when his bosom was torn by the very children whom he had begotten in Jesus Christ. The external warfare waged against him was not so unbearable to him so long as it did not lead to conflict within his family that armed his own sons against him.

In this matter his adversaries were able to attack him on the point where he was most vulnerable. If his enemies had been satisfied with ruining his reputation, they would have rendered him the greatest service he could have hoped for from them. By occasioning humiliation for him, they were striving to make him conformable to Jesus in His abjection. If those gentlemen had limited their attacks to discouraging his novices, the Servant of God would have been able to bear it, for they would have been tearing down what their own hands had built up. But what overwhelmed him with grief was that they succeeded in worming their way into his own house and there making of his children other Absaloms in revolt.

In fact, the two Brothers we spoke of, who were the instigators of this persecution, at that time added insolence to their previous betrayal of their holy Founder. They did not blush to tell him that "he had come to Provence only to destroy everything" instead of building things up. Such a reproach was as excruciating to him as their earlier disobedience had been, but the only vengeance he took was to show them new tokens of his meekness and kindness. Whether out of necessity and because he had no one else at hand, or whether by a deliberate choice, he sent one of these Brothers to Mende sometime later, where the latter consummated his fall by open rebellion and fresh insolence, as did the other Brother who had taken up his residence there without De La Salle's orders.

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*This was Brother Ponce who had held several important posts in the Institute.

The reader will recall what we have already related about this: that wishing to establish themselves in this town the two Brothers were able to defy their Superior, thanks to the backing they got from the bishop and the first magistrate of the city, when John Baptist wished to change them from a place where they were becoming irregular. They proceeded to throw off the yoke of dependence. Those ungrateful and unnatural children forced their father to leave the house, telling him that if he wished to stay he would have to pay for his board.

Time, which effaces all things, in this instance only embittered people's minds the more. John Baptist's patience had not appeased the hatred of his adversaries. They even profited by his withdrawal from the scene (for he no longer appeared in public) to spread abroad new calumnies about him. The interests of his Institute seemed to be seriously compromised in that part of the country, and he began to think that they would soon be irremediably jeopardized. As he blamed himself as the cause of all this, he thought of leaving that region of France for good.

Because in that city he was offered regular communications with Rome, he resolved to journey thither in order to prostrate himself at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, to present his respects and to offer his obedience to Peter's successor. That was not a new desire on his part. For a long time he had felt himself inspired to make such a trip in order to satisfy his special devotion to the chief of the Apostolic College, to secure from the Sovereign Pontiff the confirmation of his mission, and to ask him to approve his Institute. If previously time had permitted him to do so, and if he had not feared to cause harm to his little flock by going so faraway, he would have yielded to the inspiration with great satisfaction. But now both the time and the opportunity of satisfying his desire seemed to have arrived. Freed from all other occupations, and driven as it were from place to place, he believed that Divine Providence Itself was beckoning him to Rome.

A vessel about to set sail for the capital of the Christian world invited him to take advantage of an opportunity which he would probably never again meet with. The circumstances decided him to reserve a place on board and to have all the provisions for the trip purchased by the Brother whom he had chosen as his companion for the journey. Still, he did not wish to undertake the voyage without God's approval. The divine will was the only rule he followed. He did not listen to his own wishes except when he recognized that they came from the Holy Spirit. So as not to let any human or natural element intervene in this decision, he was careful to maintain himself in total indifference with regard to the trip and to keep himself absolutely dependent on God's good pleasure. The following incident proves his attitude.

While awaiting a favorable wind, the Servant of God prayed and recommended his voyage to God. He was ready to go and ready to remain, according to the orders of Divine Providence which events would transmit to him. Up to this point nothing had happened to oppose his desire; in fact, everything seemed to favor it. The ship was ready to weigh anchor; all the passengers were coming aboard.

De La Salle followed them and reached the port; but just as he was about to embark he met the bishop who stopped him and begged him to come back to his house. He wanted him to take possession of a school which he wished to entrust to the Brothers. Immediately the saintly priest obeyed and no longer thought of his trip to Rome. As though the voice of the prelate had been the voice of God, he returned home and said to the Brothers as he entered the house: "God be blessed! Here I am, back from Rome. It is not His will that I should go there. He wants me to busy myself with something else."

Here, surely, we have an example of virtue which is not ordinary. It shows to what an extent De La Salle was dead to himself. A man must have no self-will if he manifests none in the project of a journey to Rome. Everyone knows by experience the irritation felt when meeting with obstacles to one's least important plans. Nevertheless, in spite of the bishop's assurances, the school could not be opened at the time because of the opposition of John Baptist's enemies.

True, the Institute did not lose anything by this postponement and has since been rewarded many times over for the disappointment it experienced then. Indeed, no other city in France has shown more zeal for Christian schools or more good will towards the Brothers. They have opened classes in all the sections of the city, classes which are so well filled that one might think that each was the only one available. If the blessings that God pours out on them are so abundant, we can truly say that they are the consequences of the crosses which De La Salle had to bear in that city.

Today, his children reap, rejoicing, what their father sowed with so much sorrow. The furrows where they reap are so productive because he watered them with his tears. They enjoy peaceful possession of a terrain where he had to endure cruel warfare. The tribulations were his lot; the rewards are for the Brothers. As long as the man of God lived, that city was his enemy. After his death, it became reconciled with his disciples, and today it brooks no rival in conferring on them all possible favors.

That is how God deals with his special friends. In this world the cross is their lot. Everything they undertake is blamed, contradicted, opposed. The world looks on them with scorn. Against them hell arms the hands of sinners and even those of worthy people. The opposition they encounter on the part of the latter is ordinarily that which they feel most keenly. God Himself seems to join in the fray and abandons them when He sees them, like His Son, nailed to the cross. But once they are dead, everything they have suffered returns in the form of blessings. God has invested what they lost at a high rate of interest. He makes up to them in glory the ruin of their honor, and in the end brings to nothing all that the world and the devil undertook against them.

Where De La Salle had to suffer most, his Institute is now most flourishing. Where he was most despised, his children are now most welcome. Where he sowed amidst crosses and thorns, the Brothers are gathering a most abundant harvest.

Chapter XI

After the Ruin of the Novitiate He Had Established, De La Salle Finds His Institute Deeply Troubled and on the Verge of Ruin in That Part of the Country. Attributing All These Calamities to His Own Sins He Retires into a Solitary Place to Let the Tempest Blow Over. He Goes to Grenoble Where He Lives Unknown and in Retirement; He Visits the Grande Chartreuse. He Suffers Another Severe Attack of Rheumatism Which Is Cured Only by Another Session of Painful Therapy. He Goes to Visit a Woman Hermit, Renowned for Her Holiness.

We know what Saint Paul's zeal made him undertake; we know what love for his fellow countrymen made him suffer. We know that the hardness of heart manifested by the Jews produced in his soul a wound which made him agonize constantly. To prevent their condemnation he offered himself to God as a sacrifice, and for them he would have been willing to be anathema with regard to Jesus Christ. There was nothing that he was not ready to endure and to immolate for their salvation. He would have taken delight in the most cruel tortures if thereby he had been able to expiate their sins and with his blood to wash away their ingratitude and malice. The spectacle of their blindness was for him a cause of affliction that nothing could console.

Every day Saint Paul wept fresh tears over his people. What plunged him into desolation was that he wept over them as Samuel bewailed Saul---with tears that were unavailing because their malice had reached its summit. We also see in Saint Paul the same love, the same tenderness for the Gentiles whom he had won for Christ. He made their joys and their sorrows his own. He loved them as his children; he bore them all in his bosom, eager to place them into the heart of Jesus. He wept with those who wept, rejoiced with those who rejoiced, and made himself all things to all men to win them all to Him Who had redeemed them. He caressed and consoled them with a mother's affection and sympathized with all their woes.

This portrait does not represent the great Apostle alone. We might say that the same brush he used to paint his likeness can be utilized to depict all those who possess an ardent charity, those whom God has made the spiritual fathers of a religious family. They all feel, in varying degrees according to the depth of their love, the loss of those whom they have begotten in the Spirit. This helps us to understand what De La Salle suffered when, without being able to stop them, he saw some of his Brothers fall into wayward behavior and take the path of perdition. That sort of martyrdom lasted as long as his life itself, ever since he gave up being a canon of Rheims. For at all times he saw some of his disciples turn aside from their first virtue, go backwards and give scandal.

As we have already mentioned, many of the Founder's disciples either insulted him or revolted against him or betrayed him or maltreated him or abandoned him. So often had he experienced such sorrow that when he withdrew from Paris he felt he could not trust himself to anyone of them. True, the

great majority remained faithful and very deeply attached to him; but he had so often experienced ingratitude, perfidy, indiscretion, or wrongdoing on the part of those on whom he counted, and whom he considered the pillars of his Congregation, that he anticipated similar failures on the part of others and more of the same kind of sorrows for himself.

If all the founders of Orders have had to deal with this sort of trials, I think I can truthfully say that not one of them ever had to endure crucifixions of this type so frequently and to such a degree as the pious Founder whose life we are relating. It seems that God Himself took pleasure in destroying what he had built up, and what He Himself had inspired him to work at. Almost everything that John Baptist undertook was opposed or contradicted or destroyed. Either he could not make his plans succeed, or he saw them succeed only to be destroyed.

In spite of it all De La Salle blessed God like the holy man Job when his servants came to announce to him the loss of his goods, or the collapse of the house where his children were, or some other catastrophe; but John Baptist remained inconsolable over the loss of his sons. That cross was always the hardest for him to bear. As charity grew in him, it diminished the keenness of his other woes but only increased the agony of this one.

The only relief he could find in his sorrow was in blind submission to the unfathomable judgments of God. He took occasion of them to humble himself and to redouble his penances and acts of fervor. Thus he used, to further his own sanctification, the relaxation and lapses of his disciples. Desolate at finding cockle growing in the part of the Master's field that he had sown, he redoubled his efforts at cultivating the other parts, and making them bear a rich harvest.

Ashamed at seeing sin in a Community where the dew of heaven fell in such abundance, he humbled himself before God and blamed either his negligence or his bad example. Broken-hearted when he saw vices sprouting among his disciples' virtues, he thought he could find in himself the cause of the disorder, and he made himself accountable to God for the faults of his inferiors. Considering himself as something despicable in the presence of the Divine Sanctity, he confessed himself a culpable and sinful man who drew down God's malediction on whatever he undertook.

He began to ask himself whether his mission really was from God, and whether a work that everybody opposed was not in fact the creation of his own spirit. Fasting and prayer were the two means he used, as he generally did, to discover God's will or to appease His anger. To assiduous prayer he joined strict penance, and tried to take vengeance on his body for his disciples' faults for which he considered himself responsible. We have mentioned often enough already what a strong attraction he had for communing with God. Outside of prayer and meditation, nothing afforded him any enjoyment. In his sorrows and labors that was where he turned for consolation and repose. In his doubts and difficulties that was where he sought light and where he consulted the Divine Oracle.

But at that time the holy exercise of prayer became for him a desert-like and arid land, which offered him only thorns without flowers. His soul no longer enjoyed the divine sweetness; heaven held back its manna and no longer allowed it to fall before him. God spoke to him no more and left him in darkness. The Sun of Justice seemed veiled to his eyes, and his soul remained without energy or vigor.

Such darkness was another reason for his desolation, harder to bear than the rest, as saintly souls well know. Tears can be sweet indeed when Jesus Christ deigns to dry them. Crosses are truly lightsome when He shows Himself to a man and helps him carry them. Abandonment by creatures is scarcely felt by a heart united with God, one which enjoys the gift of His presence. When Jesus Christ consoles us, rejection and opposition by creatures are thorns with dulled points which we scarcely feel. But when God joins creatures in crucifying a soul, then it seems to be in a sort of hell, or, more correctly, in a true purgatory. At such times the more pure and ardent one's love for God is, the sharper and more cruel his torment appears.

The Servant of God found himself in that crucifying condition; he could address to God the words that the Royal Prophet places in the mouth of Christ on the cross: "My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Sometimes he might have added, "Will my sins separate me forever from Thee? When shall I be reconciled with Thee?" Like Ezechias he could exclaim: "My eyes are dimmed from lifting them on high, and from offering Thee my longings and my distress." With David he might have cried out: "I lift up mine eyes to the eternal hills where Thou hast established Thy throne, and whence I hope for succor. My soul sinks through weariness, but I await Him Who is my Salvation. When, O Lord, will it please Thee to console me? My tears flow day and night while my enemies ask me (or rather I ask myself), 'Where is thy God?'"

Thus the Servant of God, afflicted by the Lord even more than by men, seemed to struggle with Him, and sought to force His goodness to yield to his tears and entreaties. No longer experiencing the consolations which he was accustomed to, and which lightened his burdens, he blamed the loss on his sins and believed that they alone were the cause of the persecution which he endured on the part of both God and men. Persuaded that this was so, he resolved to withdraw for a time, to hide himself in some solitary place, in order, as he himself said, to bewail his sins and to throw himself like a new Jonas into the raging seas in order to calm the tempest. Abandoned by God and by men, he considered himself fit for nothing any more; and believing his presence to be the source of the opposition, he thought he might bring it to an end by departing. "My absence," he said to himself, "may mollify those who are irritated against me, and may suggest to them more favorable thoughts with regard to my dear children."

So he withdrew to a hermitage some ten or 12 leagues from the city. There, elevated above himself and all the world, he found himself like a traveler on some lofty peak where winds and storms no longer swirl; and there he discovered a deep repose and sweet tranquillity. Occupied with God alone, he forgot everything else. If his thoughts sometimes turned to his Brothers or his persecutors, it was to pray to God for them and to implore His Majesty to uphold the former and to convert the latter. The injuries and outrages

offered him had left in his soul no other traces but those that perfect charity inspires for enemies whom he loved in God and for God's sake.

The saintly Founder had already begun to find his Mount Thabor in this desert; and like Peter he exclaimed: "Lord, it is good to be here!" He enjoyed such peace and calm there that he would have wished to end his days in that spot, unknown to men; but he had not yet reached the end of his labors. God had others in store for him, which would last till the end of his life.

During this time his enemies spread the rumor that he had abandoned his Institute, and that his departure had led to that of several of the other Brothers who had been the dupes as well as the imitators of his evil conduct. Nothing was more false. In truth, the saintly priest had several times been tempted to take up his residence in some parish, there to labor at the conversion of sinners, abandoning to the care of Providence a house from where his enemies wished to banish him by all means.

Whether wiser counsel dissuaded him, or whether a special light from on high showed him that such was not God's will for him, the fact is that his thoughts were not followed up and led to no action. He always kept the same tenderness for his children; if he stayed away from them for a time on this occasion, it was only through prudence. If he withdrew into solitude, it was not through caprice, ill-humor or melancholy, but only to stay out of his adversaries' sight and to procure some respite for the Brothers.

However, the rumor spread that he had broken down under misfortune, and that despairing of being able to maintain his Institute he had abandoned it. This tale, although completely false, created a bad impression on people's minds. It tempted the Brothers, even the most resolute ones, to do as their Superior was supposed to have done. Those whom piety and a true vocation bound most closely to him were in consternation at this news. Confronted by such an unexpected turn of affairs, they were seized with extraordinary perplexity, not knowing what they should do.

Fortunately, the falsity of this rumor was soon discovered by persons who were entirely trustworthy. They provided the facts to the overcredulous, and pointed out that the people who had put out the report were given to barefaced lies and were extraordinarily adept at deceiving the public. The slander was nothing but a stratagem invented to bring about the ruin of the Institute.

After the pious Founder had spent some time at the hermitage we mentioned, he retired to another solitary place in the city of Mende. There, far from men's eyes, the Servant of God believed that people were thinking of him as little as he thought of them. Because he forgot them, he was persuaded that they had forgotten him. He was not a little surprised, therefore, when the Brother Director to whom he had entrusted the new novitiate came to meet him in this new solitude. This Brother had left the novitiate because there was nothing more to do in it as there were no more candidates. De La Salle's departure had hastened the failure of the novitiate. His enemies, as we mentioned, had induced all the young men whom they had invited to join the Institute to abandon their vocation. It was to report that information to his Superior and to try to comfort him in his dark hour that the good Brother had come---and also to ask De La Salle for a new assignment.

The news did not surprise John Baptist; he had been expecting it. What amazed him was that anyone should still think of him. Like a man convinced that his memory has faded from the earth, he replied: "God be blessed, my dear Brother. What leads you to address yourself to me? Do you not know how unfit I am to command others? Can you be ignorant of the fact that quite a few don't want me any more? That these words of the Gospel seem to apply to me: 'We will not have this man for our superior?' They are quite right, for I am incapable of being such."

The Brother, confused, edified and touched by these words, displayed on his countenance the sentiments of his soul; and letting his eyes speak for his lips, he told John Baptist by his tears everything that his heart wished to say. Indeed, that worthy Brother had always preserved for his father a great depth of tenderness and veneration. He had come, in his straightforward way, to ask for orders. He threw himself at John Baptist's feet and said that he would not leave until he had secured his father's blessing along with a new assignment. The Brother is the one who succeeded Brother Barthélemy, and who today governs the Institute as Superior General.*

When he had arrived in Mende looking for De La Salle, the Brother thought he would find him at the Brothers' residence; but the Founder was no longer there. The father had been turned out by his own children who had let him know that they no longer recognized him. They also said as much to the Brother who had come in search of his Superior, and told him there was no room for him in the house. The rude welcome and the disdainful air that accompanied it seemed strange to the one who was thus addressed; but his surprise vanished, and he consoled himself when he learned that De La Salle had been the first to be treated thus, and that when he had come to his own Community and his own house he had met with this new trait of resemblance to Jesus Christ Who "came unto His own, but His own received him not."

The Brother met the holy Founder in the lodgings which Miss De St. Denis had put at his disposal, and where he lived as in a real hermitage.

That pious lady belonged to an aristocratic family and possessed a considerable fortune which she devoted to providing for and giving a Christian education to a large number of girls born to heretical parents. Some other women had joined her in this charitable and useful work; they formed a Community called the Ladies of Christian Union. When she heard of the insult that his own disciples had offered to the holy Founder, she was inspired to take advantage of his disgrace to further the well-being of her own soul and that of her Community. Filled with esteem and respect for his virtue, she aspired to the honor and the merit of rendering to this servant of Jesus Christ the same attentions that Martha and Mary paid to Our Lord Himself. She was happy to provide him with board and lodging and everything else he needed.

At the time De La Salle was making a retreat with the Capuchin Fathers. He had asked them for hospitality when he had been turned away by the Brothers of Mende, and they had charitably welcomed him. Miss De St. Denis envied

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*Brother Timothy, second Superior General.

them, so to speak, the merit of harboring De La Salle; she offered to provide for his expenses entirely, an offer which he accepted. The pious lady, delighted at having this burning lamp so near to her, wanted nothing more than to profit by his wisdom. She received from him much excellent advice for the guidance of her new Community.

The time that she managed to spend with him seemed short to her; and like Magdalen at the Savior's feet, she never grew tired listening to his words. Her zeal even led her to do all she could to make De La Salle stay in Mende, hoping to attach him to her Community for its benefit. With this in view she offered to pay him a salary as long as he lived, and after he died to provide for a third Brother to be added to the two already in the city, all this if he consented to stay with her.

The Servant of God, however, would not listen to such a proposal. What she did obtain from him was a set of regulations for her Community. She took all possible care to profit by his stay in Mende, which lasted about two months. When he left she bought him a horse with which to pursue his travels.

From Mende he went to Grenoble where he thought he had discovered a new heaven and a new earth in the oasis of profound peace he found there. The Brothers in Grenoble realized what a treasure they possessed and took advantage of his presence. Delighted at having with them the father who had suffered so much persecution in Provence on account of more than one of his sons, not to mention outsiders, they tried by their kindness and attention to make him forget the sorrows he had suffered on account of the ingrates.

To show his appreciation the Founder resolved to remain with the Brothers of Grenoble as long as he could. Everything concurred in making him decide thus: the Brothers' good dispositions, the peace which reigned among them, the solitude that enveloped their residence, and the hidden and retired life he led there. In fact, unknown to nearly everybody and not eager to form new acquaintances, he hoped that he could remain in Grenoble like an anchorite in the midst of the forest, devoting himself to continual prayer and penance.

His attraction for these two exercises made him select the most retired room on the top floor of the house. Far from men, but occupied with God while hidden from the world, he was truly in his element. Once again he was able to yield to his inclination to devote himself almost without interruption to prayer and mortification. His prayer had no other measure than that of the day itself, no other interruption than that of changing from one exercise to another. He left the Brothers only to return to his contemplation. He did not break off his mental prayer except to pray with them. Ever punctual at all community observances, he was always the first one in the oratory and left it last of all. While he remained alone with God, nothing interfered with his communing with Him. He lived without seeing or being seen by anybody; such was his desire.

There, not far from the celebrated monastery which a Saint from the same diocese as he* had founded in a setting of ice and snow in order to make

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*Saint Bruno had been a canon of Rheims in his early life.

himself and his companions invisible to men, dealing with whom is so dangerous even to the most solid virtue, he did not want to miss the opportunity of visiting the monastery. Exchanging one solitude for another, when he left his retreat he could not fail to derive profit for his soul by going to visit the Grande Chartreuse, about three leagues from Grenoble. Could he have failed to show his devotion towards Saint Bruno, whom he had imitated so closely by giving up, like him, a canonry in the Cathedral of Rheims and everything else that would make the world smile on him, to embrace a life as austere as it was humiliating? On reaching that frightful desert,* he felt himself closer to God when he saw the spot which the restorer of the solitary life in the West had sanctified by his tears and by the rigor of his penance. Admiringly, he beheld those steep cliffs where an almost perpetual winter prevails, for they are hidden most of the time beneath snow and ice, so that those who dwell there seem to be buried alive. Edified by the silence and recollection which reigned among those solitaries, his attraction for a retired life grew stronger than ever, and he would have wished to end his days among them.

The holy Founder was received with great hospitality, but he was not shown those special signs of distinction which custom in that holy house decrees must be offered to a canon of Rheims, because he let no one know that he had once been honored by that title, and he did not permit the Brother who accompanied him to bring it up. Among all the devotional places in the holy monastery which De La Salle visited, his heart was most charmed by the hermitage of Saint Bruno. His own associations with the Saint touched him; and if he had followed his inclination, he would have been the second canon of Rheims who hid in the cleft of those rocks. He had to do violence to his piety in order to leave the place; but if he went away in body, his spirit remained behind.

The prior, struck by the modesty and remarkable piety which John Baptist could not dissimulate, realized that he was entertaining a distinguished guest. Without paying attention to the appearance of a poor priest that the latter presented, he honored without knowing him the virtue which shone out from beneath his shabby clothes, and he did all he could to persuade him to stay longer with them. De La Salle and the monks edified one another. In spite of himself, the Founder's sanctity, veiled under the mantle of poverty, revealed itself in that dwelling place of holiness.

Since those are most capable of discerning true virtue who practice it themselves, the saintly solitaries soon realized that the poor priest who was staying with them was a great servant of God. On his part, De La Salle took with him from this holy solitude all the edification he had come to seek. He left after three days, not having given to his devotion all the time he would have wished to allot to it, but all that he could spare from the business of his Congregation. He returned to Grenoble filled with esteem and veneration for that celebrated monastery.

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*So far from being a "frightful desert," the monastery is situated in the midst of some of the grandest and most impressive scenery in Europe. But Blain, like most 18th-century writers, was not attracted by the beauties of nature.

After he returned to the city, he once again took up his retired way of living with new affection for it. His eagerness to serve God seemed like that of a fervent novice who on leaving the world is in a hurry to repair the sins of his past life and the time already lost. He gave himself to mental prayer like a man who finds there his very element and cannot live apart from it. When the bell called the Brothers to the oratory in the morning, they found him kneeling there in the attitude of someone who had spent a good part of the night in prayer, or at least had been engaged in it for a long time.

During the day, if anybody wanted to find him, it was no use looking for him anywhere but in his little corner reserved for prayer where three persons could not have managed to squeeze together nor take a comfortable posture. He stayed there like the dove in the cleft of the rock, as Scripture says, and never complained except when he had to leave it. He put aside with ever renewed determination whatever could distract him from God or shorten his communing with Him. Thus he received very few visits. He had already been in Grenoble for some time before anyone knew it. He did not want to know or to be known; and he showed clearly that he could get along without others so long as he could converse with God.

However, he did not yield to his attraction for continual prayer to such an extent that he could not succeed in weaning himself away from the delicious milk that God provides to pure souls during this life when the opportunity for practicing other heroic virtues presented themselves. He was ready to leave the embraces of his heavenly Spouse when God's will called him elsewhere.

By John Baptist's orders, the Brother in charge of the school in Saint Lawrence's parish had undertaken a long journey for the interests of the Community. The holy Founder took his place and devoted himself to teaching the children with that gentleness, patience, attention and calm that all the Brothers should show when exercising their functions. Thus one might have beheld this doctor, this ex-canon of Rheims, this founder of a Congregation showing himself honored, taking pleasure, and considering it a duty to teach the children, to help the little ones learn the alphabet, to encourage the older ones to read and write, and to impart to all the rudiments of Christian doctrine. The way in which he fulfilled his duty showed clearly enough the joy he felt in fulfilling it and his assiduity in practicing the different virtues which at every moment are called for in a classroom.

If he showed favoritism for any students, it was towards the poorest ones. His concern for them was manifested by the trouble he took to help them make progress in reading and writing; for, as he said, those were skills they badly needed. That was how his humility succeeded in hiding his charity. His zeal in their regard made them his favorites again during the catechism lessons which he taught them every day. Again the students he singled out for special care were the most ignorant ones. Such children, usually abandoned to their natural stupidity or light-headedness by teachers lacking in zeal or charity, became the objects of his predilection and occasions for displaying his patience.

God blessed his efforts, showing that kind and patient zeal finally succeeds and can work miracles even on the most limited intelligences. For he

finally managed to teach them the truths of religion and to cause them to advance in reading and writing. This is an outstanding example which should be imitated by all those in charge of youth. Unless one is on his guard, self-love can seek its satisfaction in a classroom as well as anywhere else, and then natural inclinations take over. One neglects the poorest, most stupid and ignorant pupils, and those who are not naturally attractive, reserving his zeal for those who are agreeable to deal with.

Not wishing to shirk in any way the duties of a schoolmaster, our holy priest, as is the custom among the Brothers, brought his pupils two by two to church to hear Mass. Only after settling them in order did he ascend the altar to celebrate. But how did he do so? With modesty, interior spirit and reverence which drew to him the eyes of all his little students and of all the people in the congregation. At such times the holy man forfeited his attraction for the hidden life, for he showed everybody who he was. After seeing him when he brought the children to church or said Mass for them, people called him nothing but "that holy priest." Such was the nickname that his humble ministry merited for him in Grenoble.

When the Brother he was replacing came back, he and De La Salle resumed their occupations. The Brother once more took over his duties in the classroom, while the Servant of God returned to his life of retirement, prayer and penance. The only distraction he allowed himself was the composition of several works of piety for the instruction of youth and for the use of his disciples. He also revised the work, Christian Duty, and brought out a third, more accurate edition of this work.

While so usefully occupying his time in solitude, he learned to his great joy that God had finally brought back peace to his foundations in Provence and that everything was quiet there. Convinced that if he went back his presence might arouse new trouble there (for his enemies were not dead nor had they changed their attitude as far as he was concerned), he resolved to stay away. He limited his efforts with regard to Provence to prayer, letters, and to dispatching special visitors to the Brothers. The city where he had been so badly treated had the first place in his prayers and sacrifices; the Brothers who had been so disturbed and exposed to seduction received his vigilant attention. He encouraged them and comforted the others by his letters. Finally, as he did not dare go to visit them, he entrusted that mission to certain of his disciples possessing superior capacities.

He had barely finished the reediting of his works that we have just mentioned when he suffered another violent attack of rheumatism. His mortification had brought it on, for he had paid no attention to the early symptoms when he felt them, and he had not mitigated in any way his usual manner of life. His failure to take proper care of himself proved costly. As the illness grew worse, his sufferings increased and soon became so unbearable that finally he had to yield and stay first in his room and then in bed where he was practically helpless, unable to move his limbs.

Next, a fever broke out and caused concern for his life. Some pious persons who had come to know him when he was teaching school, fearing to lose him so soon after having known him so late, hastened to show him the anxiety

they felt over his condition, and spared nothing to secure some relief for him. His disciples, broken-hearted on seeing him in danger of death, surrounded his bed day and night and spared nothing which could help to preserve a life so necessary for them. They wept in his sight and sympathized with his pains with all the tenderness of devoted sons.

De La Salle tried to console them and to console himself with them, reminding them of the example of Job and repeating his words: "God be blessed! Let His will be done, not ours. If we receive health from Him, it is only right that we should endure illness with constancy. Let His holy name be blessed eternally!" The first and last of these expressions, so deeply fixed in his soul, were constantly on his lips; and he left them to the Brothers as a sort of slogan.

At this time he should have been content, and his desire for suffering should have been satisfied, for his pains were sharp and piercing and extended all over his body. All the remedies used seemed only to aggravate the illness. Since to find a remedy which might work several had to be tried out on him, he had the merit of seeing his pains increased by the very means which were supposed at least to alleviate them.

There existed, in fact, one effective remedy which had already been tried with success in Paris; but the cure was worse than the disease and was a true martyrdom, as the reader will remember from what was said of it before. Still, it was necessary for him to have recourse to it, or else to remain in bed half-crippled.

The two alternatives were terrible enough; each made nature tremble. However, if John Baptist had listened to the flesh, he would have preferred to suffer the agonies of rheumatism for a long time rather than cure them through a therapy which itself was a grievous torment. The choice was enough, consequently, to make him choose the latter; moreover, he was anxious to recover his health, less for his own relief than for the sake of helping and consoling his Brothers who were afflicted and worn out on account of him.

For the second time, therefore, he was stretched out on a bed of torture, made like a sort of gridiron; and the pain he endured again caused him to resemble Saint Lawrence. He faced the agony with such heroic patience that it seemed as though the spiritual fire which charity had enkindled in his soul was even more ardent than the flames which caused his flesh to suffer. On this second occasion, as on the first, the Servant of God found healing in this treatment. In a short time he was relieved and gradually regained his strength.

His greatest regret during the first days of his convalescence, as during his illness, was that he could not stand at the altar to immolate the spotless Lamb, for he was far from sharing the attitude of those who seem to show their devotion by excommunicating themselves, as it were, and depriving themselves of the Body of Christ; and who, while making much ado about their priesthood, let this august dignity remain sterile in them. He had learned from the Apostle that the duty of a pontiff is to offer sacrifice to God, and so he made it a duty for himself to celebrate Mass every day. His love for Jesus

Christ and his desire to procure God's glory made this an obligation for him; nothing could prevent him from saying Mass when it was possible for him to do so.

This longing brought him to the altar as soon as he was able to walk again without falling. As he could not go very far, the Brothers assisted him by bringing him to the little chapel in the hospice which the Carthusians have at Grenoble. He said Mass there as soon as he was able to stand. During that illness, which forced him to remain in bed almost without moving, to make up for the divine office which he could not recite and for all the other exercises of piety, he said his beads several times each day and kept himself united with God through the use of continual short prayers.

Once he was well enough, his first concern was to make a retreat in order to recoup his spiritual losses, as he called the omission of his mental prayer and of his other habitual exercises of devotion. As he was looking for an appropriate place to make this retreat, De Saleon urged him to spend a few days at a country place of his called Parménie, some four leagues from Grenoble. The priest's kind offer was just what the holy Founder needed, and he accepted it. Because that solitary place favored recollection, several persons went there to make retreats.

Parménie is located on the crest of a high mountain which in the past was uninhabited. The place was frequented only by shepherds who brought their flocks there to graze, and by the inhabitants of the village at the foot of the mountain, who every year went in procession to a cross erected on the mountaintop. That rustic spot, fairly well-known today, owes its celebrity to a poor village girl named Louise, who enjoyed a reputation for great holiness.

Louise had come to live at the foot of the cross we just mentioned. Her attraction for solitude and the presence of the cross which she beheld made her sojourn on the mountain agreeable to her. Her deep piety and her profound innocence prepared her for receiving God's communications. She carefully avoided contacts with people and made a paradise of that place where she felt closer to heaven and where the cross of Jesus Christ served as her book. As God's grace grew in her soul, so did her desire to fix her abode permanently on the mountain, so as to be closer to God alone and to concern herself solely with Him.

She obtained the consent of De Saleon to whom the property belonged, and there, with the alms that she begged for, she had a small house built, since her poverty made it impossible for her to pay for a larger construction. In the dwelling she lived like the courtesan Thaïs in her cell. But the more she wished to remain unknown, the more she made herself known. The name of the hermit shepherdess spread everywhere, and she soon became famous.

People came to the mountain to see her in order to be edified; several persons, taught by the grace of God, remained with her to spend a few days in retreat. Soon the house, which was too big for her, became too small for those who came to consult her or to profit by her instructions and example. Seeing this multitude of people who visited her hermitage, she felt herself inspired to build new lodgings, one for men and the other for women. The

project called for money. She sought it in the same way she had found the earlier sums: by appealing to the liberality of persons interested in works of piety. With the funds which humility had begged for and which charity donated, she added a small chapel to the two wings of the buildings she was constructing.

However, if what people say is true, she had to suffer more than the shame of begging while she was gathering the money she needed to build. Apparently, when she was collecting alms in the diocese of Lyons, she was arrested and put into prison by the orders of the archbishop. The humiliation only heightened her zeal for the execution of her project, instead of extinguishing it. She even comforted the pious persons who bewailed her arrest by assuring them that the one who had had her locked up would soon set her free again. It happened just as she had predicted. Even more, the archbishop, to make amends somewhat for the stain he had inflicted on her reputation by having her put in jail, gave her a considerable sum to help build the church.

This new Genevieve became the oracle of the whole countryside. From all over people came to consult her. Even the Lord's ministers themselves did not disdain to ask her for enlightenment and did not feel that they were demeaning themselves by seeking advice from this unlettered woman whom everybody considered a prodigy of holiness. Among the gifts with which heaven favored her, the discernment of spirits and knowledge of the future were the most remarkable.

When De La Salle was at Parménie, so near to this celebrated Sister Louise of whom everybody spoke, he did not fail to make use of the opportunity of seeking edification from her presence. He went to visit her and conversed with her for a long time, and did so on several occasions. He recognized the extraordinary graces that God had been pleased to impart to the soul of this humble village woman, and he became, like so many others, her panegyrist. In her turn she discovered in the soul of this priest who spoke to her the eminent perfection that the cloud of slander and detraction kept hidden from the world. She felt herself filled with respect and confidence in his regard.

Such men being rare on this earth, she resolved to profit by De La Salle's presence and to open her heart to him, to consult him and ask his advice. She did so with all the candor and simplicity of a humble soul that seeks God and hides nothing. In the account of her life which she gave to the holy priest, she mentioned in detail the struggles she had had to undergo in her solitude, and the vexations of the demons. She remarked that since she had built the two retreat houses, Satan's attacks had become more violent and more frequent. The Servant of God gave her on this point the counsels that the Spirit of God inspired him with. They seemed to satisfy her very much.

In his turn he wished to profit by the insights of this new Deborah. He told her about his past and present sufferings and the opposition he had encountered ever since he had undertaken to establish Christian schools. Louise found it all very surprising. She could not get over the fact that such a worthy enterprise, so useful and so necessary, could have met with such

opposition in the midst of a Christian country. As though by God's inspiration she told De La Salle in that connection that he was not yet finished with his labors, that he would have to suffer still more, but also that a crown was in store for his patience.

The holy priest admitted to her that he ardently longed to spend the rest of his days in solitude, which attracted him strongly, so as not to have to think of anything except God and himself. "Such is not God's will," replied Louise. "You must not abandon the family that God has made you the father of. Labor is your lot; you must persevere in it to the end of your days, combining, as you have done heretofore, the life of Magdalen with that of Martha."

In this answer De La Salle recognized the order of God. He admired the wisdom of Providence Which had brought him from one of the extremities of the kingdom to hear this saintly woman interpret for him the divine will. Thus those two lights illuminated each other, and their mouths were used by God to impart His commands to each other. Their holy conversation seemed too short to both of them when it came to a close at the end of the two-week retreat which the Servant of God had resolved to make. De La Salle and Sister Louise said good-bye with mutual joy over having met one another, but with regret over the prospect of never seeing each other again.

It is hard to say which of the two was the more highly edified and pleased. Louise rejoiced because she had seen a saint on this earth, sent to her by God in her place of retirement. She could not sufficiently bless Divine Wisdom Which had brought to her on the top of her mountain a director such as she needed, so enlightened in God's ways. On his side the holy Founder did not admire any less the dispositions of Divine Providence Which, through unerring paths unknown to him, had brought him from Paris to a mountain at the other end of France to present him to this village woman who instructed him, and then, like a humble disciple, asked of him lessons in perfection.

Their heavenly adventure was considered by both as among the greatest graces God ever gave them. They never forgot it and thanked Him for it every day. Louise, who did not know how to read, wanted to have copies of John Baptist's writings, even though she could not make use of them; and he could not refuse her request. She looked upon the books as a souvenir of the opportunity God had given her of seeing him, and as a deposit which she preserved like a relic in her solitude. On his side, as long as he lived De La Salle wished to profit by the vessel of election he had found hidden in the wilderness. From time to time he wrote to her amidst his greatest difficulties in order to obtain light in his doubts.

On his return to Grenoble the Servant of God gave proof of the benefits he had reaped from his contacts with an earthly angel hidden under the weakness of the female sex. His words were fiery, and his soul seemed entirely rejuvenated. His fervor was more obvious, while his ardor for perfection knew no further difficulties. He was like Moses descending from the mountain; he showed no signs of mere human nature in himself, but rather

seemed to have been deified after his intimate contacts with God and his conversations with His servant.

The Brothers who had the happiness of living with him then looked upon him with renewed admiration and listened to him with renewed respect. He rewarded their hospitality by the priceless lessons he gave them on perfection, the paths leading to it, the courage it calls for, the renovation of spirit it demands, the importance of striving for it when one is yet young, and the constancy needed in persevering in the practice of virtue.

His disciples profited by the instructions and examples given them by their father and hastened after him in the way to heaven. They drank deep of the pure water which springs forth unto eternal life, which he had brought to them with such abundance from Parménie, so that in his company they became truly spiritual men. The master could enjoy no greater consolation than that of seeing his disciples making progress in virtue.

He was experiencing this solace when a new cause of trouble came to interfere with it. He was still living with the Brothers in Grenoble when the Constitution Unigenitus was received in France and officially accepted. It was published in Grenoble, as in almost all the other dioceses of the kingdom, in the year 1714, by Bishop De Montmartin. The latter, however, later changed his attitude and issued a second pastoral letter contrary to the first one; but his second letter was not welcomed in such a Catholic diocese, except by those who had inspired it.

De La Salle had always shown great reserve with regard to the questions involved. His principle was to announce his faith by his works rather than by his words. Now, however, he felt that it was time to speak up, since everyone was taking it upon himself to give his opinion for or against the papal decree. However, to do so with more certainty and more effect, he waited till the celebrated Bull of Clement XI which condemned the 101 propositions taken from the book, Moral Reflections on the New Testament, had been duly and properly promulgated. Then he made it a matter of conscience for himself to state his position and to confess outwardly the inner sentiments of his heart, without fearing the reprisals of the powerful party which had caused him so much harassment in Provence.

De La Salle would have preferred to remain silent, if the circumstances of the times had allowed him to do so, for he was a great lover of peace. He knew that the progress of false doctrines is rarely arrested by controversy, and that calumny and persecution would be the reward of those who opposed them. On the other hand, such reticence might have made his position appear ambiguous in a matter of doctrine, or placed him among those who tolerated error or were indifferent to it, if he had failed to take sides resolutely and publicly with the adherents to the Constitution. So he spoke out and he did so with zeal; but his zeal was enlightened, wise and controlled by the motions of the Holy Spirit. He read the celebrated Bull to his disciples along with the pastoral instruction of the clergy. He explained all of the 101 propositions, made their meaning clear, showed the hidden or obvious poison that they contained, and illustrated the error and danger they involved.

His zeal would have been only half satisfied if he had limited it to his disciples alone. At a time when people from every walk in life, even women, were taking the liberty of dogmatizing and of speaking against the Holy See and the bishops, he thought that as a priest and doctor in theology he was obliged to take up the cudgels to defend the anointed of the Lord and the doctrines of the Church. The holiness of his life afforded him an advantage in dealing with error that not everyone had. The uprightness of his conduct, the purity of his morals, the austerity of his penance gave him the right to unmask the pharisaism of Quesnel's partisans, and to put to shame those who tried to assume the exterior appearance of virtue.

Without insisting as much as they on the discipline of the early centuries, without trying to pose as a great reformer or restorer of the pristine spirit of penance, he illustrated both in his person and renewed the example of the early Christians. Still, nothing bitter or offensive escaped him against the enemies of the Constitution. Without passion or false zeal he spared their persons while combating their opinions, and by his conduct he showed that it is in deed, not merely in word, that we must give praise to charity. Yet he was very careful to warn people against the Jansenists and their books. He forbade those who consulted him to have anything to do with such men or to read their works; and without saying anything bad about these new enemies of the Church, he made people fear to be led astray by them.

The Servant of God was rewarded as the saints usually are in this world. I mean that he was assailed by calumny and persecution. The friends of Quesnel, who speak and write so feelingly about charity, invented and spread lies about him in order to discredit him. It is well known what they were capable of saying about a resolute partisan of the Constitution, so we need not go into details here.

However, they did not succeed in defaming the Servant of God in Grenoble. His virtue was too well known in that city, and all the shades that the Quesnelites tried to project onto it only served to bring it out in bolder relief. On that occasion the party went down to defeat; for even those who were the least passionately involved in the dispute judged rightly that truth could not be on the side where there was no charity, and that a teaching opposed by such a great Servant of God should be rejected.

Chapter XII

What Was Going on in France during the Absence of De La Salle.

If we were permitted to judge of the actions of the saints, who conform to principles so markedly different from those of other men and who often enough act outside the ordinary rules of human prudence because they are following the motions of the Holy Spirit, we might be tempted to blame the precipitate and hidden flight of De La Salle to Provence. It occasioned great turmoil in his Institute and came near bringing about its ruin.

It would seem, in fact, that before taking this resolution, or before leaving Paris, or at least after his arrival in Provence, the holy Founder should have informed the Brothers, let them know where they could write to him, have answered them, directed them by letters from his place of retirement, and, finally, appointed the one whom he felt best qualified to take his place in Paris, one whom the others would then have honored as their superior in his absence.

John Baptist did none of these things. He went into hiding in the most distant provinces and did not want to let anyone know where he was going. He remained there unknown and did not reply to the letters he received from the Brothers. He did not even designate anyone to replace him during his absence. Finally, as far as the Brothers in France* were concerned, he showed no sign of life or movement, as though he were actually dead. No doubt a man as wise and as enlightened as he must have had very serious reasons for acting in this manner, but it is not possible for us to guess what these reasons were.

Did he want to accustom the Brothers to get along without him, and thus to oblige them finally to choose one of their number for their superior, a thing they had never wanted to do while he was among them? Perhaps he carried humility and the low sentiments he entertained of himself to the point of considering himself as a source of malediction and the cause of the troubles which constantly beset the Congregation. Perhaps he thought that some of his own disciples had gone over to his enemies and that he could no longer trust anyone. Perhaps, finally, he wished to persuade his adversaries that he no longer intervened in the government of his Institute, hoping thereby to disarm their ill-will.

Whatever may be the truth about this matter (for we are reduced to mere conjectures, De La Salle never having wished to give any explanations on this score although he was frequently asked to do so), his precipitate and hidden flight gave rise to several difficulties which followed. The first of these was that, even though there did not arise among the Brothers any dispute, as had arisen among the Apostles, as to which of them was the greatest, there was uncertainty as to whom the Brothers should obey. De La Salle not having made this clear, there was no certain rule to follow on this point.

The second disorder which followed on the first was that in the absence of any clearly recognized authority a good many faults remained uncorrected, and thus the indocile remained unpunished. A third inconvenience was that a few Brothers, weak in virtue and wavering in their vocation, considered their state as uncertain and unstable and left it. Others, suspecting that the holy Founder himself had abandoned the Institute, felt that they had a right to imitate his example. A fourth source of trouble was even more dangerous, for it gave rise to another form of government which De La Salle's rival, of whom we have so often spoken, finally managed to introduce into the Society.

The Institute seemed mortally stricken; undermined to its foundations, it threatened collapse. Its ruin had indeed begun, and it is a sort of miracle

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*France, i.e., the northern region, especially around Paris.

that it eventually managed to rise again with brighter prospects and greater success than ever. Nothing could prove more clearly that it had God for its true Author, and that the former canon of Rheims had merely lent Him his efforts. If the Institute had been John Baptist's work, it would have passed into oblivion, and people would scarcely know that there had ever existed a Community called the Brothers of the Christian Schools. But because God was its real founder, it could not be destroyed either by men or the devil. If they succeeded in altering its spirit and government for a time, that was only in order to show forth the divine power that reestablished it after its eclipse and brought it forth rejuvenated from its tomb.

At the death of Jesus Christ, the Synagogue exulted and thought that the infant Church would be buried with Him in His sepulcher. God permitted that mistake to give back a new life to the members as well as to their Head, and to show that He holds the keys to death and to life. Christ's resurrection was the miracle which served as the proof of all the others, for that miracle, the most stupendous of all, is the invincible proof of His divinity, of the truth of His religion and of His Gospel. From His death itself, Jesus Christ drew our life and His glory. It is more glorious for Him to have died and to have risen again than if He had ascended to heaven without experiencing death.

May I be permitted to apply this reflection to our present subject? If the Institute had always remained flourishing under the eyes and leadership of its Founder, in spite of all the storms that shook it, the finger of God would be quite evident, and no one could reasonably deny that the Holy Spirit was the guide of a religious family that flourished amidst persecutions. The Founder himself, seeing his children increase and greeted by the blessings of men for their outstanding reputation for holiness, would have enjoyed the consolation given to nearly all the founders of religious orders.

Instead, what characterizes him is that not long before his death he saw his Institute in turmoil; and shortly after his death (and no doubt thanks to his prayers) he could see it from heaven restored and more flourishing than ever. To whom can we attribute this sort of redemption if not to Him Who "alone does mighty deeds," as the Prophet says, to Him Who "kills and gives life," to Him Who draws good from evil and blessings from losses?

As we shall see, before his death De La Salle witnessed a new form of government imposed on his Community, which, naturally speaking, should have caused its ruin; but he also had the consolation of seeing the end of such an innovation. The great series of persecutions which at one time seemed to annihilate his Congregation only served to purge it of the unworthy members it contained, and to cause it to enter at last upon a stable and flourishing state.

While De La Salle was busy only with his own sanctification in the hidden existence he led far from Paris, the Brothers in the capital and those in the neighboring schools suffered much from his prolonged absence. They did not know what had become of him, and all the efforts they made to find out remained unavailing. The more they were attached to their vocation and to his person, the more their chagrin grew day by day. Time, which usually heals all

things, could not comfort them. Sometimes hoping to see him again, sometimes fearing to have lost him, they were sad and desolate.

They did not know the reason for his silence and seeming indifference, so that he appeared to have forgotten his sons whom he so greatly loved. Most of the Brothers, besides being uneasy over his fate, were deeply perplexed over their own. After doing all they could to discover where he was hiding, they almost despaired of finding him again. Some thought he was dead; others imagined that he had abandoned the Institute. Each one advanced his own arguments, differing from those of the others, and some were becoming unsettled in their vocation. All felt themselves hesitant and uncertain.

Their quandary was, at first, to know whether they should wait any longer before adopting some solution, or whether they should let the Institute pass through a sort of interregnum until some news came about him. In the meantime, each Director of a house would govern it as he saw fit. But as time went by and no word came from De La Salle, uncertainty also grew about what was to be done. Whom should they obey? Who should be recognized as the superior? De La Salle had not designated anyone, nor had the body of the Society chosen anyone. Had the time come to select someone? How could this election be carried out?

A body cannot subsist without a head; the members need a leader to direct them and communicate his influence to them. If De La Salle was still alive, nobody wanted any other superior. If he was dead, then it was necessary to choose another superior. But was he really dead, or was he still living? Nobody knew. Would he ever come back to the Brothers, or was he lost to them definitively? Here again nothing but uncertainty. If he were to come back some day, would it not be offering him an injury and seeming to wish to replace him if they named another superior? But if they were never to see him again, could they any longer delay in choosing another capable of succeeding him?

Supposing that an election was needed---when, where and how could it be held? Time, place and manner all presented difficulties. The only practical time for it would be during the summer holidays; any other time would cause too much disruption in the houses and schools. Where could the Brothers meet? That, too, was a knotty question. In Paris the Brothers still had many enemies, and they realized that De La Salle's rival would not fail to interfere in all their deliberations and would try secretly to control the assembly. Finally, who should convoke this meeting and decide where to hold it?

Amidst so many perplexities the Brothers were like sheep without a shepherd, without a guide or counselor, like an orphaned family that has just lost its father. Thus, nothing was done. Inaction and consternation reigned. The Brothers looked at each other and did not know what to say. They could not reassure each other nor come to any definite conclusions. Each one expected someone else to take the lead and give an order about what should be done.

To whom should they address the account of their conduct which the Rule prescribed every two months---an essential practice for the good of the Institute? Who should take the responsibility of replying to their letters? Who could arrange for new schools, change the Brothers from one place to another, correct the indocile, admit postulants, send away those who were unfit? Who could speak and act in all those matters? On all such points nothing definite could be decided.

However, the need to do something was brought home to the Brother who was at the head of those in Paris and who had been put in charge of the novitiate by De La Salle himself. He was Brother Barthélemy, a man of mild, docile and discreet character. Everything would have remained in the same confused state if he had not acted. When people came asking for De La Salle, Brother Barthélemy was the one who had to deal with them. A number of letters addressed to the Founder required prompt answers; someone had to give them. Thus, little by little and without set purpose, he found himself handling the Brothers' affairs and was considered as the Brothers' Superior in De La Salle's absence, not through a formal election but by tacit consent and unspoken approval.

Since De La Salle had put Brother Barthélemy in charge of the novitiate, it was presumed that he would have appointed him to take his place if he had thought such a measure necessary. Moreover, if the Brothers had met to elect someone, he would certainly have been their choice. He was virtuous, loved by all, and highly regarded; and as he was such a peaceable man, it was felt that his government would be peaceable also. In this they were not mistaken. In those very difficult times he adopted the wisest measures to insure that De La Salle's absence would not cause the Institute the harm that could have been feared. If he was not able to avoid all harm, he did prevent most of it. His conduct was such that the inconveniences that did occur were easy to rectify after the holy Founder's return, and even after his death.

However, he met with some opposition at first from some unruly members who were not displeased at living without any superior, and who tried to disguise their disobedience under the pretext that they did not wish to recognize any superior other than De La Salle, or that the Brother who was acting for John Baptist had neither been designated by him nor elected in a regular assembly.

Brother Barthélemy did not take umbrage at their opposition. He agreed that their hesitation in recognizing him in the superior's role was well founded, and that it was indeed possible to question his right to the title so long as no one knew for sure whether De La Salle was alive, or so long as he himself had not been given this position by a canonical election. Thus, he was governing more like an elder brother who during his father's absence was taking care of the family, rather than like a true superior.

This wise, humble and moderate attitude won him all hearts and gave him full authority. Two or three rebels were the only ones who refused to submit to him. The humble Brother endured them patiently; but as their disobedience led to disorderly conduct on their part, the principal Brothers resolved to make an example of them so that the scandal might not go any further. They

had a meeting, therefore, and dismissed those proud religious who later on might have spread to others the mortal poison of their independent spirit and thus occasioned even greater disorders.

The only mistake Brother Barthélemy made, without realizing it, was to listen to the pernicious advice given him by De La Salle's great rival. That man allowed him to take the place of the absent Superior without offering any opposition. He himself would have chosen Brother Barthélemy as superior if he had had the right to appoint anyone, for he felt that as this virtuous disciple lacked the insight, firmness and strength of mind of his Founder, he would be able to use him for his own purposes and bring him around to what he desired. Here are the means he took to succeed in his plan.

He stayed in the background and did not appear openly. If he spoke, it was through the lips of another. When he acted, it was by another's hand. I mean that he operated through a cleric entirely devoted to him, one who lent himself to whatever his master wished. This tool, who allowed himself to be manipulated in all things by his master, tried in every way possible to get Brother Barthélemy to consent to something that De La Salle (who saw through the intrigue) would never have been willing to accept. It was to drop from the Institute's Rule a number of customs and practices, and to give it a new form of government along with new regulations and new superiors.

The agent that John Baptist's secret enemy made use of was just the sort of individual he needed for the role. He was an upright man, but not too clever; he had much virtue, but little sense. He showed great zeal for what was good, but he did not understand what was best for a community. Finally, he was a man with considerable influence, thanks to his birth and family connections. The worthy ecclesiastic was so completely won over to the other's ideas that he could see only through the eyes of the other and acted only on his advice. The rival knew that his man was ready to move in whatever direction he wanted him to, and he intended to use him to control the Brothers. In this he succeeded because by means of the virtuous ecclesiastic he got Brother Barthélemy to go along with his system.

The main points of his new organization were these: (1) the Brothers should have superiors from outside the Community, men capable of directing them something like the external superiors who direct nuns; (2) the house in Paris should form a separate entity and should depend entirely on the ecclesiastical superior; (3) the novitiate should be suppressed as a useless burden; it cost too much to educate and feed all the novices; moreover, there was no need for so many in Paris, since the Brothers should remain fixed in the schools where they taught, as will be explained below; (4) the Brothers should stay in one place and not be changed from house to house; (5) to fill the gaps made by those who died or left or who had to be dismissed for misconduct, it was proposed to have one, two or three novices, more or less, in each house, according to its revenues and its personnel needs; (6) finally, a new form of government was to be set up: but about this we have no definite information.

Such a system, as is evident and as will be shown in a moment, would have turned the Institute topsy-turvy, along with all its laws and its

customs. It would have obliterated the name of De La Salle, and in ten years' time it would have thoroughly destroyed all he had worked for, so thoroughly in fact that no one would have known why the former canon of Rheims had left his native city, his family, his canonry and all his goods, nor what he had accomplished in the Church. In a word, the scheme tended to make of the Brothers' Society a series of little splinter groups, lacking subjection to a common chief and depending only on the local superiors, something like the many communities of schoolmistresses which are being multiplied in France today, and which each bishop establishes or allows to be established for his particular diocese.

But why this insistence on breaking up the Congregation of the Brothers into houses unconnected with each other and unsubordinated to any central authority? Would it not have been more natural, and more flattering to pride, to make himself the head of the whole Society, rather than of the Paris group alone? No doubt, the former solution would have been more flattering to self-love, but it was not possible. The Founder's rival could perhaps captivate and keep dependent on himself the Brothers in Paris; he had at his disposal the means necessary to do so. But his power did not extend any farther. He knew that the other Brothers would not have been willing to acknowledge him as their superior or to obey him.

In addition, if he had undertaken to govern all the Brothers, he would have had to assume the responsibility of providing for them, something he was not prepared to undertake; for at that time the Brothers often had to suffer privations during times of public calamities. Finally, he would have had to keep up the novitiate De La Salle had started. That would require a good deal of money too, and he did not venture to underwrite such a heavy expense. So, out of necessity, he had to limit himself to the scheme outlined above.

To get Brother Barthélemy to agree to the plan, De La Salle's rival took the quickest way. He had the Brothers' salaries cut off, so that the Brothers had to go on starvation rations and were in need of everything. When they went to collect the money due them, or even to ask for charity, they were told to apply to X..., a very religious and generous priest who would surely come to their help. They were also advised to show much confidence in him, even to choose him for their superior. They were assured that they would find in him a firm resource in all their needs, that he was another De La Salle. The Brothers, however, were in no hurry to follow his advice. They were wary, and rightly so. They had not lost hope of seeing their father again, and they feared that if he returned and found his place occupied by some stranger he might decide to give up the whole matter permanently.

X..., the virtuous ecclesiastic whom we have just mentioned, was an outstanding man in many ways. He sought only what was good, even when he let himself be manipulated by De La Salle's enemy. He often came to visit the Brothers in his role as their ecclesiastical superior.* He called himself

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*This priest was De Brou, who although not a Sulpician was closely connected with that Community, and especially with De La Chétardye.

such, hoping that the Brothers would eventually give him the position, and he urged them to do so. He said he wanted to be their protector, benefactor and father. He promised to use his influence in their favor and to bestow on them his services and his liberalities. They could have had all his help, in fact, if they had been willing to put him in De La Salle's place; for by reserving to the Brothers the liberal alms he bestowed in other directions he would have made them quite rich. By dint of favors and benefactions which he gave the Brothers when they were in need, he accustomed them to allowing him the title which he had first assumed by his own accord---in other words, to calling him their superior, since the term pleased him so much.

However, it was not merely the name but the reality and the rights attached to the position that he was really after. He wanted the Brothers to call him their superior and to act towards him with the spirit of dependence that becomes inferiors. That was more difficult for him to obtain. After all, words are cheap, and nobody ever went bankrupt by making compliments.

What the ecclesiastic wanted from the Brothers was not an empty title but real jurisdiction and complete authority. Fully aware of the Brothers' situation, to make his election more rapid and certain he decided to suspend all his alms in their favor and to have the Brothers' salaries held back. He succeeded in making the Brothers suffer a great deal and undergo a veritable famine, but he did not succeed in getting them to choose him as superior in due form.

In the meantime, he tried to exercise authority which had not yet been given him. He would not allow Brother Barthélemy to admit postulants without his permission, and he took it upon himself to send candidates away; for according to the system he wanted to introduce, only three or four novices were to be kept. That was an infallible way to destroy the Institute; for if the measure had been kept in effect for any length of time, the Institute would not have been able to survive.

Yet that was the situation De La Salle found when he finally returned from Provence; there were then only three or four young men in the novitiate. Brother Barthélemy no longer counted. He had let himself be captivated and dominated by the person of whom we speak. If he had wanted to take in a larger number of novices, he could not have done so because he had been deprived of the means of providing for them. He did not, like De La Salle, possess the secret of finding resources in the treasury of our heavenly Father.

However, that was the sum total of what De La Salle's rival had then been able to accomplish through the instrumentality of his agent. In spite of the latter's efforts, he made no headway in the area where he really wanted to dictate. Some of the older Brothers, who loved Brother Barthélemy, resisted vigorously and encouraged each other not to give in. They were willing to give the title of superior to the man who seemed so eager to have it and who bestowed it upon himself; but the title, without the corresponding authority, did not satisfy him.

He even took occasion of their calling him thus to try to extract real authority from the Brothers. "You call me your superior," he told them one day, "but you should show concretely that I am really such." And for fear that the Brothers might seem to misunderstand his words, he added that he wanted a formal statement drawn up which, after being signed by the Brothers, would be included in the house register. That was an important point, one which would affect the very essence of the Institute. Foreseeing that some such circumstance might arise, De La Salle had bound the Brothers, as we related above, to decide that after his death they would elect no one but one of themselves as superior. In doing so, what he had in mind when he wished to give up his position as superior, was to oblige the Brothers to choose someone from among their ranks to succeed him.

The point seemed so essential to De La Salle that he wished to see it put into effect while he still lived, so that once he was dead there might not be any difficulty about it. It was, therefore, very important that the Brothers not yield to the proposal made by their protector. We must blame the lack of firmness displayed by Brother Barthélemy in agreeing to it. He did what was asked of him out of complaisance. After De La Salle returned, however, the page was torn out of the register to do away with the record of the mistake.

Having led the Brothers to the first stage, the ecclesiastic wanted to push them even farther so as to carry out his plan. He did not explain himself, and he spoke of his scheme only in monosyllables. He wished to prepare their minds and to win them over to his project before explaining it clearly. He made great promises. He offered to put them in possession of an endowed house. But he always added an "if"---a condition which he implied without stating it plainly.

Finally, whether he thought that his time had come or whether he wished to feel out their reactions, he on one occasion proposed the new form of government. One of the articles stated that each house of the Institute would train its own candidates. A second specified that the relationships between the houses would be discontinued. A third was the conclusion of the previous one, namely, that the house in Paris would be a unit unto itself.

He was not listened to. To avoid an argument, the Brothers respectfully answered that before deciding they needed to get the opinions and consent of the Brothers in the provinces. The good Brothers congratulated themselves on having parried the thrust. They thought they had won; but they were deceived by the simplicity or the exaggerated complaisance of Brother Barthélemy, who did not see the consequences of the step he was being asked to take.

X... was an upright man who meant no evil; but the one who was manipulating him and whom he served so well was a crafty person and knew how to open doors that had been shut in his face. His suggestion was to get Brother Barthélemy to write to the Directors of the various houses, asking them to look for an outside superior capable of directing them and of taking care of their affairs. If Brother Barthélemy were to fall into this trap, the cunning Achitophel would have managed to accept in another way the proposals that had been rejected, and in spite of the Brothers' refusal he would have

succeeded in introducing a new type of government, thus succeeding in his designs. To fool Brother Barthélemy about the essential matter, to get him not only to subscribe to it himself but even to promote its execution and to be the one to bring it about, the priest told him how much he was to be pitied for being in charge of such a work, so difficult to direct, according to him, that he was laden with a weight which De La Salle himself had not been able to bear, and which he had finally got rid of.

The priest and his master continued that this responsibility was heavier for Brother Barthélemy than for the Founder, since he did not have the latter's character, authority or experience, and did not find among the Brothers the same affection, docility and trust. They told him further that if he did not wish to be crushed by the burden that had overwhelmed De La Salle himself, he needed to secure the backing of the authority of a number of clergymen, persons of influence in the places where the Brothers were established, and to turn over to the outside superiors the greater part of his responsibilities.

Such superiors, thanks to their prestige, would be able to maintain regularity among the Brothers, reduce the indocile to obedience, and bring back to the path of duty those who were inclined to take too much liberty. Without their help he would never manage to control men who could with impunity throw off the yoke of obedience.

Although specious, the advice seemed wise to Brother Barthélemy who did not foresee its consequences. He did not even dream of suspecting that any motive other than charity had inspired it. He thanked those who thus counseled him and asked them how he could put their suggestions into effect. The means for doing so were at hand. Brother Barthélemy had reached the point where they wanted him, and only one further step was needed. It was not difficult.

They told him that he should write to all the houses of the Institute and persuade the Brothers to select for themselves an outside superior who would be able to govern and uphold them during the absence of De La Salle, of whom nothing had been heard for so long. At the same time they promised Brother Barthélemy to send letters over their own signatures to confirm his. Indeed, Brother Barthélemy's letter was accompanied by another from a well-known ecclesiastical personage, which lent efficacy to what he said.

Soon De La Salle had on every side a multitude of vicars who were supposed to play the superior's role. The Institute had as many superiors as it numbered different establishments. Thus, the system so long planned by the secret rival of De La Salle and which he had not previously succeeded in implementing, finally came into being. He had labored during ten years to have it accepted, but each time he had tried to impose it he had met with confusion.

Now the time was ripe to put his plan into effect, and he did not fail to seize it. The long absence of the holy Founder had encouraged his adversary to set his project in motion again and to get it accepted. It had

been proposed to the Brothers and immediately rejected by them, but guile succeeded where authority had failed. The scheme was presented under a disguised form; it was given a different appearance. Under a deceitful mask it was agreed to, at least by the one who was acting as superior.

Thus far the adversary of the holy Founder was able to go, but no farther. At that point, when naturally speaking the Institute should have been fragmented, it was the new system that failed and came to nothing. All the storms of previous persecutions, like the waves of a tumultuous sea, soon died down and were quelled. To put the virtue of His servant to a final test, God willed to give his enemy what looked like complete victory, and to De La Salle the mortification of witnessing what looked like the certain and imminent ruin of his Institute when the new form of government was introduced.

That crisis was probably the bitterest pill that the Servant of God ever had to swallow in all his life. But he had to endure only the bitterness, and he thereby won the merit of his patience and submission to God's orders. After testing this new Job in all manner of ways---by the loss of his goods and of his spiritual children, by infirmities and painful illnesses, by outrages and continual persecution, and at last by the sorrow of seeing his life work on the brink of destruction---the Almighty gave him back a new family, reestablished his Institute, made it more flourishing than ever, and in the end rendered it secure and unshakable.

For He Who had permitted the evil to occur had also prepared the remedy for it. He inspired the new superiors with the right attitude they needed to adopt, in the absence of De La Salle, with regard to his Institute. They limited themselves to declaring that they were its protectors and guardians, while leaving to the Directors of the houses and the Brother who acted as superior all their rights. They upheld the latter's authority, helped to put superiors and inferiors into communication with each other, and in a word did what De La Salle himself would have done if he had been able to be present in each diocese.*

In addition, some of the new local superiors, realizing the dangerous consequences that this new type of organization could lead to, did their best to have it rescinded. They warned Brother Barthélemy that he should take steps to secure a revocation, and suggested to him ways of doing so. Also, those who were interested in the welfare of the Institute and who had kept a high regard for De La Salle were deeply alarmed by the strange innovations and feared lest the Christian schools might come to an end with the one who had founded them. A number of the principal Brothers, more enlightened than the others, more familiar with the nature of their Institute and with the right way of governing it, complained aloud about the new system, asserting that the service some people claimed to be doing the Society was really a mortal blow for it.

What, they asked, is the purpose of this new type of arrangement that is being introduced? Do they want to deprive the Founder of the right to govern

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*Blain himself was one of these "local superiors" and helped the Brothers in Rouen.

his Institute, so that when he returns he will find the doors of all the houses closed to him--houses that he himself founded? Is the idea merely to sustain the Brothers during his absence and keep them true to his spirit? To keep watch over the Institute, as it were, so that on his return he may find it just as he left it? Do they want to give his creation a more appropriate form, correct its defects and consolidate its foundations? Or do they want to create a new Institute on the ruins of the old? No matter how these changes are presented, they still amount to pernicious novelties, born of malice or at least dreamed up by mistaken zeal.

All this, and more which we omit, was told to Brother Barthélemy by several of the principal Brothers, and even by some of the ecclesiastical superiors chosen in the various dioceses to replace the absent Founder. Those men, clear-sighted and full of concern for the Institute of the Christian Schools, regretted that such evil counsels had been followed and offered their help to limit the damage that was bound to result.

Their role placed De La Salle's Institute in their hands, so to speak. It would have been easy for them to dismember it piece by piece, in accordance with the new plan of reorganization, and to take the leadership of that section committed to each of them. They could have made themselves the heads of those little individual congregations, and have won for themselves very cheaply the title of founders by making new regulations and introducing new practices against the will of the true Founder. It was thus, apparently, that the authors of the new system had hoped to hoodwink the local superiors. But whatever may have been their true intentions, the Almighty, Who allowed the project to be suggested, did not allow it to be carried out.

To put a stop to the disintegration of the Institute, three or four steps were suggested to Brother Barthélemy. First, to undertake a general visitation of all the establishments, to win over by kind and gentle persuasion the Director and the Brothers in each house, and to convince them not to interrupt the contacts they had with him and their connection with the body of the Society. The second was to prevail on them not to involve the outside superiors in any but external affairs and in those where their protection might be needed.

The third recommendation was not to call the ecclesiastics "superiors" but "protectors." The fourth and final suggestion was to call a general assembly of the principal Brothers at Saint Yon during the vacation period in order to deliberate on the general welfare of the Institute, to make a fervent retreat together and to be renewed in spirit; and then in the absence of De La Salle to choose a Superior General and to stipulate that the outside superior would be considered only as a protector, to be dealt with in the same way that at Rome religious orders deal with their Cardinal Protectors, who are assigned to them to favor them with their benevolent influence.

Those ecclesiastical superiors who had given such advice were the first to conform thereto. They refused to perform any act of jurisdiction in regard to the Brothers. They would not even assist at their meetings nor concern themselves with the internal affairs of the houses. They limited themselves to giving advice when asked, and beyond that they left the Brothers free to be

governed by their acting Superior and kept for themselves only the right of being helpful on occasion. The remarkable thing, which shows that God's hand was on De La Salle's Community, was that all the other superiors did of their own accord, or rather by divine inspiration, what those we have been speaking of had suggested. They all considered themselves simply as the Brothers' protectors, and did not try to interfere in any way in their manner of living. What difficulties did arise among the Brothers were not due to these ecclesiastics but to the new system itself which John Baptist's enemies were trying to introduce.

It did cause some disturbance among Brothers of differing characters, the tepid and the fervent, the docile and the rebellious. Many did not know what to think under the circumstances. Some bewailed the absence of De La Salle as if it were the cause of all the trouble; others longed for his return, considering it the only remedy for the decadence of the Institute. Some, despairing of seeing either the remedy or the liberator, were tempted to leave an Institute which was being so profoundly modified that in fact it was becoming a different one altogether. Others were glad to camouflage the reasons for their departure by their complaints over what was happening.

In the end, several did leave, among them some of the older and better members. They were weary of being forever in an uncertain and unstable situation. But most who left turned away from their state as schoolmasters only because they thought that they were being urged to give up their vocation as Brothers.

From every side letters were written to De La Salle about all this. The writers earnestly reproached him for his absence. Most of the letters were wrongly addressed because his whereabouts were not known. Hence the letters never reached him. But one letter would have been enough to tell him more than he wanted to know. He was finally informed, and the news afflicted him grievously. Of all the letters which the Brothers and those interested in the Institute's welfare sent him, a few did get through and apprised him of the disorder and trouble that his enemies had succeeded in introducing into the Society, and the decadence which threatened it unless he himself returned without delay to sustain it with the same hands that had laid its foundations.

The bad news was, in the divine counsels, the greatest trial that God had in store for John Baptist. On learning the true situation, this second Job submitted to God's orders, adored His incomprehensible designs, blessed His holy name, and abandoned himself to His adorable will. Yet he did not let himself lose courage. He hoped against hope, like Abraham, being convinced that if God so willed, He could bring forth new children for him out of the very stones and raise the Institute up again, making it more flourishing than ever. "God be blessed!" he said. "If this is His work, He will take care of it."

His trust in God was not in vain. Other, more comforting letters began to arrive, informing him that the situation was not quite so desperate as it had at first been represented. God had succeeded in drawing good from evil in favor of the Institute. The local superiors had acted as fathers and protectors for the Brothers, helped them with their advice and encouraged them to observe their Rule, without interfering in the internal affairs or the domestic government of the various houses.

Some of the superiors had advised Brother Barthélemy about what was not going right, so that he might remedy it, so great was their unwillingness to violate the rights of the acting Superior or to cause more difficulty in the houses. Some Brothers, in fact, had approached them to get their help in personal problems; but as that might have adversely affected the general good, the priests had wisely told them to take such matters up with their superiors who were the rightful judges in such cases. Thus when De La Salle returned, he had the satisfaction of learning that the new system of government had not led to any unfortunate consequences.

It would seem that the unrest that was pervading the Institute, especially the Brothers in Paris, as a result of his absence, should have made De La Salle decide to return there and set everything straight. However, convinced that he was more fit to destroy than to build up and that God did not need him to protect His work, he thought only of remaining hidden even more than he had been thus far. All the arguments which filled the letters sent to him to get him to leave his solitude were not enough to convince him. He did not even answer the letters that the Brothers wrote him on the subject, hoping to accustom them to forget him entirely, and to discourage them by his obstinate silence.

His strategy, however, did not succeed. The more he wanted to be forgotten, the more the Brothers thought of him and realized that they could no longer live without him. His long absence had taught them how dear he ought to be to them, and how necessary his return was. They importuned him unceasingly and wearied him by their letters. Finally, seeing that all such appeals were useless, they hit upon one means which would prove effective in making him come back. Since he paid no attention to their desires, their tears, their prayers, they considered the idea of sending him an order and of commanding him to return.

The expedient was a bold one with no precedent. The very fact of giving him an order seemed to be an infringement of his legitimate authority which they were bound to respect. But what else could they do? Necessity knows no law, says the proverb; and charity sometimes makes one take extraordinary steps. If on this occasion the sons gave orders to their father, it was only so that they might obey him again. If the disciples prescribed a law to their master, it was only because they wanted to be ruled by him.

The principal Brothers of Paris, Versailles and Saint Denis held a meeting and agreed to write him a letter in the name of the entire Institute. In it, after trying to convince him by invoking the most tender and touching arguments, they ordered him in the name of the obedience which he, as they, had vowed to the Institute, to come back to Paris without delay. Their missive, couched in simple and straightforward language, shows so evidently the esteem and veneration they entertained for their holy Founder and their fear of losing him that it suffices to quote it in full to refute everything that his enemies ever said about the harshness of his government and the stubbornness with which he was reproached.

"Our very dear Father, we, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God, the greater good of the

Church and of our Society, recognize that it is of the utmost importance that you should again take up the care and general government of the holy work of God, which is also yours, since it has pleased the Lord to make use of you to establish it and to direct it for such a long time. Everyone is convinced that God gave you and still gives you the graces and talents needed to govern properly this new Society which is so useful to the Church; and it is only just for us to acknowledge that you have always governed it with much success and edification. This is why we very humbly beseech you and command you in the name and on behalf of the Body of this Society to which you have promised obedience, to resume without delay the general government of our Society. In testimony of which we have signed, done at Paris this first day of April, 1714. We are with most profound respect, our dear Father, your humble and obedient inferiors."

In my opinion this letter is an outstanding testimonial to De la Salle's exceptional virtue. The Brothers must have had a very high idea of their Founder's humility and obedience to dare to write him in that way and to believe that he would be willing to submit to a command which was certainly out of place in the mouths of those who issued it. The Brothers would have been inexcusable if their simplicity and their need had not authorized such a step.

A man less humble than their Superior would have been irritated and shocked by such imperious language, and he would have taken his revenge by maintaining a profound silence or by sending a sharp reply. But the Brothers never feared anything of the sort. They knew too well the character of their Superior to have any doubts. In all circumstances he had given them such extraordinary examples of humility and obedience that they felt they had a right to expect this one also, and even to require it of him. They were right.

However, such an extraordinary letter at first surprised the Servant of God. If he had not recognized the signatures of the Brothers, he might have suspected that it had been forged or that it was a pious stratagem invented by some of those most zealous for the Institute and most closely attached to his person. But, though unable to question the genuineness of the letter, he was stunned as he read it, not sure whether he should blame the writers' boldness or praise the zeal which had inspired it. The various thoughts which passed through his mind as he read the letter finally led him to defer to his inferiors and to give them once again an outstanding example of submission and dependence, since that was what they expected of him.

On learning of his decision, some friends opposed it as strongly as they could, but he replied that he had to obey. "Whom do you wish to obey?" they inquired. "Have you a superior in your Community?" "I want to obey the Brothers," he replied. "They are commanding me to return to Paris." "A strange reversal of roles," they exclaimed. "The legislator receiving orders from those to whom he should prescribe laws!"

In vain did they strive to convince him that he had no orders to take from his inferiors, his sons who were simple Brothers, while he was their Superior and father, a priest and Founder. Nothing could swerve him from his

resolve, however; he reiterated it, declaring that since he had made a vow of obedience, he was resolved to submit himself, and by his deference to the orders that the Brothers had pointed out for him in their letter, to give an authentic example of the dependence that he had promised before the altar; that after having taught obedience for so long by words it was only right for him to begin teaching it by deed. This humble maxim reduced his friends to silence. They were as much edified as surprised. They congratulated the Brothers on having a Superior who gave them such an example; they could not doubt that an Institute founded on such heroic acts of virtue was indeed the work of God and would emerge gloriously from the abyss of crosses and persecutions in which it seemed to have been swallowed up and ready to perish.

De Saleon, today the bishop of Agen, and Didier, a canon of Saint Lawrence who was kind enough to add to his title of the Brothers' protector that of their confessor, were the ones who felt the deepest sorrow over the fact that they were about to lose their holy friend.

The Visitandines of the monastery in Grenoble also showed their profound regret. John Baptist had chosen their church to say Mass in, and the degree of devotion and piety he showed while offering the Holy Sacrifice had taught them to know and to honor him. The dignity with which he officiated at the altar used to attract nearly all these religious to his Mass, although it was not the community Mass.

After saying his farewells in the city, the Servant of God spent the last night before his departure in prayer, recommending to God his journey and the Brothers of the house which had sheltered him. Before leaving he noticed that one of them had had some little clash with the Brother Director. He hastened to smooth it over and left them all in peace after exhorting them, like a new Saint Barnabas, to persevere in union, charity, fidelity to their vocation, the spirit of retirement and avoidance of the world. It is easy to understand how distressed the Brothers were over the separation. It was all the more grievous for them since they knew they would never see De La Salle again.

De La Salle departed for Lyons. On arriving there his devotion led him to the tomb of Saint Francis De Sales, where he remained in prayer for an hour to obtain from God the spirit of that great saint and his protection for his Institute. Some of the Founder's acquaintances, whom he went to visit in the city, wished to keep him with them for a while, but he excused himself saying that obedience made it imperative for him to get back to Paris as soon as possible.

From Lyons he proceeded to Dijon, where the Brothers welcomed him with joy mingled with sadness because of the short time he could spend with them, to console them for his long absence. Finally he reached Paris on August 10, 1714.

Chapter XIII.

De La Salle's Return to and Reception in Paris. New Affronts Offered to Him. He Delivers a Possessed Person.

De La Salle had come back to Paris at the voice of obedience. He made his appearance there like an inferior and said to the Brothers when he met them: "Here I am; what do you want of me?" The Brothers were seized with astonishment and could say only that they wanted him to take up again the general direction of the Institute. The Servant of God objected that since, during his absence, the work had been preserved by the Almighty Hand Which had begun it, his help was not needed. He added that they should suppose him dead, and act as though he were no longer in this world.

The Founder further declared that he was resolved to live thenceforth as a private individual, a status to which Providence had led him by secret paths; and that after having tasted the joy of living without the burden of responsibility for others, he could not bring himself to reassume such an onerous duty. Furthermore, he insisted, it was time to think of choosing a Superior General who by ruling wisely could repair the harm he himself had done.

That was what the holy Founder really wanted to get the Brothers to do. He had already tried several times to convince them of it, even in the early days of the Society; but his humility had never succeeded in overcoming his sons' inflexibility on this point. However, in his project he now had more than one aim in view. Besides his great love of dependency which constantly urged him to take the last place, he wanted to introduce into the Society before he died, and to authorize by his example, the form of government which should remain in force after him.

De La Salle feared lest at his death an attempt might be made to give the Brothers a superior not belonging to their Community. It was to forestall such an eventuality which, he considered, would result in the ruination of the Congregation that he had bound the Brothers by a vow (as was pointed out at the proper time) to choose a superior for themselves as soon as he was dead.

His fears were not idle ones, for, as we have seen, after ten years of intrigues to set up an outsider as superior in Paris, his enemy had finally succeeded. To make sure that this situation did not perpetuate itself, De La Salle thought it essential to elect one of the Brothers as superior so as to make any outside superior who might appoint himself to the position entirely superfluous, and to put the Community in a position to conduct its own affairs in its own way without external interference.

This was what he wanted to see during his lifetime so that on dying he might hope that his departure from this world would not introduce any changes in the Brothers' way of governing themselves. On the contrary, he was afraid that if during his life the latter failed to exercise their right to govern

themselves, as all other Congregations do, they might definitively lose the prerogative after his death.

However, again this time all his efforts were of no avail. He could not win his disciples' consent to his stepping down, although he had been seeking to do so for so many years. They had not made him come back in order to remove him from office. Anybody else in his place would never be to their liking. They could not get along without him, nor withdraw from his authority. So they all knelt at his feet to show him their respect and their submission to his orders.

The Servant of God, once again deprived of what he so desired, retired to his poor cell with a heart full of sadness because he could not escape a burden which had become so wearisome for him and which he thought he had finished bearing. The release which he had been trying to obtain for so long, and for which he offered constant prayers to God, was finally granted to him, but only two years later. However, during this interval he kept only the title of superior, and let Brother Barthélemy take care of the details of administration. The latter, however, did nothing without consulting him. The Servant of God did not even wish to direct the house or preside over the spiritual exercises.

What he did keep in his hands was the exercise of his sacred ministry, which he could not hand over to any Brother. He said Mass for the Brothers, confessed them, and on Sundays and feasts gave them a spiritual exhortation lasting a half-hour. The rest of the time he remained in his room, praying, reading Holy Scripture and other pious books, and composing spiritual treatises for the benefit of his sons. His manner of acting disappointed the Brothers somewhat. They felt that they had him back only in part and regretted not being able to profit more fully by his presence. But they dissimulated their displeasure for fear of causing him any grief; moreover, they hoped that little by little they would bring him around to what they desired.

As it was decreed in the counsels of eternal wisdom that every day of John Baptist's life should be marked by the cross, it was not long before he encountered new humiliations. His great enemy no longer lived; God had called him while the Servant of God was still at Grenoble.* The news of the former's death which he received there had hastened his return to Paris, for he would not have dared to come back if that man had still been alive. De La Salle himself stated this to some of the Brothers he trusted. But his powerful adversary, although no longer living, had left behind him people who inherited his views and his prejudices against the Servant of God.

One of them affected to be highly scandalized because De La Salle continued to hear the Brothers' confessions, believing that he was not authorized to do so. His intemperate zeal over this pretended irregularity drew from him expressions of shocked surprise which he made known to Brother Barthélemy. He even went so far as to question De La Salle about it. The

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*De La Chétardye died June 29, 1714.

latter allayed his astonishment on this score, but caused him even greater amazement which he showed him the extensive faculties he had received from His Eminence Cardinal De Noailles when he first became archbishop of Paris, and which were granted without any time limit. The ecclesiastic in question was all the more astounded at the authorization because he did not know of anyone else who had received such ample powers and because he himself did not enjoy anything like the same privilege, although his rank and birth might have made it seem that he should.

Not being able to harass John Baptist on this point, he initiated a quarrel with him on another, God permitting all this for the greater perfection of His servant. The priest of whom we speak was really devoted to what was good, and his virtue was even superior to his high rank; but he was imbued with the false ideas of his deceased master and seems to have wanted to cause the latter's animosity against John Baptist to revive in him. He was seeking some way to cause trouble. He was not happy over the holy Founder's return to Paris and did not know how he could get him to leave again.

It may be that the presence of the Servant of God cast him and his title of the Brothers' superior in the shade, or perhaps he wanted to go ahead with the execution of the new scheme of government and realized that it had no chance of succeeding so long as De La Salle was on the scene. Whatever may have been his motive, he wrote out a memorandum and sent it to De La Salle, demanding a reply.

These were the questions he wanted answered promptly and precisely:

1. Who will be the superiors of the Brothers' communities?
2. What vows will the Brothers make?
3. Who should be contacted when new foundations are to be erected?
4. What salary will be required?
5. What Rule will be followed in the Society?

These questions were insidious and ticklish, especially the first one on which the rest depended. The Servant of God could not answer without furnishing new weapons to his adversaries and walking into the trap laid for him. If he answered that in the future the superiors of the Brothers' houses would have to be members of the Society, that they had to be Brothers and not priests or outsiders, his opponents would have found fault with all such terms for they would have argued that he himself was bringing in an innovation and changing the original organization of the Society, since he, although a priest, was its Superior and had been since the beginning.

They would have taxed him with pride and singularity because he wanted to be the only one of his kind, so to speak, and did not wish that after him the Community should ever have another priest-superior. They would have accused him of narrow-minded and eccentric thinking because he felt that the Congregation would be better governed by simple Brothers, without learning or culture, than by enlightened and scholarly clerics. They would have faulted him for condemning what had just been done so successfully, and for objecting to the naming of ecclesiastical superiors for the Brothers in their various houses. That would have meant wounding deeply the author of the memorandum,

who had been the primary instigator of this undertaking. Finally, it would have meant telling him that he was not recognized as the superior of the Brothers in Paris, and that he was usurping a title that nobody had a right to give him.

On the other hand, if De La Salle had replied that in the future the superiors of the Brothers' houses would be priests like himself, like those who had been appointed in the various dioceses, then,

1. He would have approved the new form of government which his enemies were trying to introduce, and had in fact introduced, and which he considered as a calamity and a source of the total ruination of his Institute.

2. He would have excluded himself from the Society and would have given his enemies legitimate pretexts for driving him from it. They might have asked him why he had come back to Paris, since there was already an ecclesiastical superior there.

3. De La Salle would have destroyed what he had built up. He would have encouraged the Brothers to violate the vow which he had inspired them to make, namely, to choose after his death neither priest nor outsider as superior, but only a Brother from their own ranks.

Of course, the ecclesiastic had no rights and no semblance of authority over De La Salle; hence the latter could have refused to reply and have asked the questioner why he was meddling in what was none of his business; but the Servant of God was too humble to do anything of the sort. It is also quite certain that if De La Salle had brought the list of questions to the Cardinal, who had never authorized them and who did not look with such a favorable eye on those who were the authors, it would have drawn down his indignation on the intriguers. But the Servant of God was too wise to stir up such a tempest and too charitable to want to avenge himself on those who were eager to have a chance to cause him more trouble.

The simplest thing for him to do was to pay no attention to the crafty questions and to answer them only with silence. But that he did not dare to do. Although the ecclesiastic had no authority over him, he had usurped it over the Brothers, and they needed him. He could do them much good and also much harm.

Thus humility, charity and prudence made it a duty for De La Salle to reply. Humility, for it always made him think of himself as the lowest of all and led him to abase himself before everybody and to submit to all as though they were his superiors, in the spirit of what the Apostles Saints Peter and Paul taught their disciples. John Baptist was so filled with humility that he never addressed the cleric of whom we speak except with deep respect. He dealt with him as with his superior. He received his corrections and often put up with his harsh and scornful treatment without being offended. Charity made it a necessity for him to answer in order to parry the blows that the priest could aim at the Brothers. Finally, prudence also suggested a reply. He needed to make his own position known; otherwise his silence might have authorized more innovations.

Thus, his quandary was considerable. The questions were artfully couched, and De La Salle knew that their author was eager to entrap him in what he might say. Finally, since he had to answer, he abandoned himself to the Spirit of God and responded in all simplicity what he felt God had inspired him with on each of the questions except the first. His reply, forwarded to the one who expected it, only embittered more deeply a man who wanted to be embittered, and who sought an occasion for an outburst against the Servant of God. He appeared indignant that no answer had been given to the first question. That was the point on which he wanted a definite answer, because all the rest depended on it.

To satisfy him the holy Founder should have replied that the Brothers in Paris would be governed by his opponent and by the* Any other answer would have irritated him, for that was what he really wanted: to have himself named superior by the Founder himself, to the exclusion of the latter; and to have John Baptist hand over the Brothers in Paris to his full power and control. That was precisely what De La Salle feared and what he considered as the complete subversion of his Society. The displeasure evinced by the ecclesiastic in question worried him very deeply because he could foresee what would follow from it; but he did not let the matter influence him.

He left it all in God's hands and replied that he could not give any answer to the first question. At that time there was really no one exercising the superior's role. De La Salle, the real Superior, did not wish to perform any function of the position. The Brothers had not chosen anybody else. Only two years later did they finally elect Brother Barthélemy. Their persistent refusal to accept the resignation of their Founder and De La Salle's constancy in refusing to act as the superior left everything up in the air. It seemed an excellent opportunity for the man who was trying to intrude himself into the Community to get the title of superior for himself from the Servant of God, so that he might then arrogate to himself the authority the title confers and thus complete the implementation of the new system of government.

Even if De La Salle had not had serious reasons to be cautious, prudence would not have allowed him to give any reply to the first question posed; for, as he said: "If I put down in writing that the Brothers' Community will be governed by X..., I will risk the displeasure of the archbishop of Paris. If I say that it will be subject to the archbishop, I will draw down upon myself and the Brothers the ill-will of these gentlemen."

Such weighty reasons prevented him from hazarding a response to the first article and from exposing himself to the disadvantages which must ensue. Consequently, he was punished for not replying, and the Brothers had to suffer the consequences. That was what De La Salle had feared, but he was prepared.

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*Blain says "the Messieurs of xxxx". Did he possibly mean the Sulpicians? De Brou, the ecclesiastic in question, although not a member of the Society of Saint Sulpice, was close to them and worked with them. Chétardye had used him as his tool.

The one who was causing all the trouble had been clever enough to have the Brothers' salaries placed in his hands. He was firmly resolved not to give them the money due them until De La Salle satisfied him by providing him with the answer he wanted. When the salaries fell due, he asked the Brothers who had come to collect them whether De La Salle had given his answer. The simple and straightforward Brothers said frankly that he had not because he did not know what to respond. That was a new disappointment for a man who wanted the title of superior from the lips of De La Salle himself and who had made up his mind to get it in exchange for the sum owed the Brothers. He refused to give them the money.

De La Salle was not surprised at the refusal because he had expected it. But the Brothers urged him to answer, pointing out the lack of funds in the house, and they did all they could to rouse him from the inaction in which he remained about the matter. But he still refused to reply, foreseeing that no matter what he said there would be unfortunate consequences to contend with.

As the Brothers could not get anything out of him on this point, and as on the other hand they were in pressing need, they decided to give an answer themselves, for they thought that a reply from them would not involve the same disadvantages as one coming from De La Salle, would secure for them the funds justly due them, and would deliver their Superior from the difficulty in which he had been for the past six weeks. Without going into the details of what happened on this occasion, suffice it to say that the Brothers found a way, if not to satisfy the author of the questions, at least to make him appear satisfied.

Here is the answer they gave in writing to the first question: "The Institute of the Brothers will be directed by X.... who, in agreement with X..., will select an ecclesiastical superior."

Although they knew that this answer would not please him, they felt sure he would have to be content with it because he himself had given the Brothers the advice that "when some difficulty arises they should get together, two or three of them, as the Gospel suggests, to resolve it." Thus they felt he would approve whatever they decided in this manner. It also followed from his advice that since the Brothers had decided that it was not up to De La Salle to answer the question but up to them, X.... had no reason to insist that De La Salle should do so.

Things turned out as the Brothers had foreseen. The priest read the paper and handed it back to them smiling, without any sign of displeasure. When the Brothers came home, they showed the paper to De La Salle and told him that X.... seemed satisfied. The holy Founder heaved a deep sigh and exclaimed, "My God, what a heavy weight you have removed from my heart!"

The next day a Brother went to collect the salaries, which were punctually paid, and that was the last that was heard of the business. Afterwards, De La Salle was more firmly resolved than ever to abdicate his position, and he took even greater care not to exercise his authority in any way. He remained nearly always in his room, praying and reading and composing meditations for the Brothers' use; other than that he limited himself to

hearing their confessions and to giving them spiritual conferences on Sundays and feasts.

About a year after De La Salle had returned to Paris, Chevalier D'Armestat entered the Brothers' novitiate. The young man belonged to an aristocratic German family and had served for several years in the emperor's army under Prince Eugène. After the battle of Denain* he left the army for unknown reasons. He passed through Lyons and stopped there for some time. During his stay in the city the exorcism of a possessed woman was the current topic of conversation and excited the curiosity of people with nothing much to do.

He, too, became curious to witness the spectacle and to learn whether what people said about diabolical possession was indeed true. Perhaps he simply wanted to make fun of the exorcism and of the simplemindedness of Catholics who, as religious innovators claim, are too credulous about such matters. A Protestant like D'Armestat was not apt to look upon the exorcism ceremony as anything but a charade to amuse people. As a soldier, he took pride in being an agnostic and in not believing in the existence of demons.

With such dispositions he entered the church where the exorcism was being carried out. Salvation, which he received on entering, was a gift to him from the devil through the mouth of the possessed woman, a reward either of his curiosity or his incredulity. He learned more about exorcism than he had wanted to know because the possessed woman looked at him and, trembling with rage, told him: "You don't believe that there are any demons; but one day you will experience their fury." Never was a man more surprised. If he had come to mock, he soon found matter for tears.

Struck by such a salutary truth that God was revealing to him through the father of lies, he pondered it seriously, and his reflections immediately led him to abjure Lutheranism and to take instructions in the Catholic and Roman faith. He lost no time. A few months later he made his profession of faith before the archbishop of Lyons. He then proceeded to Paris where the first thing he did was to put himself into the hands of a skillful director of conscience who could lead him to God and help him withdraw from his evil life. He was advised to consult a virtuous priest of the Saint Sulpice Community; the priest recommended that he join De La Salle's Community. He was received there on October 8, 1714, and the next day began following the exercises of the novitiate.

It would seem that the devil was waiting for him there, to make him experience his fury as foretold by the possessed woman. That was not so very difficult for the evil spirit to do, for during military service the Chevalier had received several wounds which had been cured only through the application of the remedy called "The Secret."** The wicked spirit who had

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*Town in northern France where Marshal Villars defeated Prince Eugène in 1712, putting an end to the War of the Spanish Succession.

**That is, he was cured through some sort of compact with the devil.

used his knowledge to cure a man who belonged to him did not want D'Armestat to continue enjoying good health once he was converted. The new convert began to feel excruciating pains all over his body as soon as he entered the novitiate. The violence of the pains brought tears to his eyes and made him heave deep groans. The Brothers, who were ignorant of the reasons for this, thought it was the result of his fervor and his sorrow for his past sins. Only on the next day did they discover the real motive for his sighs and tears.

As he did not appear at the community exercises, they went looking for him and found him in his bed, unconscious, unable to move, bathed in his blood which was flowing from his wounds which had reopened, even though before this they had been so well-healed that the scars were scarcely visible. All sorts of attentions were lavished on him, but the remedies did not revive him. He remained speechless and motionless. Fancying that he could not long survive, the Brothers had Extreme Unction administered to him. The sacrament had such a noticeable effect that his wounds immediately closed again, speech and consciousness returned, and he regained such good health that by the next day he was able to take part in the novitiate program once again.

However, his recovery did not last long, for a few days later he relapsed into a condition worse than the previous one. He lay unconscious, bereft of all sensation, and the only use he made of his senses and members was by horrible contortions. He vomited blood, and his eyes turned in their sockets as do those of a possessed person. Once in a while he rested his gaze on a certain spot in the room, and his lips quivered as though he were addressing someone. Meanwhile he moved his arms as though trying to ward off blows and to defend himself.

He spent the night in extraordinary agitation. No one could make him take any nourishment or even open his mouth. Finally he fell into a sort of coma that lasted four hours. During that time he thought he saw a crowd of demons in horrible shapes which threatened to do away with him if he did not immediately give up the new type of life which he had just begun. The frightful sight evoked horrible grimaces in him, and he seemed so near death that everyone thought he was about to expire. Then he seemed to see the Most Blessed Virgin, to whom he had become very devout since his return to the true faith; by her mere presence she dissipated the infernal crew and comforted him.

As soon as he came back to his senses he insistently begged to be given the habit of the Society, and his request was granted. The favor cost him dearly, for the devil seemed to consider the taking of the habit as a new insult and avenged himself by inflicting new torments on him. The infernal spirit seemed to seize him by the throat and to try to strangle him. The novice could not breathe and resembled a man who is choking to death. His tongue grew thick, so that he could no longer articulate a word. However, even in this extremity, he did not lose consciousness. He received holy Viaticum. As his life was despaired of, the Brothers gathered a short time later to recite the prayers for the dying. The paroxysms seemed to diminish during this interval, and by the time the prayers were ended he looked as though he had revived.

But the devil still did not let go. Since by all the torments he had not been able to get his slave, who had escaped from his bondage, to give up his proposal, he had recourse to trickery. His imagination made the poor sick man think he saw De La Salle, Brother Barthélemy and the priest who had advised him to enter the Community, all standing over him and scourging him cruelly. Actually it was the devil who, in the form of those persons, was punishing him, whether in reality or only in the sufferer's imagination is hard to say.

The fact was, however, that the novice suffered a great deal, and his pains were not at all imaginary. The evil spirit's trick was effective. He wanted to persuade the patient that he had found three torturers in those three virtuous persons. The novice became firmly persuaded that it was indeed so, and that idea almost caused his fall.

The Brothers did everything they could to make him realize his mistake, and finally he recognized that it was all due to the malice of the wicked spirit. Delivered from his false notion, his courage against Satan's attacks grew stronger, and the devils' efforts against him were renewed.

The struggle seems unbelievable. One would hardly dare affirm it in a century when nobody wants to admit anything that seems extraordinary, if one did not have the Brothers who were present at the whole scene as witnesses. The devil, not having succeeded in tearing his vocation from the novice's heart, tore out all his toenails during one night.

The Brothers saw the result the next morning and had to admit the evidence of what was before their eyes. That kind of testimony is not to be rejected, not even by those who claim to be skeptics. Like the Brothers, De La Salle, too, witnessed that happening as well as the others we have related. He had just come back from Grenoble, and for over six weeks he had done for this new convert, so cruelly assailed by hell, everything that the most tender charity could suggest.

Thinking over what he had seen, De La Salle remained convinced that it all indicated a case of true diabolical possession. But as he was wise and always proceeded in everything with the greatest circumspection, he did not want to create a great fuss about the matter. After all, there is no absolutely certain proof to be had in such cases, and it is easy to be mistaken. Hence he did not want to recite publicly the prayers that the Church prescribes for the deliverance of possessed people. De La Salle shut himself up in the sick man's room and recited over him the prayers and performed the ceremonies prescribed in such cases. They proved effective, and the novice was freed from the grasp of the devil who, up to then, had not been willing to let go of his captive. From then on the novice felt no more attacks of the evil spirit. Unfortunately, however, he did not remain faithful and he did not persevere in his vocation.

Chapter XIV

De La Salle Sends the Novitiate Back to Saint Yon.
He Wishes to Retire There Too, but Is Forbidden to Do So, and Obeys.
Later He Is Allowed to Go, and There He Occupies Himself Zealously with
the Training of the Novices. He Finally Persuaded the Brothers to Elect
a Successor to Himself, and Shows Them How to Go about It.
He Retouches the Rules and Gives Them Their Final Form.

About that time there occurred the death of King Louis XIV, which was a fresh subject of sorrow for De La Salle.* He wept over him, as did all good-thinking people, and he feared what would result for the Church and the State. The minority of the two previous kings made everyone understand what could be expected from a third.

In Louis XIV the Institute had a staunch protector, for His Majesty had always granted everything that had been asked in favor of the Christian schools. The religious-minded prince had just decided to found a school at Fontainebleau, with a grant of 500 livres for two Brothers; but his project was never carried out. The Church suffered a great loss by the death of a king even more redoubtable to heresy than to neighboring monarchs. De La Salle's concern for the Church was even greater than his concern for his Community. Indeed, it was not difficult for him to foresee that religious innovations would flourish while the heir to the throne remained in tutelage.

At that time the lack of funds and the extraordinarily high cost of living (which was going up every day) in Paris made the holy Founder resolve to send the novitiate back to Saint Yon, where it could more easily survive; for in the provinces the price of food was not as exorbitant as in the capital. Brother Barthélemy, therefore, left for Rouen in October with three or four novices; they were all he had, because the new form of government which had been instituted would not permit a greater number, as we mentioned before.

The novitiate was reestablished at Saint Yon, where it has remained ever since. De La Salle lingered in Paris another month with the Brothers of the schools. Before leaving to join the novices, he begged the Brother Director of the house to let him pray for two days shut up in his room, leaving it only to take his meals. He wanted to consult God to learn whether he should go to present his respects to Cardinal De Noailles. Apparently he was inspired not to do so, for after saying Mass early one morning at the parish church of Saint Sulpice, he went to salute De Brou and bid him good-bye.

That worthy cleric, who devoted himself in a humble and hidden way to all sorts of good works which attract little or no attention, had been asked by De La Chétardye to look after the Brothers after De La Salle had departed for Provence and to render them all the services he could. He always did so with much charity. Because of his concern for the good of the Brothers in Paris, he hastened to object to De La Salle's departure, trying to keep him in the capital. He even went so far as to forbid him to go, using a term which

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*The Roi Soleil died at Versailles on September 1, 1715.

he knew would be acceptable to such a humble man, one which charity sometimes borrows in order to supplement the lack of real authority.*

The reason why the pious priest wanted to keep De La Salle in Paris was that he did not know how the Brothers could subsist in his absence. Everything cost so much that he feared they would be in dire want. De La Salle, who seemed to find superiors everywhere, and who made it his duty to defer to this one in a most particular manner, obeyed him with the simplicity of a child. The Brothers, less inclined to acknowledge quite so many superiors, felt rather outdone by this new interference and by the dislocations the delay was going to bring about in their affairs. They felt that the holy Founder's presence was needed at Saint Yon and urged him to go there at once.

To find a way out of the impasse, two of the Brothers went to see De Brou to make him realize that De La Salle was taking in all seriousness the prohibition he had given him not to leave Paris, and that John Baptist honored in him the authority which a perfectly humble man recognizes in everyone who speaks to him. Consequently, he hesitated to go to Rouen, where he was urgently needed. It must have been a cause of much edification to the pious priest to see a man with the name, the accomplishments and the age of De La Salle honoring his youth to such an extent, and respecting orders which he had no right to give him. As charity had inspired his words, it also led him to retract them when the Brothers assured him that their Superior's presence was not absolutely needed in Paris.

Having thus returned to the place where a few years later he would find a tomb and the end of all his sorrows and labors, De La Salle thought of nothing thenceforth but of preparing for death, of laying aside all other concerns, and of leaving the Institute in the state he desired it to be. But as his hour had not yet come and he had not quite finished his task, the Brothers did not allow him to enjoy the repose he sought in God while awaiting the eternal rest of heaven.

De La Salle had brought them up in the practice of meticulous obedience. He had taught them not to do anything without permission, in his absence as well as in his presence. Thus it was right that he should be the victim of his own principles and that charity should make agreeable to him the incessant opportunities of his disciples, addressing themselves to him directly or by letters, asking him for advice or permissions. In vain did he send them to Brother Barthélemy. They always came back to him, like sons to their father, persuaded that he could not lay aside his authority over them.

The task which he preferred in the house was the direction of the novices. In the past he had always made that his best loved occupation and his principal duty, as we have seen, for he was convinced that the holiness of his Institute depended on the fervor of the novices. Conforming to that principle, he applied himself to his task more assiduously than ever. He

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*This is, of course, the same De Brou who was the Brothers' "ecclesiastical superior" in Paris, but who by this time had been quietly advised by the Cardinal to leave the Brothers alone.

observed the young men and examined them thoroughly, seeking to inspire them in all things with the spirit and the maxims of Jesus Christ, to give them a taste for His virtues and His dispositions. He showed even greater zeal in cultivating their interior life than in regulating their external comportment. He had them give him an account of all that went on within them. By observing them so attentively, he obliged them to practice recollection and to pay attention to all the motions of their hearts.

Whatever was not God, or did not lead to God, meant nothing to him. He esteemed nothing in the novices but virtue; that was what he wished to teach them to value more than anything else. On entering Saint Yon, one had to forget the world and the things of the world, or else leave quickly. In that agreeable solitude heaven was all that counted. Whatever did not concern one's salvation was forgotten. The learning of this world was contradicted. The novices would have been unaware that the world existed if they had not known it before entering.

To get along with De La Salle they needed to be eager for perfection, determined to renounce themselves and to undertake the task of perfectly dying to themselves. In a word, he wanted his novices to be fervent, or at least willing to become such; otherwise he had no use for them. What he was after was holiness, not numbers. Those in whom he discovered courage to labor at their perfection were his friends whom he cherished with special tenderness; yet they were the ones whom he mortified the most.

He strove to make them progress rapidly in the thorny path where cowardly nature begs for an opportunity to rest, or at least to catch its breath, and where even the most fervent from time to time need the spur. He pardoned nothing in those generous souls because he wanted to accustom them not to pardon anything in themselves, and to foment an irreconcilable hatred between their heart and their flesh. On this point he imitated the conduct of that wise superior, praised by Saint John Chrysostom, who would have felt he was taking the bread from the mouths of his most perfect inferiors if he had not humiliated and mortified them in season and out of season, with reason and without reason.

Towards those who were weak in virtue and towards beginners, the holy Founder acted differently. He encouraged and incited them and always upheld them. He tried to make the yoke of Jesus Christ easy for them and to bring them to experience the delight of His service. In their regard he behaved like a tender mother who carries her babe in her arms when it is tired of walking and soothes it on her bosom. Those who seemed to be slowing up in the path of virtue aroused his compassion, and yet occasionally they experienced his severity. He urged them on energetically. He incited them and made them feel the prodding of his charity; for even charity, as the saints say, can be sharp and can cause wounds, but wounds which heal the malady and never aggravate it. What did he not tell them to show them their spiritual maladies and the consequences thereof? What did he not do to oblige them to seek healing in prayer, in better preparation for receiving the sacraments, and in evangelical abnegation? The hearts which he found hard and insensible moved him deeply. He deplored their misfortune and seemed frightened by their state. He taught them to weep over themselves, to bewail their condition and so to avoid the fatal effects of their obstinacy.

Those who appeared uncertain in their vocation won all his care. He sought the cause of their temptation and taught them to discover the causes in themselves. If he did not discern in them the signs of a God-given vocation, he opened the door to them and was the first to invite them to depart. If he happened upon vocations which were defective, he taught such novices how to rectify their intentions and purify their motives. As for those whom the Holy Spirit had led to join the Institute, he omitted nothing that could strengthen their faithfulness to grace and confirm them in their chosen state.

Always ready to listen to all of them, he showed them a father's heart, even in the reprimands addressed to some, as well as in the kindly gestures directed to others. His occupation did not tire or overburden him. He gladly left all other tasks aside to devote himself to that one, as to the most important of all, the essential duty. For indeed, what can be expected later on of a man who has not been trained in virtue from his entry into the Community? Of a man who has not made a novitiate, or who has made it badly? Can a building stand if its foundation is not solid? Can one expect to see a grown man enjoy good health if in his infancy he had no milk, or only bad milk, to nourish him?

The virtuous Brother Barthélemy, Director of Novices, was delighted to see De La Salle taking over his duties, and like an elder brother he took his place among the novices to profit by the instructions given by their common father. This humility delighted the heart of John Baptist and won his confidence. There was nothing hidden between him and Brother Barthélemy. Making himself in his turn Brother Barthélemy's novice, he asked his advice on all matters and he followed it.

Some of the older Brothers conceived a little jealousy over this preference and would have wished to see their father show his confidence in others of his sons who also seemed to deserve it by their age and their seniority in the Community. But the holy Founder had other maxims. He thought that in a Community, age and seniority could never make up for any lack of virtue or prudence. He felt that only those years should be counted which fervor had sanctified and which were crowned by humility of heart. The rest were only a matter for regret, sorrow and confusion.

Seven or eight months had gone by in this way in the house of Saint Yon when Brother Barthélemy once again put De La Salle's humility and obedience to the test by asking him to visit the Brothers in the schools of Calais and Boulogne. To demand that he leave his dear solitude meant calling on him for a great sacrifice; but having made so many others, John Baptist did not refuse this one. He left Saint Yon about the middle of 1716. As we have already mentioned, in speaking of the founding of these schools, what De La Salle did during this visit and the manner in which he was welcomed, we shall not repeat the account here.

On his return from his journey to Calais and Boulogne, De La Salle spent his time in exercises of piety, knowing that prayer is useful for all things, and that to it the gifts of grace are promised in this present life and those of glory in the next. Only one thing disturbed him: he dreaded to die in the

position of superior. That honor his humility could not endure, and he felt that the best interests of the Institute did not require it. The last place among the Brothers was the one that his heart longed for. Since he had not been able to occupy it during his life, he passionately yearned to do so at his death. The many vain attempts he had made on various occasions to win this point had not made him give up hope of succeeding. The less he found the Brothers disposed to condescend to him on this subject, the more he begged them to give in to his arguments.

He had serious ones indeed. He felt death approaching, for he was already advanced in years. The Brothers were at last able to govern themselves and to find in their ranks a worthy superior. He had led them little by little to look upon Brother Barthélemy as their leader by turning over to him most of the details of administration. He had accustomed the Brothers to doing without him and his services, by refusing to let them involve him in their affairs. It was time for the Institute to assume the shape it would have to keep, and it was important for this to take place while he lived. There were serious reasons for apprehending that after his death the Brothers might run into serious difficulties in choosing a successor from among their ranks. It was even to be feared that efforts might be made to deprive them of that right. He knew that measures had already been planned to put a secular priest at their head. Past experience taught him what to expect in the future.

If while he still lived, some people had plotted to profit by his absence from Paris to introduce a new form of government into his Institute, what might they not be preparing to do after his death? If on his return to the capital he had found somebody occupying his place, acting as superior, even pretending to give him orders and wanting John Baptist to acknowledge him and his usurped authority by a written document, what might they not try to force his disciples to do after he was gone? What was more, all the ecclesiastical superiors appointed in the various provinces still kept the title as regards the Brothers, and it was to be feared that some of them, not content with the mere title, might want to act as such. The only way to prevent such disorders in the future was to put things back the way they had originally been, and to place a true leader at the head of the flock.

A Brother chosen as superior in due form by a legitimate assembly and by common consent, raised to this position under the eyes and at the behest of De La Salle himself, recognized and revered by the obedience of the Founder, and confirmed in his jurisdiction by the submission of the Brothers in general, would inaugurate the type of government which had been envisioned ever since the start of the Institute and bring to an end the system which had recently been abusively foisted on it to its detriment. It was ridiculous, in fact, that the Brothers should not have a Brother to govern them, and that they should lose from the start a right possessed by all groups and Communities, whether regular or secular---a natural right belonging to all men.

After all, their Society, made up of lay Brothers, resembles more than any other those established in the fourth-century Church. Saint Anthony, Saint Pachomius, Saint Hilarion, and all the other saintly abbots, who had under them whole armies of solitaries, were not priests. The Brothers of

Charity have a superior who is a Brother like themselves, elected from their ranks. A man who had not lived with the Brothers, who was unfamiliar with their Rule, who did not understand their customs and consequently did not share their same spirit, a man entirely different from them in everything, was hardly fit to be their superior. Would such a one not be, with regard to them, a new sort of commendatory abbot? What grave inconveniences would such a form of government not lead to? De La Salle could foresee them; he had every reason to fear that an institution, which he had had so much trouble in defending against the intrigues of those very men who were only waiting for his death to usurp power over it, would quickly come to an end when they got hold of it.

Those reasons, joined to his profound humility which had always urged him to give up the first place and take the last so as to give the example of the most perfect obedience, at last led him to take the final steps to overcome the Brothers' opposition. He called together the Brothers at Rouen and Saint Yon and declared that his mind was made up to resign his position as superior and to rid himself even of the very name, now that for some time he had given up the exercise of its functions. He told them that they should no longer oppose this design, since it was already partly executed.

De La Salle had accustomed them to do without him by turning over so much of his authority as superior to another; he had prepared them to relieve him of the title as well. He insisted that it should be done while he was still living, and that they should choose one of their number to take the leadership, and should submit to him. There was no time to lose, he added, if they wished to forestall the difficulties which his death might bring to the execution of so important a measure. They could not take too many precautions, nor show themselves too careful in making sure that the election would be canonically valid and carried out according to all the rules. Finally opening his heart, he explained to them the apprehensions for the future which disturbed him.

The decision of the holy Founder was a new source of chagrin and sorrow for his children. It hinted at his approaching demise as well as at his present abdication. Like children soon to be deprived of a beloved father who do not want to hear either his death or his absence spoken of, they heeded the sentiments of nature rather than the dictates of reason and sought to turn down a proposal which so afflicted them. They represented to him the difficulties which a change would bring about, the sorrow they would experience if they were deprived of his direction and wise counsels. The election of a new superior would leave them little liberty to address themselves to him in confidence as they had always done. The Servant of God disposed of all these objections by promising them that he would remain with them and be for them what he had been up to then; that he would keep them close to his heart, would listen to them, would continue doing all he could for them, and would render them all the assistance that a good father owes his sons. Finally, he gave them so many reasons that they could no longer oppose what he planned to do.

Once all of them had yielded to his desire, the next step was to set in motion the preliminaries for the election of one of the Brothers as superior.

To do so according to the rules, an assembly of the whole Society should be convoked in a convenient and suitable place; all the Brothers must consent to the gathering; the principal Brothers should be summoned to it, and all the others must promise in writing to subscribe and submit to whatever the assembly might decide.

All the Brothers present having agreed on these points, the holy Founder suggested a means of carrying out the proposal. The simplest and shortest way to get everything arranged in peace and good understanding, he said, was to send someone to all the houses, someone acceptable to the Brothers and enjoying their esteem, to prepare them wisely and calmly to share our views and to understand the reasons which make it necessary to call the assembly and to proceed without delay to the election of a new superior.

Before everything else, it was necessary to make sure of the consent of all the Brothers of the Institute. As to where the meeting should be held, there could be no better place than Saint Yon, which offered solitude, liberty and peace. The Brothers could gather there from all over France and decide on whatever they liked without distractions, obstacles or publicity, so that the world would not know what was going on. "If you agree with this," he concluded, "pick out the Brother whom you wish to send as your deputy to the others, the one you feel best qualified to handle this affair." They all turned to Brother Barthélemy. He was meek, prudent and held in high esteem by all the Brothers.

He left Saint Yon in October, 1716, carrying the instructions of De La Salle, and spent the rest of that year visiting the more distant houses. Then, having returned to Saint Yon, he gave John Baptist an account of what he had accomplished and received more advice from him. Soon afterwards he went back to complete what he had begun. His journey was marked by God's special protection, especially on two very dangerous occasions when God saved him.

On the first, he fell from his horse and, unable to disengage his foot from the stirrup, was dragged a considerable distance. He could have been killed in the accident, as has happened to so many others; but God protected him and he escaped with nothing worse than a bad fright. On a second occasion, two thieves threatened him one evening as he was leaving a certain city and pursued him quite some time, but they did him no harm, for they seemed to be held back from him. They came close to him and wanted to stop him, but they could not do so. They seemed to be restrained by an invisible hand.

The thieves themselves were astonished at what was happening and did not know what to say or to do. Brother Barthélemy, uneasy over such evil company, asked them several times with his usual calm what they wanted. But as though their tongues were tied as well as their hands, they remained disconcerted and speechless. Finally, they separated from him, to their mutual satisfaction; for the bandits were glad to find their freedom restored. As for Brother Barthélemy he bade them farewell with great relief. When he saw that he was alone, he recognized God's hand in his deliverance and blessed His goodness.

For the rest, Brother Barthélemy's journey was successful. He was received everywhere with great tokens of joy and respect, and he found all hearts docile and open. He made the Brothers understand and approve all the plans that had been made, and in each house he took care to get the Brothers to sign a statement consenting to the election of a Brother Superior, and to promise that they would ratify whatever was decided in the coming assembly.

De La Salle took all these precautions, and others which we purposely omit, because he considered the meeting as the accomplishment of all his plans and the beginning of the establishment of his Society in its natural condition. From the beginning at Rheims he had wanted to give it that form of government. He had sought to bring it about at Vaugirard as early as 1694, and for over 30 years he had tried several times to achieve it, but had always found invincible opposition on the part of his disciples, as we have mentioned. He would have met with the same attitude, even to his death, if he had not made use of a pious artifice inspired by his humility to triumph over it. The artifice was to get the Brothers accustomed, little by little, to get along without him, and to leave unused the authority which they did not want to see him lay aside in favor of anybody else.

Once he had taken his resolution, he never went back on it; and when he departed to hide himself in Provence, he left in Paris the government of the Institute which he never again consented to take up fully when he returned. The letters which reached him in Provence he refused to answer. That obliged the Brothers to consider him as someone dead, and to look no more to him for any services. When the Brothers ordered him to leave his place of retirement and to come back to Paris, they found him docile to their voice and ready to receive their orders, but not to resume his functions as superior.

Disappointed in not having been able to lay aside his title, he handed over its exercise to Brother Barthélemy. Although superior in name, he was no longer such in fact. That was the only reason that convinced the Brothers to give him a successor. We might as well do it, they reasoned, since he no longer wishes to govern us. It was time for them to agree, since De La Salle had only two more years to live. If, while he still lived, the Institute had not taken steps to choose a head for itself among its members, it would in all probability have been obliged to accept one imposed from outside.

Inexpressible was the joy De La Salle felt when he learned of the success of Brother Barthélemy's mission and of God's protection over him on his journey. Delighted at the prospect of finally being able to lay aside a burden which he had found so irksome for so many years, he blessed God and longed for the happy moment when he would finally be at liberty. However, it was necessary to wait till the summer before calling the Brothers together, the more so as it had become the custom among them to hold such gatherings at Pentecost, and to prepare those who would take part in the meeting by a retreat.

The same program was followed this time. All the Brothers Directors were called to Saint Yon, and all 16 of them were present on the appointed day. Pentecost Sunday was the first day of their retreat. De La Salle opened it by a fervent discourse on the importance of doing well what they were about to

undertake. He then proposed to them a method of proceeding in a supernatural manner during this gathering, and in the election of the new superior. He had drawn this up himself, and had taken it partly from the Constitutions and Rule of Saint Ignatius. He had also composed a prayer in French to invoke the Holy Spirit and to implore His assistance, and he gave them copies to use.

The Brothers were faithful to say this prayer five or six times a day. They also conformed to the other advice of their holy Founder as well as to the arrangements he had drawn up for the retreat and for the election. They asked him several times to preside over the assembly and to take the lead in the exercises as being their true Superior, but he did not consider it proper to do so. He withdrew to his poor little cell to raise his hands to heaven and draw down on his sons an abundance of grace, after urging them to let the Holy Spirit Himself preside over their assembly and to beg Him unceasingly to show them the one whom He had chosen for their superior.

"Purify your intentions and desires," he told them, "if you wish to be used by Him as His instruments in naming the one whom He has destined for you. Avoid all human views; do not listen to the voice of nature; reject all false lights and the prejudices inspired by selfishness. Consider yourselves in this election like the Apostles in the choice of the one who would replace the perfidious Judas, without any self-interest or preconceived notions, without sympathy or antipathy, without passion or personal inclinations, without yielding to any attraction or repugnance of nature. Keep your hearts in complete indifference, and do not let them be fixed on anyone but him whom the majority of the votes will indicate.

"As it is not you who should choose but God acting through you and in you, always keep your mind raised towards Him, and do not grow weary of addressing Him this prayer of the Apostles: 'Show us the one whom You have chosen.' If you wish to know who this one is, give your vote to the one whom your conscience demands, the one possessed of the greatest virtue, the one whom at the hour of death you will wish you had chosen, the one most capable of governing the Institute, who excels in its spirit, who is the model and exemplar of this spirit, the one most capable of maintaining regularity, of causing fervor to reign and of sanctifying you.

"Name the one among you whom you know to be the most enlightened, the wisest, the most virtuous, the firmest. Give your vote to the one who must perfectly possess the six qualities so necessary to govern God's family: prudence, mildness, vigilance, firmness, piety, zeal, and above all, charity. Give it to the one who combines in himself in the highest degree these virtues which are so difficult to join together: zeal and prudence, clearheadedness and charity, firmness and mildness, goodness and severity. Give it to the one who is mild but not weak, vigilant but not meddlesome, firm but not inflexible, zealous but not harsh, kind but not weak, prudent but not crafty.

"Give your vote to the one who is the holiest, or who wishes to become such, so that he may be your model whom you may imitate in all things. To the one who will be the humblest while occupying the first place, who will show you a father's heart and will make you love his authority. In this choice do not pay attention to talents, birth, age, seniority in the Congregation,

personal appearance, stature. In a word, do not consider the man, but only God. You will certainly choose the one whom God Himself has selected, if you seek a man who is according to His heart, not yours---a man of grace, in whom grace acts, not a man according to your tastes and who favors mere nature."

With these words and others of the same kind the Servant of God brought his disciples to the dispositions which he desired to see them in. They chose a chairman for the meeting, Brother Barthélemy. It was he who, after two days and many prayers received the majority of the votes and was elected Superior General of the Institute. They brought the news right away to De La Salle who did not seem surprised. "He has been acting as such for a long time," he remarked.

All the Brothers congratulated themselves on this choice; only the chosen one condemned it. If he could have done so, he would, by his prayers and tears, have caused them to retract an election which he did not wish to ratify. He felt all the weight of the responsibility that they wished to place on his shoulders, and he could not bring himself to assume a burden that the holy Founder himself had for so long sought to lay aside. When the Brothers knelt before him to acknowledge his authority and submit themselves obediently to him, they made him all the more fearful of having to command them. He regretted all the more the impossibility of no longer being able to obey. By humbling themselves before him, they added to his confusion. He blushed to find himself in De La Salle's place. His sorrow choked back his words. The tears he shed continued to reproach the Brothers with this election, but they would not listen either to his complaints or to his reproaches.

As his sighs were no more effective than his pleas, he was obliged to accept through obedience a position which his humility would have refused; but he agreed only on condition that two Brothers, chosen from among the most able, should be given him as his aides, to share with him the weight of his responsibility. That was done. The assembly appointed as his assistants two of the principal Brothers to help him with their advice.

The retreat continued until Trinity Sunday, which was the great feast of the Institute. The Brothers renewed their vows on that day after De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy had first renewed theirs.

After the retreat ended, the meetings continued, on De La Salle's advice, in order to examine the Rule once again, under the guidance of the new Superior, and to add or delete in full liberty whatever might be thought necessary. Once the observations and remarks were made, it was decided unanimously to place these suggestions into the hands of De La Salle and to ask him to make whatever use he wished of them. He promised that he would work at the project and, in fact, he applied himself to the task of revision with great diligence.

It was at this time that the Founder composed the chapters on modesty and on good government, taken in part from the Rule and Constitutions of Saint Ignatius, which he wisely adapted to the needs of the Institute. He also wrote the chapter on regularity and a few others which did not yet figure in the Rule. Thus by its author given the form which it has today, a copy of the

Rule, authenticated and signed by Brother Barthélemy, was sent to all the houses, to be observed uniformly by all the Brothers of the Institute.

Chapter XV

Remarks on the Rule for Recreation and on the Rule of the Brother Director.

Although we have already spoken of the rule concerning recreation, it seems useful to say more about it here, since some Brothers wished to modify it.

During the assembly of 1717 a new examination was made of the chapter of the Rule which lays down the manner in which the Brothers should act during the recreations. Among other things, it states that the Brothers "should not speak without having first saluted Brother Director and received permission from him. They should not speak of any person in particular except to speak well of him. They should not inquire about anything curious or useless. They should keep silence when separated from the others. They should not indulge in any buffoonery or unseemly behavior or perform any indecorous gestures. They should not speak too loudly or laugh boisterously. They should not contradict each other or correct what another has said, since this is something that only Brother Director should do. Finally, they should converse on edifying topics which can lead them to love God and practice virtue."

It must be admitted that this chapter calls for a high degree of perfection and presupposes that the Brothers are real saints, or men who wish to become such. Those who are holy are filled with God and like to speak only of God. "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," says Jesus Christ. From the treasure of his heart a good man draws holy and edifying talk. Filled with God, he thinks of Him always and wants to speak of Him unceasingly. All other topics displease him, bore him or leave him indifferent. Saint Francis Borgia seemed to drowse and he found it difficult not to go to sleep when in his presence people talked of things other than God or of what did not refer to God. Such were all the saints. "They hear the world and the things of the world spoken of only with regret," as the author of the Imitation says, while they always listen with fresh delight to talk about God or the things of God.

If a certain disinclination to speak of anything but God is not always a certain sign of holiness, it is at least a great means of attaining it. "Those who are of the world speak of the world, and those who are of God speak of God and like to hear God spoken of," as Our Lord says. When we speak of the world, we fill ourselves with the world and the concerns of the world; when we speak of God, we fill ourselves with God and what refers to God, and we empty ourselves of the world and of worldly concerns. "Evil conversations corrupt good morals," says Saint Paul. Why? Because evil talk fills the mind with evil thoughts and the heart with evil desires. On the contrary, pious discourses fill the mind with holy thoughts and the heart with sentiments

which lead us to God. Hence you will never find a fervent religious eager for profane conversations which fill the mind with useless ideas. His aim is to keep his mind lifted up to God and his heart united with Him. He seeks to banish from his conversations all that can cause him to lose recollection. As nothing leads us to God more surely than speaking about God, a true religious allows himself no other conversations; or, if he does allow them, he finds himself ill-at-ease in them.

Following these principles, De La Salle made it a rule for his disciples to avoid in their recreations everything that might distract them, trivialize them, empty them of God and fill them with the world and with worldly concerns. If he does not suppose that all of them are already saints, he gives them credit for wishing to become such. Now, all those who are saints, or want to become saints, appreciate these rules and find satisfaction in conforming to them. True, the tepid do not like them, and those who are beginning to grow irregular or to become relaxed also begin to find them very irksome. That is their own fault; they should accuse nobody but themselves. If the rule no longer pleases them, the reason is that they are no longer what the rule supposes them to be: fervent and eager for their sanctification. By the dissatisfaction they feel with such a rule, they can judge how far they have relaxed in their pursuit of virtue.

Moreover, De La Salle had very weighty reasons for establishing this rule. His long experience had taught him how much good or how much evil recreation can produce according as it is well or badly conducted. Disorder in Communities ordinarily has no other source than the misconduct that so easily insinuates itself into this action. As Saint Magdalen Pazzi observed, in badly made recreations the devil reaps the most profit; from them arises the loss of those religious who are damned. The great reformer of a monastic order, the celebrated De Rancé, abbot of La Trappe, feared such recreations so much that he did away with them altogether and did not allow any at all.

In permitting them to his followers, De La Salle sought a means of sanctifying them. Now, to do this it was necessary to prevent the sins so easily committed during them, and to promote the practice of the virtues proper to this exercise. How many ill-regulated actions do members of Communities not make themselves guilty of in recreation when they are not watchful over themselves? Frivolousness, light, indiscreet and unmeasured words, idle chatter and impoliteness are the least of the lot. Pretentious statements, bragging, arrogance and scorn for one's neighbor, worldliness, curiosity about news or the pleasure of imparting it, speaking about the world and the things of the world, or inquiring about them, are faults which easily escape human weakness during recreation time.

Particular friendships, little plots, murmuring, mockery, slander, quarrels and disputes, and many other defects which affect or wound charity are frequently found there. Biting words, animosity, resentment, impatience, bitterness, anger, moodiness, ill-humor, patronizing airs, harsh, cutting or scornful language; clowning, voicing dangerous principles or unedifying topics---and many other faults either against modesty or humility or the other virtues---are all sins that members of Communities may be guilty of.

Now, the rules we are speaking of do away with all these. In addition, they help one to practice the virtues of humility, obedience, recollection and Christian courtesy. They teach one to speak with circumspection, measure and wisdom; to listen in silence and to profit by what is said. They lead the heart to God, nourish devotion, inflame the soul with fervor, and make recreation a sort of spiritual conference, unconstrained and agreeable. It instructs, enlightens, warms the heart, encourages, consoles, produces spiritual joy and fills us with God. In a word, from a recreation carried on in this manner one often experiences, as several of the Brothers know, more fervor and good will than from one's mental prayer. When we speak of God and the things of God with simplicity, candor and cheerfulness, God is found in the midst of us. As they separated, the Brothers could often say, like the disciples of Emmaus: "Was not our heart burning within us while we conversed so enthusiastically of the things of God? Did not Jesus Christ seem to be in our midst and to speak to us Himself?"

But, someone will object, such a recreation is not really recreation; it is mental prayer or a spiritual conference. This objection was made long ago. De La Salle heard it often, but he did not let it disturb him. It is true that recreation carried on in this way is no longer a recreation that robs one of recollection, no longer a profane, worldly, vicious and dangerous practice; but nothing prevents it from being a true recreation while remaining holy and spiritual. For in taking recreation thus (when the weather permits) the Brothers are out in the fresh air, they move about, they speak, they allow their eyes and senses decent liberty, they let their minds relax and reinvigorate their bodies.

Because one asks permission to speak by a sign, because one takes his turn talking, and all do not talk at once, because nobody shouts or gets excited and wears out his vocal cords or lungs by arguing vociferously, does this mean that one is not recreating himself? Is it essential to recreation for all to speak at once, to brawl so that one cannot hear the other, to stir up a cloud of dust and breathe it in while making violent motions, or to make one's arms, legs and one's whole body share in the tongue's excitement? Is it essential to recreation to spend it in playing, in boisterous exercise, in being so agitated that when it is over one's face is bathed in sweat, his head buzzing and his chest exhausted?

"I number among the causes of relaxation," says a famous author, "the recreations that have been introduced in these recent times; for the Rule of Saint Benedict does not say a word about them, nor does any other ancient Rule that I know of. This practice seems to be founded on the opinion of some modern theologians who feel that free and light-hearted conversation is a necessary respite after serious application of the mind, like rest after bodily work; and they call the proper use of this mental relaxation the virtue of eutrapelia. But they do not know that this pseudo-virtue, derived from Aristotle, is numbered by Saint Paul among the vices, under the same name of eutrapelia. What has deceived them is that, not understanding Greek, they have found in the Latin text of Saint Paul the word, 'scurrility,' which they obediently classified among the vices. So, the same word in Latin means a vice and in Greek, a virtue! There we have, if I am not mistaken, the origin of these recreations. The fact is that conversation is not needed to give us

respite from too great tension of mind. Bodily motion is more appropriate, for instance, walking or light manual work; for this movement returns to the more distant parts of the body the animal spirits which were too concentrated in the brain.

"Conversation, on the contrary, entertains and often augments the agitation of the mind, not to speak of the temptations to which it exposes us: raillery, backbiting, rash judgments about matters of Church or State; for the topics of the day are often what are discussed in these recreations. I refer the reader to his own experience and I beg religious persons to ask themselves what is the most ordinary matter of their confessions, frequent as these are."

Without adopting the conjecture that this author hazards on the origin of recreations, in an essay in which so many excellent ideas can be found, his final reflection, borrowed from the celebrated Abbé De Rancé, seems extremely reasonable and true. No one has better discussed this subject than that great reformer of monastic perfection in the last century. He treats of it with his usual emphasis and eloquence in his 15th Explanation dealing with some of the difficulties found in his "Book of Monastic Ways."

"We have been reproached," he says, "with being too severe on the subject of conversations, and some have pretended that it would be useful, nay even necessary, for religious to engage in amusing conversations and to employ these so-called innocent pastimes." To answer this criticism he shows that every Christian is obliged to imitate Jesus Christ, Whose entire life was painful and laborious.

"Nowhere in His life," he continues, "do we find anything like a diversion or recreation. His sacred lips never opened to utter a word of mockery; laughter He did not know; He called down woe on those who laugh. Saint Paul, who was so filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ, forbids these sorts of conversations to Christians. They are referred to in the Vulgate by the term, scurrilitas, which means amusing and agreeable stories told to make others laugh, but which do not suit the only affair that we have to concern ourselves with in this world, namely our sanctification, serving God and pleasing Him. If abstaining from joking and funny stories were inappropriate for a monk, one might say that he had no obligation to practice it; but it is so closely connected to his profession, so intimately bound up to the penance he has assumed as an obligation, that one cannot fail to count it among the things that he must naturally expect to find on his path.

"Nothing proves more clearly that it is a mistake to want to introduce such practices into religious houses, which can justly be called houses of prayer, than the consideration of the inconveniences which follow from them. For if these stories and conversations, which are supposed to contribute to the Brothers' recreation and to dissipate the vapors which (they say) solitude and retirement cause to gather, are really capable of doing this; and if these witticisms are keen, delicate and clever, as can happen according to the type of mind that produces them, is it not to be feared that they will be sought after more than they should be? Will those who invent them not be pleased at having won admiration? Will they not seek applause from those who hear them? Will they not spend their time looking for clever sayings and preparing in their cells what they intend to say in recreation? And will not this spirit,

which is really the spirit of the world, displace the simplicity, mortification and piety which should reign in the cloister?

"If, on the contrary, these jokes are clumsy and vulgar, if they lack the wit which alone makes them capable of amusing anyone, the conversations will be filled with idle tales, impertinent remarks, stupid jests, trifles capable of corrupting hearts and minds, of filling them with low thoughts and sentiments unworthy of the exalted state of religion. The result will be that the Brothers will contract improper familiarity with one another. Instead of looking on each other with esteem and charity they will only despise one another.

"Moreover, in such conversations it is so difficult to keep to the golden mean that hardly anybody can avoid exaggerating in one way or another. One's feet are on a steep and slippery slope; it takes only one false step to fall into a liberty that the law of Jesus Christ does not admit of, either in a simple Christian or in a monk. It is very hard not to allow oneself to be surprised on such occasions. A word escapes too freely, evil-mindedness picks it up. One does not show one's neighbor all the reserve one owes him. The joy which we wish to arouse has nothing to restrain it and degenerates into heedlessness and license. On leaving these conversations one always feels spiritually drained, unrecollected, troubled, perhaps scrupulous (if one is capable of feeling that way), and suffering from a number of other similar maladies. Show me, if you can, how this conduct is compatible with that presence of God, that spirit of renunciation, that purity of heart, that perfection that Jesus Christ expects of monks. For my part, I consider such conduct no less opposed to that perfection than shadows are contrary to light.

"We can find a peremptory argument in the instructions that the saints have left us on this topic....Saint Benedict forbids and banishes absolutely from his Brothers' conversation all frivolities, mockeries and useless words, those that lead to laughter or excite that human joy which some consider so necessary and innocent. He was careful not to change his opinion, for he wanted the Brothers not to lose sight of death or of the judgments of God. He wanted them always to keep in mind the reality of eternal rewards and punishments. The authority of this great man, whom Jesus Christ gave to His Church as the founder and patriarch of all the monks of the West, should silence all those who think otherwise."

After proving his affirmations by the authority of Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Ambrose and Saint Basil, he refutes the objections to his thesis. "A number of arguments," he says, "are brought forward to counter this opinion and to establish the contrary one. It is said that we should not condemn what is granted to religious merely to afford relaxation to their minds, exhausted by constant tension and unremitting exercises.

"Such an argument does not even deserve a hearing. First, just because something may be useful or even necessary, does it follow that we should put it into practice? We should first inquire whether it is in no way wrong, whether it is free from all evil consequences, whether there is nothing in it contrary to the true rules; for if it sanctions even a little departure from

them, or is opposed to them, we cannot doubt that it is forbidden to make use of it, whatever good or advantage it might afford.

"It is mere imagination to suppose that such recreations, diversions and merrymaking are necessary, and that monks and solitaries need them to dissipate the clouds which (it is said) obscure the spirit in solitude. There are other means for doing this, which are more proper and more suitable to their profession, and which they can have recourse to. When they assemble on certain occasions, when they hold conferences in the manner we have explained, and when they leave the state of inner recollection which is habitual for them, when they speak of God with holy liberty, when they converse freely and unhindered about what refers to their duties, or to the life, actions, beliefs and remarkable statements of the holy Fathers, to the constancy and happiness of the martyrs who preferred the glory of dying for Jesus Christ to all this world's happiness; finally, when they speak of all that can stimulate their zeal and increase their ardor and fidelity in God's service, it must be admitted that such conversations are all that is needed to give them true consolation, to restore to their minds whatever they may have lost in the depths of their silence and retirement."

Let the reader continue with what this author says in the same work. It is a pity to have to omit such splendid passages, but they would be too long to insert here. One can also read in the rest of his rebuttal the way he answers the argument that this manner of making fun and amusing oneself not only involves nothing reprehensible, but is a virtue that the ancients called eutrapelia.

Those who object may say whatever they like, but I would add, making use of the words of this new Saint Bernard. "I know that the irregularities, the exaggerations, the factions and cabals, the party spirit, the murmuring and the dubious friendships that flourish in cloisters all start because of the communications that the Brothers have with each other." I cannot too strongly approve a Rule which does away with all such disorders and which, without forbidding all recreation, obliges the Brothers to sanctify it by the actual practice of humility, obedience, Christian civility, discretion in word, and by limiting themselves to holy and spiritual conversation.

True, this Rule is irksome for nature and contradicts self-love. That was why some of the Brothers, seeing that the Rule was being subjected to revision, thought that it would be a favorable opportunity for having the rule of recreation modified; they tried to bring it about. However, after much discussion, they gave up their proposal, as we shall see after I explain what had given rise to the rule in the first place.

From the beginning of the Society De La Salle had introduced among the Brothers the practice of very strict silence. Although he allowed them a period of pious conversation after dinner and after supper, he forbade all speaking except under truly necessary circumstances; both those who through the duties of their position had to speak, or those who had obtained permission, were to speak in few words and in a low tone. He punished faults against this regulation severely, considering them far from minor, for, as Saint Scholastica says, silence is the guardian angel of Communities.

To maintain this exact silence in its perfection, he permitted recreations, which he considered both as a respite necessary for human weakness and as a new means of sanctification. Constant tension and application of mind demand some relaxation, and bodies engaged in exercises of piety or in labor need some rest. Nothing wastes away the body more than an uninterrupted interior life where one is constantly engaged in mortifying the senses and keeping watch over the movements of the heart. Such a regime is like a constant drip of water which noiselessly and insensibly wears out nature's resistance.

Recreation is the relief provided by nearly all Communities to restore the soul's strength and enable it to renew its attention to itself. Moreover, recreation, if well performed, can like any other action become a means of sanctification, for it provides frequent opportunities for practicing all the virtues, and one can leave recreation filled with God and with fervor, if one is careful to bring Jesus Christ into it and to converse with Him in the simplicity of one's heart.

These two motives which have introduced the practice of recreation into nearly all Communities did not permit the holy Founder, so full of tenderness and concern for the needs of his children and for their health, to forbid such moments of relaxation in his Society.

At first, he gave the Brothers full liberty to speak and to recreate themselves, without interfering with them by any regulations; and, in fact, none was needed. Fervent souls discover within themselves the laws inspired by the Holy Spirit; and as they follow His lead, all their words are measured and all their actions sanctified. In those blessed early days the Brothers were so recollected, so attentive to themselves, so circumspect in all things that there was no need to restrain them by regulations. Filled with God, they spoke of God; any other discourse was foreign to them. But alas, such is the frailty of human nature! Among us men fervor is always a passing visitor to which natural slothfulness never gets accustomed, and which is eventually eliminated.

For several years there was nothing more edifying than the Brothers' recreations. God was the object thereof; spiritual topics were the matter of their discourses; the practice of virtue was their exercise. Recreations resembled the conferences of the Fathers of the desert; each Brother came to them only in order to contribute his own fervor and to take away with him that of the others. Modesty and recollection were combined with noble simplicity; agreeable openness of heart with polite and courteous behavior. Loud talk, frivolous words, vulgarities, loquaciousness, sallies of humor, vivacity, shallow exchanges, and all the other defects common in conversations were unknown there. But finally they did put in an appearance.

While speaking of God, the Brothers began to speak of other things, too. After beginning the recreation by spiritual topics, they ended up by discussing worldly matters. Then lack of restraint, loss of recollection, and confusion followed, and brought along with them the other disorders which so easily penetrate recreation. The more fervent Brothers grew dissatisfied, and the time of recreation became a sort of martyrdom for them. De La Salle

noticed the trouble at its inception, but he could not put a stop to it; neither daily penances nor exhortations were able to arrest the contagion.

Because it was recreation time, some thought that anything was permitted. Several of the most fervent Brothers stopped coming on the pretext that they had other things to do. Many of the novices were tempted to leave their vocation, and several of them did so. The Brothers lost the mutual respect that they owed each other. Even the Brothers Directors were not spared, and at times De La Salle himself suffered the same treatment. Indeed, some took advantage of his patience. Because he made himself all things to all men and appeared among them as though he had been just an ordinary Brother, some of them, lacking in good manners, exercised his forbearance by their vulgarities and their uncivil behavior, which he pretended not to notice and over which he did not show any displeasure.

However, none of these drawbacks suggested to De La Salle the idea of suppressing recreation or of eliminating the abuses that had crept in. He endured patiently an evil that he could not remedy and hoped that God would provide a solution. He was neither upset nor astonished, because he knew that even the holiest Communities from their early days had suffered from like disorders during recreation.

I myself heard the Founder say that the Society of Jesus, so virtuous and so holy, which even its bitterest enemies have to admit is very regular, had encountered the same problem in the beginning, and that steps had to be taken to remedy the evil by new regulations. At that time only 14 years had elapsed since De La Salle had founded his Institute, and already the abuses in recreation had begun to affect its fervor; but God did not permit the evil to go any farther. He Himself applied a remedy, almost without anyone's realizing it.

It was about 1694, when there were only five houses and not more than 30 Brothers. Influenced by an extraordinary movement of fervor, De La Salle was making a month's retreat at the novitiate in Vaugirard with four of the principal Brothers. He was inspired to seek a means for shutting the door on all false liberty during recreation. We explained at the proper point what he did to this end, so we shall not repeat it here.

Some years later, the Servant of God set down in writing what he had authorized in practice and made it the sixth chapter of his Rule. He considered the chapter so important that he had it read every Sunday during dinner, so that all might pay attention to it and observe it faithfully. His hope was not disappointed. He had the consolation of bringing back to the Brothers' recreation the fervor that had originally characterized it. The rule which taught them to sanctify this exercise corrected all the abuses that existed, and the fidelity with which the rule was observed prevented the abuses from ever recurring.

The chapter on the manner of behaving in recreation, so conformable to the maxims of the Gospel and of the saints, had been in use among the Brothers for nearly 24 years without having met with any serious opposition during all that time. It was only in the 1717 assembly that three or four Brothers

suggested to the others that they should modify a regulation which was so constraining for nature even in the action which was supposed to provide nature with some relaxation. The holy Founder had turned over to the members of the assembly the complete Rule, which had not yet received any approval from the Holy See. He allowed the Brothers full liberty to make whatever changes they desired. The chapter on recreation became the main topic of this examination, at the request of the three or four Brothers.

After much discussion extending over two meetings, and after much prayer, to conclude the affair in unanimity it was agreed that they would consult superiors of Communities who had the highest reputation and the most experience. So that the interested parties could not complain that they had not been allowed to present their point of view, two who advocated changes were delegated to plead their cause before such arbiters. De La Salle was asked if he approved of this, and his prudence could not let him refuse. He very willingly abandoned his work to revision by others.

Baudin, at the time the director of the Jesuit novitiate in Rouen, who later became provincial, a man of uncommon piety, wisdom and talent, as well as of great experience in government, was one of the main authorities consulted on this question. He and the other superiors of well-known Communities all came to the same conclusion. After listening attentively to the arguments on both sides, they concluded that the Brothers should continue to spend their recreations as they had been doing for 24 years with so many blessings; and that they should be careful not to change anything. The opinion was clear and decisive, but it is rare for those who have lost their case to acquiesce in the sentence which condemns them.

One of the Brothers who urged changing the rule appealed from the opinion to the example of the judges themselves, and he pretended to find a contradiction between what these superiors had decided and what took place in their Communities. "In your own houses which are so regular," he said, "the recreations are not carried on in such a constraining manner; even games are permitted, such as bowling, tenpins and quoits."

"Say that they are tolerated, not permitted," these men of experience replied. "Such things were not allowed in the beginning. Our Rule says nothing about them; these customs have been introduced little by little. We endure them because we cannot do away with them. We can see their unfortunate consequences but we cannot remedy them."

At this the Brother was reduced to silence and said no more. The others who shared his opinion imitated him in this, and it was finally decided with no dissenting voices that the chapter of the Rule concerning recreation would remain as it was. So that in the future no one might, in ignorance of what had taken place, pretend to change it, the assembly decreed that the manner of making recreation, authorized by 24 years of experience with great benefit for the Institute, should remain unmodified in the future, as being the most suitable for body and soul, the most agreeable to the fervent Brothers and to those who wished to become such.

De La Salle, who not only was endowed with great wisdom but also possessed much experience, was so convinced of this that he made the rule of recreation one of the four essential supports of his Institute. He went even farther, because in the Rule of the Brothers Directors of which we shall soon speak, he ordered the Director to be present at recreation rather than at mental prayer, if he was forced to choose to be absent from one or the other of these exercises; and to take some other time to fulfill the latter duty, so convinced was he that the progress or the decline of a Community starts with the manner of making recreation.

Finally, to complete what needs to be said on this topic, all the points of the Rule which make up the chapter on recreation are antidotes for the defects which can creep into it, and which had indeed crept into it in spite of the care and attention of the vigilant Superior. It was to correct these disorders committed under his eyes that he detailed the practice of the contrary virtues; and because the light of the Holy Spirit showed him that such important rules might be neglected, if strangers lived with the Brothers, he closed the doors of their ordinary schools to boarders, who never keep silence, who tend to be too free in their recreations, and who bring with them everywhere disturbance, disorder and irregularity.

Directors must pay attention to this. Let them remember that regularity will begin to suffer in the Community as soon as it is open to boarders; let them trust the wisdom of their Founder on this point and follow the Rule approved by the Holy See, which forbids them to accept boarders into their ordinary schools because silence and the rule of recreation would suffer, along with the other exercises.

But how can one refuse such a favor to a friend, a benefactor or some person in authority? By showing the Rule which forbids it. This excuse will always be accepted by a person with true religious spirit. A denial authorized by the Rule never offends one who thinks rightly. Firmness in observing the Rule edifies even those who are asking for its transgression. Disregarding it often scandalizes the very friends who request the derogation. Seculars never conceive a higher regard for persons living in a Community than when they find them regular and faithful to their duties. When one is resolved to turn down a friend, or a benefactor, or a person in authority who asks for something that God does not allow, one is ready to refuse when he demands what the Rule forbids. Instead of saying, "But how can we say no to a friend, a benefactor, a person in authority?" one should say instead, "How can we violate a rule that our Founder considered as the safeguard of silence and of the spiritual exercises?"

All that we have been saying makes it clear that De La Salle did all he could to sanctify recreation and to remove from such a dangerous action all the faults which too often disfigure it. The behavior of the Brothers Directors also drew his attention to an equal degree. In the Institute the name, "Director," is given to the one in charge of each house, who must watch over the Brothers, his inferiors, take the lead in the exercises, manage the business of the house both interior and exterior, and give an account of everything to Brother Superior whose vicar he is, so to speak. It is easy to see that the well-being or the decline of the Institute depends on the

Directors' proper or improper behavior. They are subaltern leaders, each of whom has a portion of the flock to guide. They are the captains of the chosen people and share in caring for them by watching over the group committed to them. They are the eyes and the tongue of the head, i.e., of the superior who governs the entire body.

After a careful study of the reasons for the decadence of monasteries and of the relaxation that had overtaken the most flourishing Communities, De La Salle concluded that the decline was due to superiors. According to him, it was their fault if the devil caused such ravages in these earthly paradises. It was through their negligence that relaxation and then vice and disorder penetrated there. If they had been vigilant, firm, regular, the delightful gardens of the Sacred Spouse would not have fallen fallow; they would still be today what they were at the start. Primitive fervor would still make them the honor of the Church and the good odor of Jesus Christ.

Convinced of this, the holy Founder often said that the Institute was in the hands of the Brothers Directors; that they were the ones who labored either to build it up or to tear it down; that its regularity depended on theirs; and that fervor would not be maintained therein save through their fidelity to the Rule and to their duties. On the other hand, convinced that God knows those who are men after His own heart, and His hand alone knows how to form them, he prayed and fasted continually to obtain from heaven Directors of proven virtue, filled with faith and with the Holy Spirit.

To win this favor, starting about the year 1696 and continuing until 1710, he had established in his Community the practice of a daily fast and a daily Communion. In other words, each day one or several Brothers, depending on the number in each house, fasted and received Communion in turn every week to ask God to give them worthy Directors. Finally, at the suggestion of the older Brothers meeting in Paris, this fast was fixed by De La Salle on Fridays and extended to all the Brothers. It has thus become a fast of Rule, so to speak, or rather a fast dedicated by custom for this same intention, as is also the Thursday Communion or that made on a feast day during the week.

De La Salle, who when it came to penance had a hard time moderating himself, did not content himself with one fast day each week. He fasted continually for four years, not excepting Sundays and the most solemn feasts, including Easter, Pentecost and Christmas; and so rigorous was his fast that for his collation he ate nothing but a piece of dry bread and drank only plain water.

About 1700, he composed a Rule for the Brother Director, which he sent in manuscript form to all the houses, ordering the Directors to have it read in the refectory during dinner on the first Thursday of each month. The Director himself was to use it for his own spiritual reading on Sundays and Thursdays. Until his journey to Provence De La Salle had this observed with invariable constancy, without paying attention to the complaints of some who found this reading annoying. However, to accommodate human weakness, and to make the practice of this Rule easier, he changed a few expressions which some timorous souls found too embarrassing, and which led to scruples in those who were inclined in that regard.

In spite of the mitigations, the Rule met with a certain opposition from some Directors, for they found it difficult to submit to a law which did not permit them to use their authority except when necessary to insure the observance of perfect regularity, by obliging them to become examples of this virtue themselves. Their self-love was not a little irritated, because the first rank which they occupied in their houses gave them less liberty than the others enjoyed; because their duties (and consequently their faults) were proclaimed publicly every month; because they had to give an account of everything to the Brother Superior and were really the mere executors of his decisions with no discretionary powers of their own.

Humble and obedient men, those eager for their own perfection and for that of others, were delighted by a Rule which made it impossible for them to abuse their authority. By regulating all their conduct, it freed them from the terrible account that they would have had to give for it at God's tribunal, by the obligation imposed on them to refer everything to the Superior and not to do anything extraordinary without his permission.

In his wisdom De La Salle closed his eyes to the infraction of several important regulations referring to the Directors of the various houses, and he waited to remedy the problem till his disciples conceived a greater ardor for the perfection of their state. He did not even speak about the matter on his return from Provence, nor in the assembly of 1717, although that would have been an excellent occasion for calling attention to these points of Rule while he was revising all the rest and, at his disciples' request, was putting them into their final form. If we may hazard a guess as to the reasons for his silence, it would be that humility, prudence and his abandonment to Divine Providence led him to say nothing. Humility no longer permitted him to act in any way as the Superior or legislator. He thought he was the one who was drawing down the wrath of God on the Institute, and that the best thing he could do for its welfare was to pray and not to have anything more to do with its government.

In fine, he knew that all his efforts had not sufficed to save his Society. After it had more than once been on the point of crumbling, God had revived it and given it a new lease on life. For this reason he let the Divine Hand, which was apparently succeeding in bringing his creation back to the right path, take care of leading it to its perfection. In addition, he wanted the rules concerning the Brothers Directors to be their own creation; and they themselves, he felt, should legislate on their own needs. He left it up to their fervor to choose the rules of perfection for themselves, so that being more willingly accepted, their observance might be more meritorious, and so that they might subject themselves thereto with greater exactness, after having embraced them with fuller liberty. The fervor which he could see increasing among his disciples made him hope that it would bring them to this point.

He was not mistaken; for the Directors have already done in part what he would have wished, in the assembly of 1725, which was composed of 32 of the principal Brothers. Those worthy sons, ashamed at seeing such wise and important regulations drawn up by their father falling into disuse, felt inspired to have them receive the honor and obedience they deserved. They

decided that the Rule of the Brother Director should be read in public twice a year: once at the beginning of the year, and a second time when the Brother Visitor came to make his visitation of the house.

It can be said that here we recognize the perfect disciples of the holy Founder and the heirs of his spirit and virtues. Humble people do not seek to keep their obligations hidden from their inferiors, nor to conceal from them the knowledge of the laws which reveal their own shortcomings. On the contrary, they are pleased when their Brothers know what they themselves are supposed to do, so that they may even in this life bear the confusion due them over their faults, be corrected by wise advice or kept to the path of duty through the salutary fear of disedifying.

The Brothers, thus made aware of the duties of their superiors, are greatly edified by the zeal which the latter display in carrying out their obligations, and through emulation they become more ardent in fulfilling their own Rule. The more regular they see their Director, the more they become such themselves. His obedience to his Rule makes it all the harder for them to dispense themselves from theirs; and he is always in a stronger position to recommend fidelity to them when his words are backed up by his own deeds.

In addition, when inferiors know the duties of the one who governs them, they become witnesses, censors and judges of his conduct. He fears their eyes, their tongue and their pen; and he resolves to do through the love of God what he might be tempted to do out of human respect. The Director who must watch over the others has as many censors over himself as he has inferiors, and they render him pretty much the same service as he renders them. Their presence reminds him of what he ought to do. The public reading of the Rule prescribed for him will bring him either the approbation of his Brothers or the opportunity for humbly confessing his shortcomings. Thus, by accusing himself and admitting his faults, he makes up for the disedification he may have given them and obtains God's pardon.

Let us then conclude that nothing but the spirit of pride could take offense at the reading of the regulations or could be mortified by it. A humble Brother will always take pleasure in such reading and will seek the reparation for his faults in the publication of his duties. A truly obedient man, far from wishing to command without wanting to obey, is delighted to establish his right to command on his own obedience, and by his example to preach submission, the spirit of dependence and fidelity to the Rule.

If in their houses the Brothers Directors are like elder brothers in a family, do they not owe their younger brothers the example of complete fidelity to all the wishes of their father? If they are subordinate pastors in the Institute, must they not base the authority they exercise on entire submission to higher authority? If they are the protectors and guardians of regularity, must they not show themselves lovers of the Rule which the holy Founder prescribed for them? Can they dispense themselves from their obligations and still be considered the defenders of the Common Rule?

No man will have the grace to command if he does not possess the virtue of obedience. He will never convince his inferiors that he loves regulations

if he himself neglects them. If he feels that publicizing his duties is humiliating for him, he shows that he must not be faithful to them. If he were faithful, reading them would be a eulogy of his conduct and would provide him with a certificate of good conduct. If he considers as a tacit reproach for his own faults the frequent reading of his regulations which should govern all his actions, he shows that he is neither humble enough to admit his shortcomings nor obedient enough to love dependence, nor penitent enough to want to correct himself, nor virtuous enough to want to let himself be governed in all things by the laws drawn up for him.

For myself, I can never believe that the holy Founder in heaven will ever consider as a faithful disciple of his the Brother Director who neglects the wise regulations he left him. Such a son dishonors his father and refuses to conform to his desires. If he considers them impractical, he accuses the Founder of harshness and lack of discretion. If he considers them too perfect, he confesses his own slackness and want of fervor. If he agrees that they are wise and mild, then either he must bring himself to observe them or admit that he is dishonest. Finally, all the Brothers, especially the older ones and the ones who hold some position, all the true disciples of the holy Founder, should zealously work together so as not to leave his work unfinished, and to give him in heaven the joy of seeing all his laws punctually observed on earth.

No doubt that, like the Brothers in the assembly, the Directors will make it their pleasure and duty to put into practice what De La Salle during his life asked them to do, will read as often as possible their particular regulations, and will make them their spiritual reading. To be perfect, their regularity must include fidelity to this last point. Their example will make agreeable the obligation which they will impose on themselves. For indeed, which Brother Director would wish to distinguish himself by obvious signs of pride when he knows that all the others publicize every week the laws that they have received from their Moses? Obedience is a token of respect they owe to his Rule; if they fail to pay it, it is a task that they leave to him. Justice and gratitude should lead them to give the other Brothers such good example and to afford to De La Salle in heaven his deserved satisfaction.

Moreover, what more authentic sign is there of divine inspiration in all the regulations made by De La Salle than the care that Divine Providence has taken to justify them, to reestablish them and to consecrate them by the approval of the Holy See? We have seen above that the holy Founder's rivals, more opposed to the Rule and practices of virtue in which he trained his disciples than to his person, treated them as being either too perfect or too difficult, exaggerated and impractical. Was it not under this pretext that they had slandered him at the archbishop's and made every effort to remove him, to prejudice the Brothers against his government? As we have seen, when they finally became masters in his house after he left Paris, they had brought into it their own spirit and a new form of government and had altered the Rule.

After their vain triumph, what happened? God snatched victory from the hands of those who had abused it; and before he died, the Servant of God beheld the changes introduced into his Community nullified, reduced to

nothing. He saw the former discipline flourish again as before, saw fervor revive, the Rule accepted and confirmed by the body of the Brothers themselves; and as the sequel will relate, the Rule was finally approved by the Holy See.

Can we not say that the finger of God is manifested? That the Holy Spirit clearly showed that He was the author of the regulations that De La Salle left to his Institute? If that is so (and who can doubt it?), then one cannot hold that the Rule was only half-inspired. If his sons cannot doubt that the Spirit of God Himself by the pen of their Founder wrote the regulations which he prescribed for them, then they must follow them all to the letter, without exception, without modification, without distinction. The Directors must give the example. The fidelity that they show for the special regulations given them will strengthen the zeal and the exactness of all the others in observing the Common Rule.

I must also mention here some signs of special complaisance on the part of Divine Providence as regards the Rule of the Institute. Towards the end of 1713 the Brothers, disturbed over the absence of their Founder, not knowing where he was, and having almost lost hope of seeing him again, undertook to have their Rule approved by His Eminence Cardinal De Noailles. This idea had been suggested to them by De Brou who, acting as the Brothers' ecclesiastical superior in the absence of De La Salle, showed great concern for all their interests.* The incident which gave rise to this initiative was the kindness that the prelate showed the Brothers of the school at Saint Denis when he went there to administer Confirmation, and the singular esteem he then displayed for De La Salle. After asking about the latter's health and his whereabouts, he praised him before the entire gathering, adding that he was indeed a saintly person and a great servant of God. He asked the Brothers to give De La Salle his best regards.

De La Chétardye, the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, aware of these tokens of the Cardinal's interest in the Institute, went with De Brou to thank him and to beg him to take this work under his protection. Later, De Brou took Brother Barthélemy and another Brother to pay their respects to His Eminence, who received them very graciously. The prelate inquired which of the two was the Superior, and having been told, he questioned him very gently, asked if he had many novices, and recommended to him to train good schoolmasters.

It was this kindly attitude of the archbishop towards the Institute which suggested the idea of asking him to approve the Rule. Once this action was decided upon, Brother Barthélemy, on the advice of De Brou, called together the Brothers of Paris, Versailles and Saint Denis, to decide on any changes which they thought needed to be made in the Rule. For so long a time the rivals of the holy Founder had exaggerated to such an extent the difficulty of observing it that they had finally convinced some of the Brothers, not necessarily the most fervent ones.

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*This was the same De Brou who was acting as De La Chétardye's agent in undermining the Brothers' attachment to De La Salle.

The Rule was recopied, along with the comments made on it, and the whole was brought by De Brou to the archbishop, who was asked to take the Rule under consideration and to approve the modifications. To this the prelate agreed. He then entrusted the task to Vivant,* one of his vicars general. The latter kept the documents for seven or eight months. It was during this time that the troubles arose in Paris over the Constitution Unigenitus and Cardinal De Noailles' refusal to agree to it.

After all this, Vivant sent the documents back to De Brou with a letter, dated April 4, 1714, in which he stated: "His Eminence does not think that anything should be decided about this matter, or signed in his name, either with regard to the regulations themselves, or the changes which it has been proposed to make in them. He has full confidence in your wisdom for the good government of the schools which you have charge of, and he feels sure that under such wise direction piety and peace will flourish in them."

There is every reason to believe that the prelate, who considered De La Salle as a holy man and a great servant of God, was unwilling to meddle with his Rule in his absence, out of respect for his virtue and regard for his person; for the Cardinal loved him and did not want to substitute another superior in his place. He remembered how in 1702 the Brothers had demonstrated their love for the Founder and their attachment to him as well as the invincible opposition they had expressed to the intrusion of Bricot.

In all these matters the protection of Divine Providence over De La Salle and over his Rule was obvious. Nothing was changed in the Rule; it remained as it was. Nothing was changed so far as the Founder personally was concerned, and no other superior was put in his place. Control over the schools was given by the vicar general's letter to De Brou, but he was given no control over the Brothers. Thus De La Salle remained their legitimate Superior. No authority other than that of the archbishop could remove him. Thus, also, the proposed changes in the Rule became null and lost all value, not having received episcopal confirmation. In addition the nomination of local ecclesiastical superiors became useless since De La Salle had not been deposed by Church authority. Finally, the Cardinal's refusal to modify the Brothers' Rule was certainly inspired by heaven, for any approval he might have given would not have helped at all to secure that of the Holy See and might even have prevented it.**

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*This was François Vivant. He was a good friend of the Brothers. His brother, Jean Vivant, was very helpful later on in securing the approval of the Holy See for the Institute.

**Because of his opposition to the Bull Unigenitus, Cardinal De Noailles was not favorably regarded in Rome.

Chapter XVI

Eulogy of Brother Barthélemy. Heroic Examples of Virtue
Given by De La Salle at Saint Yon after His Resignation.
Through Obedience He Goes to Paris to Arrange for the Transfer
to the Society of the 5,200 Livres Left Him by Testament in
Restitution. He Lodges at the Seminary of Saint Nicholas, Where His
Virtue Edifies All. The Testimony Given about Him by One of the
Superiors of That Holy House.

The result of the assembly that we have spoken of was to reestablish discipline, the early form of government, and the former practices along with the primitive fervor of the Institute. What had been decided on at the meeting was confirmed unanimously by the Brothers in the various houses, even as it had been passed unanimously by the Directors who made up the assembly. On his return each Director told the Brothers what had taken place: the election of Brother Barthélemy and the ratification of the Rule after its revision by the holy Founder. The decisions met with entire submission of mind and agreement of wills.

The Brothers' sorrow over losing De La Salle as their superior was somewhat alleviated by the choice of Brother Barthélemy to succeed him. Brother Barthélemy was loved because he had a mild, compliant and easy-going humor, and at the same time he was humble, prudent and somewhat retiring. Always ready to follow the wisest counsels, he was never attached to his own way of thinking. Not relying too much on his own insights, he was eager to have recourse to the prudence of others. When he consulted them, he did so with great openness and simplicity. He was quite prepared to let a matter be decided by the judgment of others rather than by his own.

The position of Director of novices, which he had occupied for a long time with great effectiveness, had won for him the confidence of all the younger Brothers who had been trained by him. The role of superior which he had been exercising in fact for some years with so much prudence, in De La Salle's presence as well as in his absence, had also won for him the hearts of the older Brothers. Thus, everything went on as usual, and it was not easy to see that a new superior had been selected in the Institute. The only thing new among the Brothers was the emulation they displayed in hastening to send their new Superior their tokens of respect and genuine proofs of their submission. The virtuous Brother Barthélemy did not occupy his position for very long, because he died on June 7, 1720, about a year after De La Salle's death, and three years after his election.

Still, he remained at his post long enough to give the Brothers ample proof of his virtue and to win for himself a great store of merit before God. He governed during difficult times, and his patience was tried on more than one unpleasant occasion. The Constitution Unigenitus, about which at the time men's minds were so overwrought and so divided in France, brought him more than one cross. Not that he took it upon himself to issue dogmatic pronouncements. After De La Salle's example, he never broke his silence on

this subject save when he was obliged to declare his faith or to uphold that of his inferiors. But since several of the latter lived in dioceses where Quesnel boasted a large number of adherents, the blows aimed at the Brothers fell upon their Superior. Pens skilled in writing harsh, bitter and venomous language sent him letters filled with invective and threats; and tongues practiced in spreading lies and in ruining reputations, while recommending charity, honored him (as they honored so many others) by hurling at him the most odious epithets and the most biting insults.

The zeal that Brother Barthélemy displayed in keeping his Brothers firmly united with the Holy See and submissive to the majority of the French clergy was the only motive for their anger at him; but he considered their opposition an honor and he acted with so much wisdom under these attacks that if his enemies could not love him, they could not at least refuse him the tribute of praise which he deserved by his meek, humble and prudent conduct. By his equanimity and the serenity of his countenance he strove to keep his pains and infirmities hidden even from those who lived with him. He did not let it appear that he was hurt either by the outrages which he so often received from without, or by the importunities and even the harsh treatment he sometimes received from certain indiscreet persons.

To complete his encomium, let me add that he never forgot who he was in respect to his predecessor. He always remembered the gulf that separates a priest from a layman, the master from the disciple, the father from the child, the second Superior of the Society from its Founder. A docile disciple, he spoke only because the master was resolved to keep silence. A submissive son, he took over the government of the family as an elder brother only when the father had turned this duty over to him. As a simple Brother, he never lost sight of the sacred character which raised De La Salle above him, and in his presence he never performed any act of authority except with embarrassment and when obliged to do so by the humility of the one who had left the first place only to be sure of never leaving the last one.

In spite of De La Salle's firm resolve not to take part in any business, he could not prevent Brother Barthélemy from turning to him every time he felt the need of his lights. The Brother Superior did nothing without consulting De La Salle and followed his advice with the docility of a child. If De La Salle spoke to the Superior with all the respect and deference of an inferior, the latter followed the example he had before his eyes and seized the opportunity of humbling himself, in his turn, before the one who gave him such an example of this virtue. By this modest, humble and prudent conduct the new Superior showed himself a worthy son of the holy Founder and acquired the veneration and trust of the Brothers.

These reciprocal examples of humility, union, and good understanding between the two highest authorities in the Institute produced the most desirable effects. They reinforced the union among the other members of the body, brought about emulation among the inferiors, and the whole family returned to its early spirit and its former fervor. That is what the Brothers owe to the wise government of their second Superior, who died full of merits and was regretted by all who knew him.

In fact, once De La Salle had attained the condition of an inferior, which he had so long and so ardently desired, he no longer thought of anything save of fulfilling the obligations it imposed and of practicing the virtues it required. He reserved to himself no mark of distinction and, as a reward for all he had done for the Brothers, he wanted nothing but the right to practice submission and dependence. The only privilege he demanded was to be forgotten, slighted, and permitted to die in this state of abjection in which he had spent his entire life, ever since the establishment of the Christian Schools. He could be seen, like the most fervent novice, punctually observing the most insignificant details and following all the regulations with scrupulous exactitude.

He no longer remembered what he had once been, nor even what he still was, save to draw thence new grounds for confusion and humiliation. The titles of Founder and Superior which he had found so onerous and so crucifying were so completely effaced from his mind and from his behavior that it seemed he had never possessed them, and that all his life he had never had anything else to do but obey. As for his sacerdotal quality, he let it appear only when he ascended the altar and when he sat in the tribunal of penance. These were the only functions that he reserved to himself: to say Mass for the Brothers, to hear their confessions, to address exhortations and instructions to the boarders. In all else he behaved like a priest who has been deprived of his functions, like a minister of the altar who has been condemned to spend the rest of his life doing penance in a monastery.

With this in mind he refused all demonstrations of confidence which the Brothers offered him, and which they could not help showing to the wise and virtuous father who had brought them up. "I am nothing; go to Brother Superior," he said to those who came to him asking for permissions. When others wrote to him to ask his advice, he would not even read the letters. If later on he consented to do so, it was only through obedience, considering as an order the request Brother Barthélemy made of him to do so. His answers to those who had consulted him were of a sort to correct his correspondents for their supposed fault, for he concluded the advice he gave them by saying: "Take care not to address yourself to me on such topics again. You have a Superior; you should lay your difficulties before him. As for myself I do not wish to interfere any more in anything; I want only to think of death and to bewail my sins." Thus the saintly priest closed his life in abjection, obedience and dependence.

Brother Barthélemy was embarrassed on seeing De La Salle so often at his feet to ask for the slightest permissions. Because he wished to spare him the inconvenience of this behavior and himself the confusion of commanding a priest, his confessor and father, he gave him a general permission to do anything he thought proper. But a perfectly obedient man like John Baptist could not agree to that. It robbed him of the merit of all acts of humility, which displeased him, so he did not wish to make use of this permission. To confirm by his actions the teachings he had given his disciples on this subject, he used to ask permission for the least thing.

Never did he preside over any community exercises, not even the spiritual exercises such as vocal or mental prayer, where his sacerdotal character

conferred a certain preeminence on him. The place he occupied during these holy exercises was that of the publican---the last place, nearest the door. He did not venture to change the hour of Mass without express permission. When he went to recreation with the serving Brothers, it was on condition that one of them should preside. The presiding Brother, whom he now considered as his superior, beheld him asking for permission each time he wished to speak. If they tried to show him any special mark of distinction, he would at once withdraw and finish the recreation with some young boarder.

As much as they tried to have him occupy the first place in the refectory, they never succeeded in overcoming on this point his humility which aspired only to the last place, among the serving Brothers. Only with difficulty did they prevail on him to bless the table. If he gave in on this point, it was only because they showed him that his priestly character did not permit a Brother to give the blessing in his presence. When one of the novices came to sweep his modest cell and asked his permission to do so, he replied: "I don't want anything, my dear Brother; go find out whether they want me to go outside." He would never have allowed anyone to do him such a service of humility and charity, if Brother Superior had not ordered it.

Finally, this saintly priest was for the Brothers an accomplished model of perfection. Each act he performed was an example of virtue. Humble, submissive, obedient, simple, he had reached that happy stage of spiritual childhood which Jesus Christ Himself praised. Relieved of his burdens and able to concentrate on himself, his own sanctification became his one concern. Whatever the world could offer meant nothing to him. He could no longer turn his thoughts aside from God, from Whom nothing could distract him. Since his own perfection was his one aim, he sought it without ceasing, without allowing even the slightest occasion of furthering it to escape him, as the Wise Man advises.

I would not be saying too much if I affirmed that those venerable ancients of the famous monastery described by Saint John Climacus, who obeyed their superior like children, would have found a master of humility and obedience in De La Salle and could have modeled themselves after him in this style of living. The more the saintly priest sought to humble and to belittle himself, the more God took pleasure in enlightening him. The fact which we are about to relate shows that the state of abjection is also a state of enlightenment and the true school where Jesus Christ imparts it.

Charon, a very zealous man, one of the founders of a hospital in Canada, had come to Paris on various business matters. He strongly insisted on having four Brothers and on bringing them back with him to that country. Finally, the superiors yielded to his pleas. Brother Barthélemy gave his consent; De La Salle agreed; and in concert with the Brother Assistant who was called to Saint Yon especially for this matter, they chose the Brothers whom they destined for this mission. Two days later, when the Brother Assistant was about to return home, he went, early in the morning, to say good-bye to the Servant of God. He was much surprised to hear the latter say: "Ah, my God! What are you about to do? You are going to undertake something which will cause you an infinite number of complications, and which will have disastrous consequences." Brother Barthélemy, who had come in just then, observed that

there was no way to back out now, that everything was agreed upon and settled. In fact, the money had already been spent for the expenses of the voyage.

But the Servant of God simply repeated: "What are you about to do?" Then he said no more. This repeated remonstrance so impressed the Brothers that they did not proceed any further in this matter. After breaking off the project, they did not have long to wait before finding out that the whole business was a pious fraud. Charon admitted that he had planned to place the four Brothers in separate localities with four country parish priests to teach the children there. In other words, he wanted to steal these Brothers from the Institute and expose them to lose their vocations or to disobey their Rule. They would surely have been lost to the Society since they would no longer have had either contact or relations with it. They would really have left it by ceasing to live in community and to practice its Rule. In a word, as we have seen previously, De La Salle never wanted to send his disciples to country schools because he would have had to dispatch them singly and abandon them to their own conduct.

The Brothers chosen for the Canadian venture were four men distinguished by their merit and virtue, since that is the sort of person needed for working among the savage Iroquois. De La Salle felt that they would be lost for him if they were sent. It was no doubt thanks to a supernatural inspiration that he found out about what was proposed, for how else could he have foreseen the future and have discovered Charon's plan? The latter was obliged to seek other workers instead of the Brothers. He did not bring them with him to Canada and he died when he got back there. He had secured from the king Letters Patent for six schoolmasters, but his death led to the failure of the whole scheme, and his design was buried with him.

Meanwhile, the news of De La Salle's resignation had reached Paris, and on every side people judged him differently, each one speaking of the matter according to his own dispositions. Esteem and praise from men had not often been his lot, and it was rare that anything he did met with anything but blame. His latest gesture was condemned by all those who knew him. Some said he was demeaning his priestly character by subjecting himself to persons who lacked it. They had not remembered that Saint Anthony, Saint Hilarion, Saint Pachomius and so many other abbots who were not priests were at the head of an infinite number of solitaries and monks, among whom there were priests, and that these latter accepted obedience like the others. If they had recalled that Saint Francis was only a deacon, yet numbered among his disciples priests and even doctors of rare merit, they would have dropped this accusation.

Others taxed him with imprudence and considered him guilty of ruining his Institute by entrusting it to a simple Brother. Some accused him of laziness or pusillanimity, and opined that he had preferred love of repose and avoidance of labor by preferring a condition of undisturbed tranquillity to a position surrounded by cares and difficulties. His enemies gave an even more sinister twist to his action. According to them his subtle and refined pride was at the bottom of it all. He sought, in the lowest place, the esteem and praise of men which he had not been able to secure in the highest. The Servant of God, who thought only of preparing himself to face God's judgments, paid scant attention to all these comments from men. God alone concerned him

entirely, and all the chatter that went on about him seemed to him like so much nonsense. He laughed when he was forced to hear about it.

When the Servant of God was thus entirely taken up with the repose and solitude where he could occupy himself with the thought of heaven and with putting his soul into that state of purity needed to enter the divine sanctuary, he received a letter which called him to Paris to collect a legacy left to him. It was not a gift; it was restitution made by Rogier who in the past had been so intimately associated with him in works of piety, and who had lent his name for the purchase of the house at Saint Denis of which we spoke previously.

De La Salle reached Paris on October 4, 1717, in obedience to the orders of Brother Barthélemy who had strongly urged him to secure for the Society the restitution of the money which had been made to look as though it were a donation. He took up lodging in the celebrated Seminary of Saint Nicholas, a revered institution in which many ministers of the altar were trained and from which so many saintly priests came. He did not want to stay at the Brothers' house, fearing the tokens of submission, respect and confidence which his children owed their father and which they were quite prepared to offer him. Perhaps, too, he wished to avoid reawakening the animosity of some of his rivals, an animosity which had not yet died down, one which might have provoked new trouble for the Brothers.

In the Seminary of Saint Nicholas Du Chardonnet, De La Salle showed himself, as he did everywhere else, the perfect priest. As a star, he had gone to shine in a different heaven and to shed rays of ecclesiastical virtues and spirit in a place which was one of the sources thereof. Let us listen to one of the superiors of that seminary on this subject. Here is the letter he wrote to Brother Barthélemy after John Baptist's death.

"We are most pleased, dear Brother, to learn that you intend to give to the public the life of De La Salle, your venerable Founder. The clergy will be edified by the outstanding examples of virtue which he provided, and especially by his zeal for the instruction of youth and the establishment of the Christian Schools. We enjoyed the honor and the advantage of having this holy priest with us in our seminary from October 4, 1717, to March 7, 1718. As you see, the time was short, but it sufficed for us to recognize in him the special gifts God had given him, and the graces which he strove to keep hidden from men.

"We observed in him especially an extraordinary zeal and fervor for his perfection, deep humility, a great love for mortification and poverty. Zeal for his own perfection was manifested, firstly, in the fact that not content with being present every day without exception at all the spiritual exercises ---morning mental prayer, spiritual conferences, the Divine Office, etc.---he further mentioned to me that he spent two and a half to three hours daily in meditation; secondly, in the entire dependence on the seminary rule in which he wished to live, for he was always the first to go to the exercises, and for him there was no unimportant point of rule. He would not have wanted, I do not say to go out into the city, but even to speak to an outsider without asking for permission.

"In vain did I tell him several times that he enjoyed all permissions in our house, and that this point of the regulations did not apply to him. It was not possible to make him accept any such dispensation. His humility seemed equally admirable to us, and it was universal. He did nothing without asking for advice, and the opinions of others always seemed to him better than his own. In conversations he listened more willingly than he spoke, and never was he heard to say anything to his own praise. Filled with horror and scorn for the worldliness which a number of ecclesiastics show in their external behavior and in their manner of dress, he kept his own garb most simple and wore clothes made of very ordinary serge.

"All the rest of his external appearance corresponded with this, and that is partly the reason why I said that he loved poverty. His affection for this virtue showed itself in the generosity he displayed in renouncing everything and divesting himself of everything so as to promote the establishment of his Community, in the precautions he took to teach the Brothers who compose it, and to perpetuate among them a spirit of simplicity and of detachment from all that is not absolutely necessary for one's life and maintenance.

"His mortification, finally, threw us all into confusion while it also edified us. When he first came to the seminary, he never wished to accept a room with a fireplace; and instead of warming himself with the others, at least during recreation time, he preferred to converse with some seminarian in the halls or in the garden, to have a chance of suggesting to him some holy thought and detachment from the things of earth. As his modesty, his recollected air, and the unction of his words made it impossible to doubt that he practiced most faithfully what he preached, it is impossible to gauge the good he did in this seminary.

"Some have tried erroneously to represent him as a man with a penchant for some of the new doctrines. Wise and prudent as he was, he rarely spoke of such matters because he knew that such discourses serve no useful purpose and often cause harm; but he was most submissive and attached to the decisions of the Church. I recall that he warmly approved the action of some of his Brothers in a large provincial city who preferred to incur disgrace on the part of the highest authorities in the diocese rather than do what was required of them. It seemed to them contrary to the respect that their Founder had always taught them to profess for the authority of the Holy See and of the hierarchy of France.

"Such, my dear Brother, is the testimony that I feel I owe to the late De La Salle, whose death was deeply regretted by all of us here, to you, to the public, as well as to our own edification. If God listens to our prayers, De La Salle will continue to live in his Community through the fidelity which it will display in never giving up the maxims and examples of zeal for the instruction of children, for simplicity, poverty, edification, obedience and profound veneration for the bishops, etc. I recommend myself to your prayers, and I remain, with complete esteem for your Community and for yourself in particular, my dear Brother. At the Seminary of Saint Nicholas, March 1, 1721."

This letter truly constitutes a fulsome eulogy, one which did not come from the lips or the pen of a simple-minded person who is easily edified, or who, by a fortunate preconception in favor of virtue, tends to find it everywhere. Ordinary people, on slight appearances, often canonize men who are saints only on the outside; but those who understand what virtue really is do not bestow this name so freely, for they know how hard it is to deserve it. Even ordinary virtue, when it is easily seen, attracts a lot of attention in the world because it is a light shining in the darkness, and because, when surrounded by vices and passions, genuine merit shows up by its uniqueness. But in places where piety reigns, where examples of virtue are of everyday occurrence, where people are striving after perfection, a virtue which appears notable must indeed be eminent. One must be perfect to shine forth among the perfect and to be considered a saint. This is what the reader must keep in mind concerning the letter just cited.

De La Salle lived in that seminary so retired and so solitary a life that the persons who knew him could scarcely find him there. He withdrew from everyone's eyes and avoided dealing with others, even with the Brothers whom he denied the consolation of coming to see him. Only his Brother Director had that privilege, and he was allowed to make use of it only on rare occasions. If some of the Brothers who could not put aside their confidence in him wished to profit by his advice, they had to use some stratagem to surprise him; and when they did so, the first counsel he gave them was to refer to Brother Superior and to get accustomed to doing without him, since he had not long to live. That lesson, so calculated to detach them from his own person, did not satisfy them. As they could not lay aside their character as his sons, they begged him to preserve his character of father in their regard until death. Finally, he succeeded in causing all hearts to be opened towards Brother Barthélemy and he had the consolation of seeing all the Brothers perfectly submissive to the one whom they themselves had chosen as their superior, of seeing them faithful to reveal their inner dispositions to him in all candor, and to honor him with perfect confidence and to follow his advice faithfully.

De La Salle had been summoned to Paris to conclude the business of the legacy of which we spoke. He went to a notary who read to him the article that concerned him. In it he was referred to as the "Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools." That title, which he felt no longer belonged to him, alarmed his humility and seemed to him contrary to the truth. After answering that he was no longer the superior of the Brothers, he added that he could not use a title which he no longer possessed, and he refused to sign the document of acceptance using that appellation. In vain the notary pointed out to him that the title was not important, did not deserve any attention and still less any scruple on his part. However, he added, it was necessary to use it, since the acceptance had to be couched in the exact terms contained in the testament.

The humble priest, as strongly attached to truth as he was to abjection, continued to resist. Unable to bring himself to use a title to which he no longer had a claim, he preferred to renounce his right to the legacy rather than to receive it at the expense of truth and humility. So he withdrew, leaving the money in the hands of the notary who persisted in refusing to give

it to him except in the terms laid down in the will. Three months went by this way, during which it proved impossible to constrain the humility of the Servant of God. Finally the notary, edified by this resistance, came to the conclusion that he could perhaps allow the omission of the word, Superior, without having to fear any untoward consequences. He felt sure that this kind of conduct would not be emulated very often; and that if he had met one man ready to refuse money and an honorable title, and to refuse the former because of the latter, he would not soon see a second case of that kind. That was how De La Salle finally signed the receipt of acceptance and received under the guise of a donation what was really an act of restitution.

About the same time Divine Providence, which destined the property of Saint Yon for the Brothers, caused events to turn out in such a way that what seemed destined to drive them away from their beloved solitude was what put them in possession of it. The Marquise De Louvois who owned the house died. Her heirs sent word to the Brothers to vacate the property as soon as possible and to return it to them. The Brothers, who had been living there for 14 years, were surprised and disappointed; their Founder felt the same. There seemed no possibility of finding another place so well suited to the young Society, situated like this one on the outskirts of one of the principal cities of the kingdom, and of all those that commerce and industry cause to flourish, the one nearest Paris, of which it was actually the port and warehousing center.

The property, which they had rented so cheaply, enjoyed pure, fresh air, very different from that of Rouen. It was in the country, had large gardens, favored both the piety and the health of the Brothers, and offered them an agreeable place of retirement. De La Salle delighted to stay there because he could remain as solitary as he desired and because no other location was so suitable for the novitiate. After having been forced to transfer it from one place to another, he had established it at Saint Yon permanently, and he desired that it should not leave there unless Divine Providence brought it to some similar place near Paris, the heart of the kingdom, which is also the center of all good works and the place in France where the Brothers find the most favor, success and resources for their development.

Faced with the unwelcome necessity of giving up on short notice a house so beloved and so necessary, father and disciples had no other recourse than to turn to God, for no consideration could be expected from the heirs. When there is property to be divided up, nobody wants to speak of doing favors. De La Salle exhorted his followers to abandon themselves to Divine Providence and to hope against hope that they might yet see themselves in peaceful possession of a place which seemed made for them. He even told them that they should consider buying it. This surprised them, for the extreme poverty which had accompanied them ever since their foundation had not deserted them. Lacking revenue and money, they had sought their daily sustenance in the granary of the Heavenly Father. De La Salle knew better than they that none of the houses of the Institute had any money and could only exemplify the attentions of Divine Providence. So it was from that source alone that they should expect the funds needed to buy the house at Saint Yon.

To win such a blessing, prayers were not spared. The Brothers' great desire of having the house lent ardor to their supplications, and in the end they were effective. De La Salle found in the treasure house of our common Father enough money to conclude the purchase. The first sums came from the legacy which we mentioned above. The rest was furnished by generous people who were interested in helping the Institute. All came about in such a way that the finger of God clearly appeared, for it was just at that time that the article of Rogier's testament concerning De La Salle came up for execution.

The old servant, who was to enjoy in the first place the 220 or 250 livres of income from the estate of De Plancy, had died, leaving the right to this money to John Baptist. It was an annuity, not a lump sum such as was needed to purchase Saint Yon. However, God provided the money by inspiring De Plancy to offer to pay over the capital instead of the annuity which was due. Charity alone was the motive which inspired this offer; it was only to be helpful to the Brothers who, this gentleman learned, needed ready money, that he agreed to give the principal. His proposal was accepted with great joy, and the funds were used to make the down payment on the property of Saint Yon, which was eventually purchased.

Divine Providence also favored this acquisition in a very obvious manner, because De Louvois, the testamentary executor of his mother's will, was eager to do a favor for De La Salle. De Louvois promised the Brothers to give them the first option to buy the place, and offered it to them at a very reasonable price so as to make its purchase easier for them. As we have already mentioned, the name of De La Salle was venerated in the entire family of the former prelate of Rheims, Archbishop Le Tellier. De Louvois, aware of who and what the Founder of the Christian Schools had been and was, of what he had done and suffered, considered him a saint and was delighted to have a chance to do him a favor.

Still, despite all De Louvois's good will towards the Servant of God, the enemy of all good came near foiling his generous dispositions through the intrigues of some people who, for their own advantage, wanted to include in the contract certain clauses which would have proved very disadvantageous to the Brothers. The projected contract had been broken off twice, and the transaction seemed to have failed; but finally after two months of uncertainty it was brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and the property of Saint Yon was acquired under the names of two of the principal Brothers.* De La Salle did not want his name to appear in the deeds. Content with having the merit before God, he did not want to have the honor before men and took care to hide his name, although he was the one who furnished the money that closed the deal. For this he sent Brother Barthélemy to Paris and gave him the legacy which had been left to him, together with an act by which he renounced this legacy in favor of the Institute.

His joy was great indeed on seeing his children in possession of a property so favorable to recollection and prayer, so convenient for the

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*Since the Institute was not a legally recognized entity as yet, it could not buy or sell or hold property. Hence the purchase was made in the names of two individual Brothers.

novitiate, and so necessary for his Institute. It was, however, only after his death that the Brothers gained undisputed possession of the place, thanks to the Letters Patent granted them by the king. In the meantime they were often disturbed, and several times were alarmed both from within and from without, on the subject of this purchase. People eager for gain and incited by the malice of others were working underhandedly to put the Brothers out. They did not despair of seeing the property fall back into their hands some day. They felt that it had been torn from their ancestral heritage and that their avidity gave them some right to it.

Moreover, one of the Brothers in whose name the house had been bought, died, leaving his property rights to the other Brother. Although this latter had too much religious spirit to be tempted to take advantage of the situation for his own profit at the expense of the Society and to appropriate the domain for which he had merely lent his name, still it was something to be apprehensive about. There had already been an example of such dishonesty among the Brothers, as the reader will recall. The Letters Patent put an end to the alarms and worries by confirming the Brothers in the ownership of Saint Yon.

The peace and quiet that the founder of the Brothers enjoyed at the Seminary of Saint Nicholas Du Chardonnet attached him to the place, so that it was not easy to get him away from it. Considering himself a mere novice in the pursuit of perfection, he thought that the seminary was just the right place for him, and that at the age of over 65 he needed, like a young cleric, to begin again to acquire the ecclesiastical virtues, thinking that he had not yet reached the first degrees thereof. Thus, less important in his own eyes, more submissive, more docile than a young man who has just been tonsured and who comes with juvenile ardor to draw from seminary life as from its source the true ecclesiastical spirit and to allow himself to be trained in piety by experienced masters, he wished to renew in the Seminary of Saint Nicholas the practices of fervor which he had learned at Saint Sulpice when he was 16 or 17 years of age, and to close in that house the life of dependence and of interior abnegation which he had begun in the former.

His entire ambition was to die like Jesus Christ in the practice of obedience, humility and mortification; hence his heart kept him bound to a spot where he found it easy to exercise these virtues. Such ties which the purest virtue weaves were not easy to break, and the Brothers were not heeded when they urged the Servant of God to come back to them. They had at their head a Superior General elected from their own ranks, one whom they themselves had chosen. He was wise, and his conduct corresponded with the opinion everyone had of his solid virtue. They had at last become proprietors of a stable establishment very well suited for the novitiate. Once these two goals had been achieved, the holy Founder had nothing more to do in the Society. If he were to go back to Saint Yon, he felt he would be occupying a place uselessly. That was what he replied to those of his children who begged him to give himself back to them.

Brother Barthélemy, who agreed with his good father in everything else, did not share his views on this point. Feeling that De La Salle's presence was more necessary than ever for the Institute, he suffered with regret being

deprived of it and used every means to shorten the time of John Baptist's absence. He feared lest, being already rather advanced in age, infirm and worn out physically, the Servant of God might die outside the bosom of his own family, and that other hands might have to close his eyes. Moreover, he and the other Brothers had witnessed for so many years the heroic acts of virtue that their Founder had practiced during his life, that they did not want to miss those that would bring that life to a close.

Their reasons were valid, but they were not the kind that carried much weight with the humble Founder or that could have prevailed on him to come home. So Brother Barthélemy was careful not to appeal to them. He insisted, rather, on the fact that it was only proper for the father to live with his children, on the Brothers' desire to see him among them again, and on the duty he had of not abandoning the Society he had founded. The holy Founder, impressed by such arguments, took refuge in his incapacity for all things. Claiming that he was entirely useless, he wished to persuade the Brothers that the Institute should consider it a blessing from heaven to be rid of him.

"I need to be led, not to lead. It is time for me to begin working at my own sanctification after having striven for so long to sanctify others. Since God gives me such a splendid occasion to do so, I must profit by it. If I let it escape, that would be a fault with which I would have to reproach myself for the remainder of my days. I have commanded long enough; the time for obeying has come, and I need to teach you by my example to prefer the state of dependence to that of authority. I have turned my back, most fortunately, on all cares foreign to my salvation. I am released from all the distractions which interrupt my communing with God. Why should I trouble the sweet repose I enjoy to take up again those solitudes? After serious reflections, I am much inclined to end my days here."

This refusal only made the Brothers' desire for the return of their holy Founder all the stronger and more urgent. However, seeing that they could not convince him unless they invoked arguments based on authority, they turned to the superiors of the seminary and begged them to use obedience to prevail on De La Salle to come back to his own house, since he wanted to stay in theirs only to be able to practice obedience in all things. The superiors could not turn down this request which, although contrary to what they would have preferred, was so reasonable. Delighted to have with them so saintly a priest, they would gladly have paid him to stay; but his own children were asking them to have him leave. By obliging him to go back to the Brothers, the priests consented to lose him; it was a real sacrifice for them, but one they generously made.

The compliment they paid John Baptist to get him to go back to the Brothers could not have been more gracious or more effective. They told him that as he was the model for the whole seminary, he was a consolation and a joy for them in the Lord; that they considered his stay among them as a favor from heaven; and that to keep him they would have gone to any length if God's interests and those of the Institute were not opposed to theirs. However, since the two were in competition with each other, the former should prevail over the latter. They felt it to be their duty to point out to him that he owed his presence to his own family. It would be a shame for them to deprive

his children of the father whom they still needed. In this case justice and charity, courtesy and duty all made it an obligation for them to ask him to give in, and to point out that he could no longer keep himself away from his flock without exposing several of those who belonged to it to fall into false ways, without provoking murmurs on the part of some, and complaints and tears on the part of all. He should believe what they told him on this subject all the more since it was only with great reluctance that they presented this request to him on the Brothers' part, and that they were acting as mediators between them and him only at the expense of their own inclinations.

The humble priest did not allow himself to be dazzled by such an honorable and flattering address which came from the heart rather than from the lips, and which might have nourished self-love in anyone less solidly established in self-contempt than he. After all, the persons who spoke thus were men of high merit and distinguished virtue, and it was easy to feel satisfied with oneself on hearing them. At any rate, John Baptist replied that since he was incapable of governing, his presence would be useless to the Brothers while his absence would cause them no harm. He added that since he did not yet know how to obey properly, it was to his advantage not to leave a place where he was only learning how to practice this virtue.

This reply was worthy of him. It was to be expected, and nobody was surprised; but he did not foresee that his own words would be used against him; he did not suspect what would happen next. For they told him that since he made obedience his law, he should do through obedience what was asked of him. Because obedience was indeed his supreme law, he submitted without a word as soon as obedience was invoked. Immediately he began to prepare for his return to Saint Yon where the Brother who had replaced him as superior was eagerly awaiting him.

It was a sacrifice on both sides when he said good-bye to his charitable hosts. Shared aspirations had brought them together, and virtue was the tie that cemented their friendship. The purer it was, the closer and more cordial it was. The separation was hard on one side and on the other. The priests in charge of the Seminary of Saint Nicholas Du Chardonnet regretted losing a saint as they bewailed the departure of their friend. They deplored even more the absence of the spiritual benefits that his presence had afforded their students and themselves.

On his side, the Founder of the Christian Schools departed with extreme reluctance from a place which he regarded as the source of true clerical spirit in France, the place he had chosen as his resting place, where he longed to end his days in submission, dependence, humility and continual prayer. In short, it was a real sacrifice for him to bid farewell to the virtuous priests whom he honored as the fathers of so many holy ministers of the altar, men whose zeal, piety and skill in the administration of the sacraments, in the instruction of the faithful, and in pastoral work give infinite honor to those who trained them.

Before leaving for Rouen, De La Salle paid the Brothers in Paris the visit that they had awaited with so much eagerness. Their joy was great, but

it lasted only a short time, for he only stopped in to see them in passing and only for a few moments, like Jesus Christ appearing to His Apostles after His resurrection in brief passing moments which left their hearts filled with regret for His absence, mingled with the joy that His momentary presence afforded them. Perhaps these good Brothers, giving way to their filial tenderness, might have imitated the holy women spoken of in the Gospel who, delighted at seeing their Divine Master alive once more, and fearing that they might not be able to enjoy His presence as much as they wished, tried to retain Him. The Brothers in Paris might have done the same, I say, if they had known that this was the last time they would see their holy Founder. No doubt, if they had realized that they would not meet him again on this earth, they would have thrown their arms about his neck, bedewed his face with their tears, and obliged him to mingle his with theirs as they embraced him, as did the disciples of Saint Paul when they said farewell to him.

At least, all of them eagerly asked him for his last blessing; but he hesitated to give it to them and would probably have refused if Brother Barthélemy, in begging him to do so, had not made the request sound like an order. The humble Founder, who considered himself as the least member of the Society and forgot all that he had been, did not dare deny himself a right which he could never lose, however lowly the position he might assume, and to whatever obscuring of his priestly character he might have condemned himself, since he could never efface it. So, in the presence of Brother Barthélemy, whom he honored with deep reverence as his Superior, his humility did not permit him to perform this act which is a sign of preeminence; but the same humility, subject in all things to the voice of obedience, made it impossible for him to refuse as soon as the one whose requests were orders for him had spoken. Then, in company with Brother Barthélemy, he left for Saint Yon on March 7, 1718, some 13 months before his death.

Chapter XVII

On His Return to Saint Yon De La Salle Thinks Only of
Preparing for Death. The Nearer He Approaches It, the More
Brightly Does His Virtue Shine Forth. New Examples of Humility,
Obedience, Zeal and Charity. Persecution Follows Him Even to His
Deathbed, and His Honor Receives a Final Blow When the Archbishop of
Rouen Revokes the Faculties Granted to Him.

The Brothers at Saint Yon saw their Founder once more as an angel from heaven and they welcomed him as they would have welcomed Jesus Christ Himself. His return brought them an increase of joy and of grace; his presence made itself felt by the benefits that accompanied it. Indeed, it was necessary to revive fervor, good order, perfect regularity, the spirit of recollection, silence, prayer, mortification and obedience, which had suffered some diminution. After his return from Provence, the Servant of God had indeed reestablished Saint Yon in the peace, union and tranquillity which had been altered in his absence; but he had not had time to revive there the perfection which had reigned at the beginning. His long absence had brought about at Saint Yon itself the same disorders that it had caused elsewhere.

To restore the primitive fervor of the house, more time was needed. As De La Salle had been called to Paris not long after he had returned to Saint Yon, his stay there had not been long enough to enable the mother of virtues to reconquer its first sway. It is well known how quickly and easily fervor can be lost, and how much time and difficulty must be spent before it can be recovered again. We can say, however, that it was gradually coming back to Saint Yon when De La Salle departed for the last time, and that when he returned, it came back with him. His example, his zeal and his instructions rekindled the divine fire which he had ignited there before his departure for Provence.

The novices and Brothers of that house, happy at having recovered their master in perfection, vied with one another in profiting by the limited time they still had to enjoy his presence. It would seem that the Holy Spirit repeated to them the words of Jesus Christ to His Apostles: "Walk while you have the light." Walk with giant strides in the way to heaven while you have the guide who will conduct you there; take pains to follow his footsteps with ardor while you have him at your head; take advantage of the light which his actions and words offer you, lest the shadows of tepidity, infidelity and cowardice overcome you.

In their midst De La Salle was like a torch which flared up more brightly as it approached its end. Like another Eliah: "His words were ardent; he was all aflame and shone like a star in the firmament." Entirely concentrated on preparing himself for death, he no longer lived save as a man belonging to the next world. He often spoke of it; and in spite of his attention to repress his soul's aspirations, he could not help allowing it to be seen that he was heartily tired of his exile on this earth and sighed unceasingly after heaven. The weight of years, the weakening of his powers, and the increase of his pains showed him that his end was near, and that Divine Providence had destined for him a tomb at Rouen, since It had sent him to die at Saint Yon.

Moreover, the Servant of God, feeling himself useless in this world and seeing his wishes finally fulfilled, no longer restrained his desire for death. As it delayed in coming, he begged God, if He so willed, to hasten the moment of his dissolution. For a long time, for too long a time, he had been living with these thoughts in mind. The Spirit of God warned him that it was time for him to go back to the One Who had sent him. His task was accomplished; nothing further held him on earth. He desired to be delivered from the prison of his body and to be united with Jesus Christ. His pilgrimage here below seemed long to him, and all his yearnings were directed to his heavenly country. To make himself day by day more worthy of it, he sought to mark the final moments of his life by some act of virtue. As though he wished to leave to his disciples at every step some trace of his charity, zeal, humility and obedience, he went about giving examples of these virtues.

He had so completely forgotten what he had been and what he still was that seeing him one might have taken him for what he pretended to be: the last of all. If his garb and tonsure had not shown who he was, nobody could have believed his rank, and everyone would have taken him for a serving Brother. Nothing in him recalled what he had been, what he had given up, what he still was, or what was due him. It was entirely against his wishes that

the Brothers did not forget, as completely as he himself had forgotten, that he belonged to one of the first families of Rheims, that he had been a canon of an illustrious metropolitan church, that he had given up everything---family, home, canonry and wealth---to follow Jesus Christ.

It was even less possible to recognize by any natural sally which might escape him, or by any sudden movement of self-love, that he was the first Superior and founder of his Society, the father, director and leader of the Brothers. He was so submissive, humble and obedient that no one could have guessed that he had ever commanded, or had ever done anything else but obey. He was seen speaking to the Brother Superior with the respect a child shows to his father and with the reverence he would have displayed at the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff. Nor should his attitude surprise anyone; for this humble priest saw only Jesus Christ in Brother Barthélemy, and he was as little attentive to his own personal qualities as he was attentive to those of that good Brother.

Views of faith had effaced from the mind of the Servant of God the idea of what either of them was in himself. He was as unmindful of his noble birth, of his dignity in the Church, of his learning, of his merit, as he was of the fact that the new Superior of the Institute lacked all these human advantages. To say it all in a word, De La Salle, on his return to Saint Yon, had no other occupation than to abase himself and to obey. The nearer he approached the end of his life, the more one could see growing within him this desire of humbling himself and of departing for the next world without bringing along with him anything belonging to the old Adam.

The Brothers, eyewitnesses of all this, beheld this redoubling of his fervor with admiration, but they were frightened by it because they felt it foreshadowed his imminent death. They thought, rightly, that this light was about to be extinguished, since it flickered so brightly. In the course of his life we have seen with what a holy passion he cultivated retirement, so as to keep himself in God's company. Hence there was no reason for surprise if in the last days of his life he was so careful to remain continually recollected.

His esteem for mental prayer was so great that he judged people on the progress they had made in it. Whoever did not apply himself to it with fervor was not, in his opinion, a very spiritual man, no matter what reputation he might have for virtue. In such a soul, he said, there is nothing great. He enjoys few of heaven's graces and gifts. Wherever the Spirit of God does not reign as master, the natural spirit dominates and self-love does not yield place to charity. Now it is only through mental prayer that the soul empties itself of self and fills itself with God. His love for this holy exercise made him take up his pen to recommend it and to awaken an attraction for it by describing its advantages and its excellence.

In his little work entitled Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer, he tried to smooth out the paths of mental prayer by explaining the manner of performing it well. Every day he spoke to the novices on that noble subject so as to give them a liking for the divine food which offers a delightful

manna to those who have had the courage to endure perseveringly its first bitterness and its first aridities. It was after the mental prayer that they made before dinner, and of which he asked them an account, that he entered with them into instructive and interesting details. At first he opened their minds to the mistakes they had committed in it, whether out of negligence or lack of understanding; then he enlightened them as to the manner in which they should have proceeded. Next he read them some pages of his book and taught them how to spend the time of mental prayer usefully.

But as he knew that the spirit of mental prayer is not something easily acquired, and that success depends on the preparation one brings to it, he taught them how to make mental prayer outside of the appointed time by accustoming themselves to converse with God during the day, by making His presence familiar to themselves, by watching carefully over their senses, and by applying themselves to perform all their actions for God in union with those of Jesus Christ. To help them to enter upon such a spiritual life, he composed for them a collection of choice sayings, of lively and ardent sentiments, of various instructions, both short and enlightening, of prayers of all sorts. His intention was to furnish them a magazine of spiritual arms against the suggestions of the evil one, and against the useless thoughts which, while amusing the soul, fill it with vanities and often, by exciting its passions, leave it empty of God.

Moreover, De La Salle's continual prayer was not a state of idleness, nor was it unfruitful in the house at Saint Yon. All those who lived there felt the influence of the lights and graces which he derived from prayer. The zeal with which it inspired him made him attentive to every opportunity for practicing charity toward the boarders, old and young, who resided in the house under the guidance of the Brothers. He visited the older ones frequently. They badly needed such help. Because of their evil conduct, they had been locked up by the authority of their parents or by court order. They were doing involuntary penance which, as a rule, helps people very little to amend their lives or to expiate their sins. These young men, blinded by their passions and hardened in vice, were not easy to reach. Often enough their captivity made them bellicose and difficult to approach. The desire of regaining the liberty which they had abused occupied them wholly and blocked their ears to the pious exhortations addressed to them. If they paid attention and seemed docile and open to good impressions, it was often only through hypocrisy and dissimulation; by pretending to be converted they hoped to win their deliverance.

It is easy to understand that these young delinquents were in no mood to hear any talk about God or penance; and that men of ordinary virtue, after all their remonstrances and exhortations, left the youngsters exactly as they were before. To win over such souls steeped in sin, it takes men endowed with a special and superior grace. It takes saints whose approach puts the demons to flight and whose fiery words can melt such brazen hearts. It did not take long to notice that De La Salle was in the habit of visiting them. True and solid conversions were the sign and the result of his action.

First he won their confidence, so that they turned over the care of their consciences to him. In the hands of such a charitable and skillful physician,

the most desperate maladies of their souls were cured; the most inveterate and seemingly incurable wounds began to heal. Everybody was surprised; the patients themselves wondered at their prompt restoration. Their conversion brought about their liberation, but some of them did not wish to leave Saint Yon save to enter the cloister. Others, when they returned to the world, made known by their well-regulated and edifying lives that they had had the good fortune to find in their prison a saint through whom grace and repentance had been given to them.

The younger boarders who were sent to Saint Yon to be educated and trained by the Brothers also felt the effects of De La Salle's zeal. With great kindness he heard all their confessions; neither their number nor their importunity seemed to weary or bore him. He made himself all things to all men so as to gain all to Jesus Christ; he became a child to his children and often mingled with them at recreation time. On their side they were delighted to see him and came thronging around him so that they might enjoy not only the pleasure of listening to and seeing him at close range, but also that of showing him their affection. For they truly loved him; he had won their hearts. Then the Servant of God, after seizing the favorable moment of giving them some short instruction proper to their age, bade them farewell, to their regret, not wishing to interfere with their innocent amusements. If one or the other was lacking in docility or had fallen into some fault, he would take him aside, and by his advice and exhortations, reprimands and caresses, would usually succeed in changing him or at least touching his heart.

He heard the confessions of all the Brothers, numerous as they were, once or twice a week; and he did so with such fatherly tenderness that later on they could not remember them without being deeply moved. On Sundays and feast days he addressed a fervent sermon to the Brothers urging them to acquire virtue and to strengthen their fidelity to their vocation.

In his solitude the saintly priest was not shielded from persecution. He found his path still strewn with thorns, both inside and outside the Community. After living for so long on the cross, it was only right that he should die there after the example of Jesus Christ. Having lost his rank, so to speak, and being nothing any more among the Brothers, he gathered, as he had hoped to do, the benefits belonging to the lowest place which he had chosen. Some, at times, seemed to overlook or to forget what he had been and what he still was in their regard, and treated him in a manner that lacked the proper respect. What appears even more surprising, and shows that God acts in a special way in dealing with His most distinguished servants and makes everything concur to further their sanctification, is that one of his oldest disciples, who had never left the ranks of the serving Brothers, treated the Servant of God with haughty insolence without realizing it; for if he had realized it, he would have felt a deep confusion over it. In fact, the Brother was truly filled with esteem and admiration for his father and considered him a saint. He had always remained inviolably faithful to the Founder in all the critical events we have spoken of. Yet when he dealt with him, he treated him with arrogance and put the virtue of the Servant of God to a severe test.

De La Salle was once invited by a priest in the city, a man with whom he had a close relationship, to say high Mass on Sunday in the parish church. He could not refuse the invitation to dine at the priest's house because it would have been too far for him to return to Saint Yon. In addition, he did not wish to refuse an invitation from a friend whom he needed to cultivate, and who had already done several favors for the Community and was in a position to do more. Yet, on his return home, the humble Founder was reprimanded by the Brother in question, who reproached him with violating the Rule by dining away from the house. On another occasion the same Brother told him that he was being fed and lodged at Saint Yon's out of charity, as a penniless priest who was no longer good for anything. On hearing this "compliment," the Servant of God could not help laughing. The one who had paid it to him had accustomed him to receiving others like it with mildness and serenity.

Another Brother, as ill-mannered as the former, and much more stupid, put the humility of the Servant of God to the test in another way. This Brother was a false mystic, a real fanatic, a man convinced that he had attained a high degree of mental prayer and was specially favored by God. Enraptured by his chimerical perfection, he considered De La Salle as just another ordinary priest, not sufficiently enlightened to guide him in his supposedly elevated mystical states. I am not sure that the Brother would not have ventured to dispute first place in the realm of mystical prayer with Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross. According to him, heaven had no more secrets for him, and he carried on familiar converse with its inhabitants. The Most Blessed Virgin and the angels paid him such frequent visits that he was no longer surprised on seeing them. All these marvelous favors were granted him, he said, in a hayloft where he had arranged a sort of oratory for himself. The place, he declared, was so sacred, because of the miracles of grace which occurred there, that nobody could enter it save barefooted. He saw himself surrounded with celestial light at the first step he took into it. Waiting for him were various citizens of the heavenly court who had come to see him.

Books by Luis De Granada, Rodriguez or Saint Francis De Sales and other similar authors, whose spirituality was solid and approved, were very elementary according to him. This eagle, nourished only on heavenly manna and raised so far above the common ways, did not deign to read such ordinary material. Malaval and some of the other Quietist authors were the ones he liked, the only ones he judged worthy of himself.

In vain did De La Salle strive to open the eyes of the poor Brother, duped by his own gross self-love. Possessed by the demon of pride, he scorned the advice of a man whom he rated far below himself in spiritual awareness. The only thing the Servant of God managed to persuade him to do was to consult someone else and to reveal his interior situation to the director whom he chose.

The superiors called in a canon, a great friend of the Institute,* who had the patience to listen, at least in part, to the prideful reveries of the idiot who was enraptured by the prodigies of Satan when he transforms himself

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*No doubt Blain himself.

into an angel of light. Without being actually deranged, no one could have had such a small endowment of common sense. He was really impoverished in spirit, but not with the spiritual poverty which makes a man truly wise by making him truly humble. He really suffered from a lack of intelligence as well as of grace. He spoke only to praise himself and to give others the same exalted idea he had of himself. The canon, surprised at first that this Brother should be seeking advice from an outsider, told him that he had in his Founder a new Moses or a new Saint Paul, and that he would not find in any other the enlightenment he could find in De La Salle. But the Brother would not agree with that opinion. Furthermore, he was not looking for advice from anyone but himself. It was not to seek guidance but to cause his interior life to be admired that the fanatic consented to reveal himself.

In vain did the canon try to open his eyes to his palpable illusions and to the evident pride he displayed. In vain did he strive to show him his errors and discover to him the operations of Satan in his pretended mystical experiences. The canon was classified by the Brother as one more of those who understand nothing about extraordinary spiritual ways, and his advice was scorned even as De La Salle's had been. Finally the devil's work was completed. Some days later the visionary, although a man of mature age, jumped over the walls enclosing the property, losing his hat in the process. He then presented himself at the Abbey of La Trappe but he found the door shut. Not knowing what else to do, he applied, and was accepted out of charity, in the house of some nuns who put him to work sweeping the church and helping the sacristan. A short time later his life came to an end there, and he was no doubt quite surprised when death overtook him, he who had thought himself to be richly endowed with grace, to find that he was naked, poor and miserable. He died as his desertion merited and as his pride demanded: a prey to despair and abandoned by God.

Outside the Community De La Salle had much to suffer from his ecclesiastical superiors. Archbishop D'Aubigné of Rouen treated him with a harshness which has few parallels, and so did his vicar general. The latter, although of a mild and obliging character, declared himself the enemy of the Servant of God and did him all the evil turns he could. His position enabled him to do many. In such treatment we can recognize that God is pleased to make use of all kinds of hands to work at the sanctification of His elect, and that even the just, at times, persecute other just men.

Among the many illustrious bishops whose virtue shone brightly, I dare say that France contained no other more pious, more regular, more zealous, more laborious or more exemplary than Archbishop D'Aubigné. Yet it was that worthy prelate, still so deeply mourned in the archdiocese of Rouen by good Catholics and virtuous priests, who strewed De La Salle's path with sharp thorns, and who treated him as the most unworthy priest of this vast diocese.*

The archbishop, who had been the vicar general of Bishop Godet Des Marais at Chartres, had given to De La Salle and to the Brothers at that time all

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*Blain had been brought to Rouen by Archbishop D'Aubigné when the latter was transferred from the bishopric of Noyon to that of Rouen.

sorts of tokens of his esteem and his kindness; but as we mentioned earlier, he allowed himself to be so strongly prejudiced against them by the secret enemy of the Servant of God that he would neither see the Brothers nor hear them spoken of. When John Baptist visited Rouen, he never failed to present his respects to the archbishop, but he was always badly received and had to put up with his lack of consideration. On one occasion among others, the prelate, usually so moderate, who even in dealing with ecclesiastics whose lives were a scandal respected their state and priestly character while not sparing their personal shortcomings, addressed De La Salle in unmeasured and harsh language. The humble priest, who was already kneeling, no sooner heard the first words from his superior's lips than he prostrated himself on the floor to receive the rest of the admonition with due respect and humility.

When Archbishop D'Aubigné had finished speaking, De La Salle arose, without opening his mouth to excuse or justify himself; after making a deep reverence to the one who had just treated him so unfairly, he left. On that occasion, as on all the others, the humble Founder did not proffer a word of complaint or show any sign of displeasure. The Brother who had accompanied him, upset over what he had just heard, saw him leave the archbishop's palace as calm and collected as he had been on entering.

The vicar general of whom we just spoke, far from trying to mollify the prelate and to defend De La Salle, seemed only to incite and embitter the former more. He, too, had allowed himself to be prejudiced against the Servant of God by the deceased priest of Saint Sever, who was highly regarded by the archbishop and who was indeed a worthy pastor. That priest, as we mentioned, never stopped criticizing the Brothers and their Superior, and as we explained before, he complained everywhere that they did not keep to the terms of the agreement reached between them and him. The agreement had become impossible to observe in certain of its articles, and it was entirely unreasonable to insist on their execution. Yet it was on that point that the priest, meaning well no doubt, continually accused De La Salle to his ecclesiastical superiors.

In vain did the saintly Founder try to point out that he and the Brothers were not violating any of the articles agreed upon except those that experience had shown to be impossible to keep. In vain did he seek to demonstrate the inconveniences which had already resulted, and the disorder which had ensued when they had tried to carry out such provisions. He was never listened to. The other side was not interested in knowing the truth. The vicar general's prejudices had reached such a point, in the last meeting when this matter had been discussed, that he charged De La Salle with lying and accused him of that fault to the archbishop.

A canon,* who happened to be present when this imputation was made, indignant at seeing a man whom he honored as a saint blamed for a shameful prevarication, could not help raising his voice to justify him, and said to the vicar general that certainly either De La Salle had not explained himself properly, or that the vicar general had not understood what he said; that a

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*This was Blain himself.

man like De La Salle was not capable of wishing to deceive his ecclesiastical superiors by a vulgar lie. In spite of all that the canon could say, the humble Founder was pronounced a liar and condemned to suffer the penalty for it by being suspended from his priestly functions.

The canon, appalled by this sentence even more than by the accusation, immediately went to the Servant of God, who was already suffering from his last illness, and asked him for the correct information about the matter concerning which he was considered to have lied, but without informing him of what had happened or warning him of the insulting incrimination against his sincerity. The pious De La Salle explained in a few words, with his usual straightforwardness, what had happened, without suspecting that anyone was considering him guilty of lying. He had put the matter clearly to the vicar general, but the latter had misunderstood and had suspected him of practicing duplicity, had accused him of it and condemned him for it, without having any reason for so doing.

The canon returned with this information to the archbishop's but it was all useless. God permitted this trial so that His servant might die, like Jesus Christ, in disgrace. The vicar general still maintained that De La Salle had lied to him, and he would not listen to any explanation of what had happened. Not willing to admit that he had made a mistake, he had to maintain his story that the Founder of the Brothers was deceitful. The latter's condemnation was then confirmed; and the canon, who had tried to demonstrate De La Salle's innocence, was asked to transmit to him orally the decision to revoke the faculties granted him.

The canon said nothing, since further discussion would have been useless; but he was not at all pleased to be charged with such an odious commission, founded on a calumny dictated by false impressions and prejudice. He was not prepared to lend his cooperation to the passion of a man who, although moderate and kindly by nature, seemed to have forgotten on this occasion the gentleness which was so characteristic of him. Moreover, as De La Salle had only a short time to live, it was only right to show him some consideration. Even if he had been guilty of the falsehood imputed to him or of other more considerable faults, it seemed shocking to blacken his honor by relieving him of his priestly functions at the very end of his life. The decent thing to do would have been to let him die in peace, with his honor intact. They would not have wanted to offer such an affront or to cause such grief to anyone else.

In addition, what consternation would the suspension not cause in a house like Saint Yon where there were over 80 persons whom De La Salle confessed regularly? What a scandal it would be---or rather, what complaints against authority would such a step not give rise to---if it became known? For all these reasons the canon resolved to keep the matter secret and to leave the entire affair in the hands of Divine Providence. He did not doubt that if he himself said nothing, someone else would be sent to Saint Yon to tell John Baptist that he was suspended. To prepare the Founder for such a blow, the canon warned him that serious trouble was brewing against him at the archbishop's, that he had not been able to avert it, and that soon the news would be divulged. He said no more. In fact, as those in authority saw

clearly that the canon was not willing to act as a messenger, they sent someone else, a person who informed the saintly priest that his faculties had been revoked.

That was two or three days before De La Salle died. The insult did not provoke any outbursts, because John Baptist said nothing about it to anyone, and because his death, which followed almost immediately, did not leave any time for the suspension to be made public. The canon, De La Salle's friend, went to see him two days before he died and learned from De La Salle's own lips that someone had come to inform him that his faculties had been revoked. "They had asked me," the canon replied, "to bring you the news myself; but I was in no hurry to carry out such an unpleasant task." "I suspected as much," replied John Baptist, "after what you did me the honor of telling me at your last visit."

He accepted such an ignominious blow, which was his last, without losing anything of his peace and tranquillity. He spoke of it with a cheerful and serene air; he seemed not to feel any chagrin over it nor the least resentment. One thing should not be forgotten. When some of the Brothers, a few days later, informed the vicar general of their Founder's death, he exclaimed: "He is a saint! The Saint is dead!" He might have added that he himself had fastened the last jewel to the Saint's crown. But how can a man with any sense declare someone to be a saint after accusing him of imposture and causing him to be suspended? If this contradiction in sentiments and behavior seems incomprehensible, it is only because God permits even the hearts of good men to grow passionately bitter towards His favorites; but He does not allow the latter to lose the esteem that their virtue deserves.

Chapter XVIII

Last Illness and Death of De La Salle

The closer De La Salle felt his death approaching, the more he labored to die to everything and to cause the remembrance of himself to fade from the minds of all, even of his dearest disciples. But in spite of all he could do, he still remained in their hearts what he had always been and should have been: their father, their Superior, their Founder. He could not eradicate from their souls that depth of confidence, tenderness and openness inspired by grace towards those who have engendered us in Jesus Christ. He constantly spoke to them of death and affirmed that his own was not far off, that they should no longer consider him as among the living, and hence should get accustomed to doing without him. He replied in the same vein to those who consulted him by letter. "I beg of you, for the love of God, my dear Brother," he wrote to one of the pioneer Brothers whose confidence he had not been able to turn down, "in the future do not think of addressing yourself to me in any way. You have your superiors whom you should consult about your spiritual and temporal concerns. Henceforth I wish only to prepare myself for death which must soon separate me from all that is created."

Before long, in fact, the Brothers came to fear that his prediction would be fulfilled. The rheumatism, which he had contracted long before by his vigils and his austerities and by sleeping on the floor after spending the greater part of the night in prayer, had become inveterate and would not yield to any remedies, even the most potent ones. The sort of fire torture, which we have described, had given him some relief but it had not cured him. As the years went by his pains increased and spread throughout his members, so that at the end his desire for suffering must have been fully satisfied. The pangs were exacerbated by the continuation of his austerities and his ordinary exercises of piety, for he left none of them aside and treated his body as if it were bereft of sensation, which gave some the impression that he was not really all that sick. They were tempted to believe that a man who never complained and who did not allow the most violent agony to show itself must not be suffering very much.

In fact, all he strove for was to let God alone be the witness of his patience, to suffer in silence, and to hide from the Brothers the knowledge of what he endured. In this he succeeded, because his countenance, which remained always calm and cheerful, serene and peaceful, on which there appeared not the slightest cloud of chagrin or alteration, made them think that he was without pain when in fact he was enduring very sharp pangs. They might have thought he was in fairly good health if the diminution of his strength, joined to the difficulty he felt in moving about, had not shown the contrary.

Asthma, with which he had to contend for some time, was an additional complication which his fasting aggravated. His various ailments did not prevent him from observing Lent in 1719 with his usual strictness; and although he breathed only with difficulty, so violent was the suffocation caused by the asthma, the Brothers could not prevail on him to try to get some relief from it or to mitigate his Lenten penances. He answered them that the victim was ready to be immolated and needed to be purified. On his return from a trip to Paris which he had had to undertake, Brother Barthélemy was not any more successful than the others in convincing him; so they had recourse to his confessor and asked him to forbid John Baptist to continue a fast which was putting his life in danger. He submitted to the injunction of his confessor, thus causing the spirit of penance to yield to that of obedience.

Not long afterwards a violent headache, resulting from a blow from a falling door, together with a stitch in his side, was added to his other ailments. The doctor who came to see him declared that the illness was mortal and he did not fail to so inform the patient. The virtuous priest heard him with a smiling countenance that showed his satisfaction; it was for him a joyful piece of news which he had been waiting for from one day to the next. His one desire was to leave this earth and to be united with Jesus Christ. The life he led had no interest for him; he wanted to die as soon as possible. He had nothing to lose and everything to gain by death. A man so long attached to the cross of Jesus Christ and crucified with Him could face with nothing but joy the demise which would put an end to his suffering and usher in his happiness.

While not entertaining any hope of curing his patient, the doctor tried by every possible means to give him some relief from his sufferings. Although John Baptist knew that these remedies were quite useless, he did not refuse them because they were very unpleasant and thus furnished him opportunities for offering God the sacrifice of his repugnance. But everything that they tried to do to relieve his pains was unsuccessful. The illness gathered strength and progressed considerably. Then he asked the Brothers not to waste any more money and to spare the cost of his treatments. He added that his hour was drawing near, and that they should have recourse only to the Sovereign Physician Who alone could cure him or afford him any relief.

The discontinuance of the therapy and his abandonment to God made it possible for him to say Mass again and to offer the sacred Victim; or rather his fervor, which had been impeded by the kind of treatment they had been using on him, found itself at liberty to celebrate the sacred mysteries again and to hear confessions for about a fortnight, in spite of the pain he endured. On such occasions virtue gives one strength, or helps one rediscover the powers that are only hidden, not removed, from the depths of one's nature. The great souls that never pay attention to their bodies demand from them, even unto death, efforts which are truly prodigious.

De La Salle's condition was such that anyone else would have remained in bed. To all appearances he should not have been able to get up, and his incapacity for doing anything should have forced him to stay in bed. But he did not pay any attention, and everyone was amazed at seeing him up and about, doing things, and forcing his body to obey him so that he could satisfy his devotion. However, what is too violent cannot last; if virtue can inspire courage and make up for the weakness of nature by redoubled fervor, it cannot, aside from a miracle, restore exhausted strength and bring back to full vigor a body that has been worn out and abused. Towards the end of Lent his illness grew so violent that the Servant of God was obliged to remain in bed. In proportion as he felt his body growing weaker, his joy increased and shone out on his face. "I hope," he said, "that I shall soon be delivered from Egypt and brought into the true Promised Land."

The feast of Saint Joseph was drawing near. His special devotion to this great Saint, whom he had chosen for Patron and Protector of the Institute, made him conceive an ardent desire to celebrate Mass that day in his honor; but he was content with merely desiring to do so, for it did not seem that he could say Mass without a miracle. Still, the favor that the Servant of God hoped for without daring to expect, or even less to ask for, was granted to him.

On the eve of the Saint's feast, about ten at night, he felt his pain grow less and his strength return. He was surprised at the change and, imagining that he was dreaming, he did not mention it to anyone. Next morning he discovered that this sudden improvement was neither a dream nor imagination, for he felt strong enough to get up and to celebrate the divine mysteries. His joy was great at being able to satisfy his devotion; the joy of his children, who thought he was cured by a miracle of the Most High, was even greater. All of them together blessed, praised and thanked the goodness of God and their Patron, Saint Joseph. John Baptist took advantage of this

favor and celebrated Mass with the recollection and fervor befitting the last Mass of his life. His free and unconstrained air as he said it made the Brothers believe that God had restored him to health through the intercession of Saint Joseph. They all hastened to ask his advice for their spiritual progress, as though he had been perfectly cured. He answered them for the last time with the ease of a man possessing his full vigor. But after satisfying his piety and that of the Brothers, he relapsed into his former condition; his strength failed, and his end seemed close at hand. Then the Brothers understood to their great regret that his health had not been given back to him, but merely lent so that he might celebrate Mass in honor of Saint Joseph and satisfy his devotion towards this great Saint.

The parish priest of Saint Sever, informed of the danger in which the Brothers' Founder lay, came to visit him; after assuring him of his sympathy for the suffering he was enduring, he exhorted him to patience. This priest, accustomed to encountering disquiet and apprehension whenever he visited people who were dying, was much surprised and rather disconcerted when he saw De La Salle so calm and so indifferent to whatever might transpire. As though shocked or disedified by this seeming security which the Servant of God enjoyed, he thought it his duty to withdraw him therefrom by speaking to him very plainly that death was approaching, and that judgment would follow it.

"Realize," he told him, "that you are going to die, and that afterwards you will have to appear before God."

"I know it," replied De La Salle, "and I am entirely submissive to His orders. My fate is in His hands. May His will be done!"

By these few words the priest understood where the confidence and serenity of the patient came from, and he judged that lengthy remonstrances were not necessary for a man who was entirely absorbed in God, and who seemed already to enjoy the happiness of the Blessed. He was even inspired to put an end, in peace and charity, to a slight quarrel which had existed between him and John Baptist, who had not been willing to accede to everything the priest wished to require of the Brothers in his parish. The reconciliation afforded the pious Founder no small consolation.

After the priest's visit, De La Salle's heart abandoned itself to the desire of the Sovereign Good, and he concentrated all his thoughts on the heavenly Jerusalem. His union with God and his aspirations towards Him were unceasing. He requested the Viaticum, which he called his passport, and did so with an eagerness which surprised all. The priests of the parish raised some objections to granting his wish, as they did not think he was yet so near death; but finally they promised to bring Viaticum to him the next day. The delay favored the great desire he had to prepare adequately for receiving Viaticum. He spent the entire night in preparation. As soon as day broke he gave orders to prepare everything so that he might receive his Lord as worthily as possible. The Brothers did so with as much magnificence as the poverty of Saint Yon would allow. Nothing could have pleased him more, because he wished everything connected with the sacred mysteries to be beautiful and rich.

While the Brothers were getting the house ready for the coming of Jesus Christ, De La Salle was lost in recollection, preparing his heart. At that moment he once more ignored the fact that he was desperately ill, and in his fervor, profound respect and ardent devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament, he found the strength to get up from bed. Reluctant to welcome the Prince of Eternity while lying in a bed, he insisted so much to be allowed to rise and to put on his surplice and stole that the Brothers could not refuse his request. Thus, seated in a chair, he awaited the arrival of his Lord and God. But when the tinkling of the little bell announced His coming, he could no longer contain himself. Confused at appearing seated before his Creator and his Judge, he gave way to a transport of fervor which caused him to prostrate himself before the Host, to adore Jesus Christ, and to annihilate himself in His presence. With a countenance lit up by his excessive joy and his ardent charity, he received the holy Viaticum in the same manner in which, so often, he had been seen celebrating holy Mass---namely, with seraphic devotion. The flush which appeared on his face gave him a healthy look and made the bystanders think that he was actually better. In fact, some of them showed astonishment that the Viaticum was being given to a man who seemed to be quite well.

It was time to grant him this consolation, which was not complete until they brought him the sacrament of the sick, a blessing which he asked for with insistence. He felt his strength ebbing away and knew that the prison of his body had almost reached the moment of its dissolution. Extreme Unction was administered to him the following day, Holy Thursday; he received it with complete presence of mind, responding to all the prayers. When these were finished, he remained in deep silence for seven hours, entirely occupied with the graces God had just given him. He broke this silence only to satisfy those who surrounded his bed and who wished either to witness his blessed death or to receive some advice from him or to hear some word of edification. He satisfied all of them and even revealed to several of them things hidden in the depths of their souls, revelations which surprised them very much. A layman who was present, whether out of curiosity or out of piety, wished to try this out for himself and asked John Baptist to tell him what he thought of him. The answer was: "You can be saved if you want to be; for God is bestowing great graces on you; but you are not profiting by them. You are not going to Him as you should. You are hiding the talents given to you." Nothing was nearer the truth; the man admitted as much and added that the Servant of God had read his soul and all that was taking place in it.

The Brothers, disconsolate over the loss they were about to experience, hastened to gather his final words. Here is the first article of the Testament which he left them.

"First, I recommend my soul to God, and next all the Brothers of the Society of Christian Schools with whom He has associated me. I urge them above all else always to show entire submission to the Church, especially in these evil times; and so as to give proof of this, never to separate themselves in anything from our Holy Father the Pope and from the Church of Rome, always remembering that I sent two Brothers to Rome to ask God for the grace that their Society might always be entirely submissive thereto. I also recommend to them to have a great devotion to Our Lord, to love very much Holy

Communion and the exercise of mental prayer, to cultivate a very special devotion towards the Most Blessed Virgin and towards Saint Joseph, the Patron and Protector of their Society, and to fulfill the duties of their employment with zeal and disinterestedness; to maintain close union among themselves and blind obedience to their superiors, which is the foundation and the support of all perfection in a community."

As he found it very difficult to speak, and his voice was growing weaker, the Brothers thought that his agony was about to begin. Then all his sons threw themselves on their knees, asking him to bless them; and Brother Barthélemy, raising his voice, besought him to impart a blessing to all those present and to extend it to all the Brothers of the Institute. At first his humility made him reluctant to do so; but finally yielding to the pleas made to him, he lifted his eyes and hands to heaven and said: "May the Lord bless all of you!" This blessing caused many tears to flow from the eyes of his disciples and opened a new wound of sorrow in their hearts. The realization of the loss they were about to sustain grew stronger as the moment drew nearer. Like loving children who are about to become orphans through the death of their father, they found comfort in their sorrow only in their piety, their submission to God's will, and in the hope that when their Founder was taken from their sight, he would continue in heaven the services he had rendered them on earth.

Towards evening he began to lose consciousness, as indicated by his unconnected speech. The Brothers then recited the prayers for the dying. When these were finished, John Baptist recovered his awareness and took advantage of this last moment God gave him to inspire his disciples with his own horror of the world. "If you wish to preserve yourself in your state," he said, "and to die in it, never have any familiar dealings with people of the world; for little by little you will acquire a liking for their way of acting and will be drawn into conversation with them so that, through policy, you will not be able to avoid agreeing with their language, however pernicious it may be. This will cause you to fall into infidelity; and no longer being faithful in observing your Rule, you will grow disgusted with your state, and finally you will abandon it."

He could say no more; a cold sweat broke out over him and deprived him of speech. At that moment he entered into an agony which lasted from midnight until half past two the next morning, which was Good Friday. He then recovered slightly, and someone suggested to him the thought of imploring the help of the Most Blessed Virgin by this prayer of the Church which he was in the habit of addressing to her daily in his evening prayer: "Maria, Mater gratiae..."

Brother Barthélemy, who never left his side, asked him whether he accepted with joy the sufferings he was undergoing. "Yes," he replied, "I adore in all things the action of God in my regard." These were the last words he uttered. At three in the morning he fell into agony again, which lasted until four. The agitation which it caused him did not prevent his face from appearing tranquil and reassured. Finally, about four o'clock, he made an effort as though to rise from bed to go to meet someone. Then joining his

hands, he raised his eyes to heaven and expired. It was Good Friday, April 7, 1719. He was not quite 68 years old.

Such was the demise of the Founder of the Christian Schools, of the saintly priest whom God raised up in these later times to labor for the instruction and education of the poorest and most neglected youth. If there never was a more necessary and more useful undertaking for Christian society, neither was there ever one which was for so long, so universally and so cruelly opposed and persecuted. During the nearly 40 years the Servant of God devoted himself to it with unexampled constancy, he hardly enjoyed a day of peace. His zeal, his trouble, his courage brought him constantly renewed crosses.

Scarcely could De La Salle open his mouth without being contradicted, blamed, humiliated, treated as an indiscreet, stubborn, eccentric sort of person, a vain and proud man. So humble, submissive and unpretentious did he act that everyone thought he had a right to reprehend De La Salle, to give him orders, to assume the posture of his judge and his superior. Facing enemies whom hell raised up against him on all sides, he pursued none of them and adopted no defense other than that of humbling himself and yielding. He was inflexible only on the questions of regularity, of keeping the spirit of poverty, of recollection, of mortification and of the other Gospel virtues which produce saints. He was as docile as a child on all the rest.

Filled with courage in the greatest dangers which threatened him or menaced his Society with imminent ruin, he displayed an unshakable confidence in God, generous abandonment to all the orders of Providence, and a deeper horror for the slightest imperfection than for the greatest evil in life. Whoever so desired could maltreat, humiliate, calumniate and persecute him in his own person and in that of his sons, yet during 40 years he never opened his mouth to complain. He had become so familiar with affronts, scorn and injury that he was surprised and thought he was in a different world when compliments were paid to him. Friends and enemies, the great and the not so great, rich and poor, learned men and ignoramuses, saints and sinners, prelates and superiors, and even his own disciples took up arms and waged cruel war against him. All of them were, in God's hands, the instruments of his sanctification.

Persecuted everywhere, he fled from one city to another, following the counsel of Jesus Christ. He wandered from province to province without finding peace anywhere, without discovering a place where he did not meet a Calvary on which he was crucified. Ever since he first thought of founding the Christian schools, what day was there, what spot which for him was not marked by the sign of the elect, the cross, and which he himself did not sanctify by heroic acts either of humility or patience or mortification or obedience or submission to God's will, by abandonment to Divine Providence or by some other virtue?

Could we not say of him in all truth what the Doctor of the Gentiles said of himself and of all the Apostles: that he was considered as the refuse of the world? But in the midst of so many crosses which were as numerous as the days of his life, in the midst of so many contradictions, affronts, outrages

and injustices, who ever saw him upset, sullen, disconcerted, infuriated? Who ever heard from his mouth a single word of bitterness, impatience or resentment? Who ever saw his countenance altered by the agitation of his heart? Calm, cheerful, recollected, satisfied, gracious and modest---that was how he appeared in the midst of all the tempests that afflicted him. He emerged from them as unruffled as he did from mental prayer.

How often did he not witness in his own house some of his children rising up against their father, disciples taking up arms against their master, members rebelling against their chief? How often did he not see himself alone, or nearly alone, abandoned, betrayed, persecuted from within and without, encountering on every side hands raised against him? Can we not say that God seemed to take pleasure in setting all men against him and in delivering the first blow Himself? For no matter how pure De La Salle's intentions were, God seemed to cross them. No matter how holy his projects, God appeared determined to lay them waste. He was able to do hardly anything that succeeded, and if the project of establishing the Christian schools did finally prosper, how long did it take him, and how did he do it? It took him 40 years of labor, pains and continual alarms---years he closed, as he had begun, in ignominy.

If all France so admired Abbot De Rancé, buried in his Abbey of La Trappe and reviving there in our day the austerities of the Thebaid, should she not also have congratulated herself on having seen almost at the same time a young canon of Rheims renouncing his canonry, not in favor of his own brother or some relative, but of a stranger with a reputation for virtue? On having beheld him giving away his family fortune to the poor and condemning himself to a life of abjection, poverty and suffering, and then raising the standard of penance at the very gates of Paris, leading there a life as austere as that of La Trappe, and much more humble and poor?

If we compare the life of the Brothers at Vaugirard and at the Grande Maison with that of the celebrated penitents who made the solitude of La Trappe so illustrious, and if we ask our own self-love which of these two states we would care for least, I am not afraid of being mistaken if I maintain that if one had to choose between them, self-love, forced to the choice, would prefer the life of La Trappe to that of the Brothers' infant Society. In fact, if on the one hand the austerities practiced in the two states can be laced in parallel, on the other it must be admitted that at this time disesteem was as characteristic of the Brothers' habit as glory was of De Rancé's reform.

We have seen above that the exercises of penance, mortification and humiliation reigned with such complete sway in the youthful Institute that the Founder's enemies made such austerities a crime for him, and that they took occasion of them to slander him to the ecclesiastical authorities as a man whose fervor made him imprudent, whose severity knew no mitigation, and as a torturer of the human body. They obliged him, in spite of himself, to tone down the great rigor and to discontinue a number of practices which they considered insupportable to human nature. The constraint applied to the Servant of God to make him lighten the burden borne by his disciples merely

made him add to his own. For as though he wished to compensate God for the macerations which his disciples were forbidden to practice, he reserved them all for himself.

Hair shirts, iron girdles, cruel disciplines, vigils, sleeping on the floor, the most insipid food, frequent and strict fasts, poor clothing, traveling on foot, almost complete abstinence from wine, constantly doing without fire---all these were penitential practices which he could never bring himself to give up. In all truth one can address to him the reproach which has always been leveled at the greatest saints: that he was the torturer of his own body. Interior mortification completed in him the putting to death of the old man which external mortification can only begin. He was so dead to himself that he manifested no sign of repugnance or of natural inclination. No sudden sally of passion escaped him, or let his desires or his fears become known, or showed his resentment or his touchiness.

De La Salle's perfect mortification, having made him complete master of himself, also established in the depths of his soul a peace which the most trying events of life could not trouble; and his confidence in God added thereto a joy which the whole world could neither give nor take away. When he lacked everything, when everything rose up against him, then did he seem the most assured. He hoped against hope, and rarely did he hope in vain.

Apostolic zeal and generosity inspired all his conduct. Nothing seemed difficult for him when God's interests were at stake. Once he was sure of the divine will, he never gave up what he had undertaken, whatever assaults might be directed against him by the world or by hell. He possessed a special grace for winning over the most hardened sinners; he never undertook the conversion of one of them without succeeding. He had a tender, generous and sincere heart; he was affable, considerate and polite. His natural disposition was both tender and firm, energetic and active; but he did nothing hastily and was incapable of cowardly surrender. He took his full time to reflect; but once he had made a decision after mature consideration, he held to it, so long at least as he felt that it was conformable to God's will.

Brought up in the lap of luxury by a wealthy family, by parents who loved him dearly, his constitution at first seemed very delicate; but his body, inured to labor and to austerity, grew more robust with age, so that as his virtue grew his health likewise improved. No doubt he would have enjoyed good health even to an advanced age, if he had not undermined it by excessive penance.

De La Salle stood a little above average in height; his frame was well proportioned and solidly built. A wide forehead, prominent nose, and two large beautiful eyes, nearly blue, made up an arresting countenance. His features were gentle and agreeable; his voice was strong and distinct. Exteriorly he appeared cheerful, serene, modest and pious. His skin, somewhat tanned by his long travels, usually appeared slightly flushed. His manners were simple, gracious and inviting, without affectation. His hair, chestnut in his youth and curly, had with the years become gray or white, and made him look venerable. Finally, grace enthroned, so to speak, on his countenance made him amiable and inspired piety.

I dare say that no man in our day looked more like a saint than he. He appeared as such to all who saw him; he inspired them with the desire of becoming saints themselves. On his approach, one was seized with respect; one felt confused in his presence because one felt oneself either a sinner, or a tepid soul, or unfaithful. Such is the portrait of John Baptist De La Salle, priest, doctor, ex-canon of the metropolitan church of Rheims and Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Those who knew him will agree that even this portrait is very imperfect.

The news of his death quickly spread throughout the city of Rouen. Everybody hastened to come to see for the last time a man considered a saint, but not treated like one. After all, only death gives to true virtue its real luster and differentiates the saints from those who are not. The glory of the latter, just like their false happiness, ends where the former's begins: at the grave. Death, which plunges into oblivion all the partisans of the world and makes them vanish from men's minds, reestablishes the servants of God in true honor and makes the remembrance of them imperishable.

Death, which causes the former to be trampled underfoot and mingles their ashes with the common dust of the streets, withdraws the latter from ignominy and throws full light upon their forgotten virtues. Who is the great one of earth, be he prince or king, whom death does not turn into a frightful corpse, the presence of which is insupportable? The sight of it scares all; its deformity strikes terror, its decomposition drives all away. But if a saint is dead, he draws men to him; everyone is eager to behold him, to have a relic of him. In his case death loses all its horror.

That was what occurred after the death of De La Salle. His face seemed as beautiful and serene after he expired as it had been during his life. Everyone hastened to claim something belonging to him. The difficulty was to satisfy all those who asked for relics; a crucifix, a New Testament, an Imitation of Christ, and a pair of Rosary beads were all he had. They constituted his entire wealth. Once this inheritance had been seized by the ~~most clever and most adroit~~ hands, the others fell upon his poor garments. Everyone wanted some bit or piece for a relic. Outsiders did not scruple to appropriate, by a pious theft, whatever they could lay their hands on; some even cut locks of his hair; others treasured things which he had used. Those of his disciples who were not able to get anything seemed as disconsolate as children who have lost their father's heritage. To console them, copies were drawn up of the testament he had made shortly before his death; these were given to all the Brothers, present and absent.

The saintly priest's body, clad in his sacerdotal vestments, was waked in the chapel of Saint Yon from the evening of Good Friday till the afternoon of Holy Saturday to satisfy the devotion of his disciples and of the public. He was then buried with no special ceremony in Saint Suzanne's chapel in the parish church of Saint Sever, in the presence of a large crowd of people who had come to the funeral. Several religious of different orders and various clerics joined the parish clergy in honoring the memory of the deceased. His body was carried by six of the Brothers and followed by all the others, who bedewed with their tears the path they followed, and who mingled their sobs with the chanting of the Psalms. Here is the epitaph inscribed on his tomb:

D. O. M.
Hic expectat resurrectionem vitae venerabilis
 JOANNES BAP. DE LA SALLE Rhemus, Presbiter,
 Doctor Theologus, Canonicus Ecclesiae Metropolitanae
 Rhemensis, Institutor Fratrum Scholae Christianae.
Obiit sexta Parasceves, annum agens LXVIII.
Die septima Aprilis anno 1719, in aedibus
Fratrum Sancti Yonis hujusce Parochiae.
Det illi Dominus invenire requiem in illa die.

Because the feast of Easter and its octave made it impossible to hold the memorial service, it was celebrated on the Monday after Quasimodo Sunday with great solemnity by the clerics of the minor Seminary of Saint Patrick, which is now at Saint Nicaise. Many pious persons hastened to pay to De La Salle's memory the honors which he had so carefully avoided during his life; and God seemed to find their devotion agreeable since He gave tangible tokens of His power, although we do not venture to declare them miraculous in anticipation of the judgment of the Church. Such is how, even on this earth, God rewards those who have been faithful to Him unto death.

All who knew De La Salle regretted his departure and considered his death as a loss for the Church. The conviction about his heroic virtues, which he had left behind him wherever he had been or had dwelt for any length of time, brought him after his death a concert of praise from all over France. Worthy men could not refuse their tears, and his disciples were all but inconsolable. The constant stream of letters which Brother Barthélemy received on this topic made it impossible for him to forget his loss and kept open the wound in his heart. His sorrow lasted as long as his life. Once deprived of De La Salle, he was as much at a loss as an orphan who, by the death of his parents, remains at the mercy of Providence, without money, friends or defenders. Life became a real trial for him and, as he himself declared, earth had no attraction for him since he no longer saw his dear father in Jesus Christ. To assuage his sorrow he set about gathering, and causing to be collected, accounts of all that De La Salle had done, while his memory was still fresh in everyone's mind, and to secure memoirs about his life from those who had been eyewitnesses of it. He was also much comforted by the good will shown by the Brothers who, scattered as they were all over the country, took care out of precaution and for greater surety, to have a large number of Masses said for the repose of their Founder's soul, even though they felt sure he was in paradise.

Many parish priests had solemn Masses sung out of charity for the late Founder. No one showed more sympathy over the loss of John Baptist than the priests of the Seminary of Saint Nicholas Du Chardonnet who had been so edified the previous year by the examples of eminent virtue they had witnessed on his part. The reply that one of them sent to Brother Barthélemy on this subject deserves to be quoted here.

"My dear Brother, I was truly sorry to receive your letter concerning the death of your beloved father, John Baptist De La Salle, which De La Vertu had already informed me of. I have spread the news of this sad event and I have recommended him to the prayers of our community, while informing them of the details which you had given me in your letter. You may be sure that each of us joins you in praying for the beloved departed. All of us, and I in particular, consider him as a saint who is praying for us in heaven. I do not think that your Community can ever decline, having such a protector with the Lord. You know better than anyone else what a holy life he led, what opposition he had to face in founding the Institute, an obvious sign that it is God's work. I hope it will be strengthened by his prayers and by your correspondence with grace.

"We were fortunate enough to be edified by his presence during some six months while he did us the honor of residing among us. I think God had sent him to preach to our young men by his example, and to help us ourselves to rise from our tepidity. His life here was most humble and mortified; he slept little and prayed much. Our bell-ringer told me several times that he always found him up when he went to ring the rising bell, even during the coldest winter weather; and during that time he never went to the room where the fire was, except when I insisted on bringing him along with me, a thing which happened seldom since my schedule did not correspond with his.

"He made at least three hours of meditation regularly every day. He was more faithful to the house regulations than the lowliest of seminarians, obeying with admirable promptness the first sound of the bell which announced the exercises. He was so submissive that he wearied the prefect by coming to ask him for permissions, even for those which are not required of the seminarians themselves, as for instance to speak with persons who came asking to see him; to bring them to his room, as you yourself noticed more than once; to go out on free days; and even to write letters, for he never wrote a single one without an express permission. He was so willing to accede to the requests made to him to take part in funeral processions without a stipend, or to conduct the funerals of children, that it seemed as if that was something he valued very much. In a word, retirement, prayer, charity, humility, mortification, a poor and hard life seemed to be what delighted him.

"As for myself and my hometown, we shall forever be indebted to him. When he lived in the Faubourg Saint Marcel, he was charitable enough to educate four young men to teach school. They left his institution so well-trained and so full of zeal that if they had found in the local ecclesiastics someone capable of cultivating the good dispositions he had inspired them with, they might have established a most useful community for the province. One of them became a priest, and he teaches the humanities with edification for the young, in spite of the opposition they have frequently had to contend with from the magistrates, and sometimes from parish priests and other ecclesiastics. I hope that De La Salle's death will not deprive me of the affection of your Community and that you will always do me the honor of considering me as one of your friends. On my part, I shall strive always to give you proofs of my sincere friendship in the hope of sharing the merit of all your good works and your prayers before the Lord, in Whose love I remain, very humbly yours, etc...."

This testimonial to De La Salle's virtue by such an able judge is not out of place here. It will no doubt bear fruit in the seminaries. The example of an ex-canon, priest, doctor, venerable superior, celebrated Founder being faithful to the first sound of the bell, asking for the least permissions, practicing childlike obedience, keeping recollection and avoiding the world, engaging in practices of humility, charity and mortification, will teach young clerics that these virtues are proper to all ages; that the time they spend in the seminary is the time for them to learn how to acquire similar virtues; and that De La Salle, in spite of his advanced years, exercised them with so much joy and ease in the Seminary of Saint Nicholas only because when he was young, he had acquired the habit of exercising them at Saint Sulpice.

Brother Barthélemy was not alone in being inconsolable over the loss of the holy Founder. Like him, many others could neither prevent themselves from weeping over it, nor heal the wound that it had inflicted on their hearts. Time, of all remedies against affliction the most effective, could not soothe them; and they looked for an end to it only with the close of their lives. Thus Brother Barthélemy, who could not console himself, was obliged to console others and to dry their tears when he could not prevent his own eyes from shedding them.

Here is a touching letter he sent to one of the Brothers, trying to console him.

"My very dear Brother, may the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us! You had every reason to shed tears when you learned of the death of our very dear father. I do not think that any of our Brothers was able to refrain from doing the same, it was something so natural. But, after considering everything, my dear Brother, we must admit that it was the holy will of God. God had given our Founder to us for as long as He pleased; now He has taken him from us to reward him for his labors and for his saintly life. We must submit and conform ourselves to His divine good pleasure.

"The holy Apostles, too, were very sad when they were deprived of the sensible presence of their Divine Master; but to console them He said, 'It is expedient for you that I go, for if I go not the Holy Spirit will not come upon you.' Our dear father is not lost; he is, in all probability, among the saints in heaven. He can do much for us before God's throne, since even on this earth he obtained so many graces for himself and for all the souls whom he helped to be converted and to give themselves to God.

"Now we admire his lofty virtues, his angelic purity, his deep interest in church ornaments and sacerdotal vestments for which he spared no expense, his great liberality towards the poor, even though he himself was in need, and our Brothers as well; his zeal for the salvation of souls, which made him at one time propose to exchange his canonry for a pastoral charge so as to be able to exercise his zeal; his humility, patience, obedience, complete resignation to Divine Providence, and so many other heroic virtues. I think he must take rank among the virgins, if I may judge by what I learned of his conduct with reference to chastity and virginity. No, my dear Brother, do not ask God to withdraw you from this world; I shall pray to Him with all my heart to keep you here for as long as it may please Him, for His glory, the

salvation of souls and for your own greater good. I forbid you to die, save to your own self-will and your own way of thinking.

"Our dear father did not die without permission; I think he would have died much sooner if he had been able to get permission to do so. Hence, do not be sad any longer to no purpose, for the one whom you weep for as dead is living and enjoys peace which nobody can ever take from him. Be at peace, too; keep yourself in the close union he recommended to us and in the practice of the other virtues.

"Do not sadden Our Lord's spirit which is within you by an unjustified melancholy over our dear father. I do not know how I myself manage; I am sad and joyful at the same time. The remembrance of his holy life, along with the recollection of several remarkable things which happened during his illness and at his death, consoles me. So try to be more cheerful, for sadness which does not come from the motion of the Holy Spirit is dangerous and has unfortunate consequences."

It must be admitted that the sorrow felt by these good Brothers was amply justified. What loss in all the world could have affected them more than that of the father who had begotten them all in Jesus Christ, nourished them with the milk of his teaching, stimulated them by his example, upheld them by the power of his prayers, defended them by his patience and invincible courage from the persecutions of the world and of hell, and all this for nearly 40 years?

In losing De La Salle they lost their teacher of the spiritual life, their guide in the paths of perfection, their legislator, Founder and model. In losing him they lost one of the greatest servants of God which the seventeenth century had seen in France: an apostolic man, a man of consummate virtue, a man according to God's own heart, a true image of Jesus Christ on earth. But, in truth, they have not lost him; in heaven he is, in their regard, what he was for them on earth. Shortly after his death he wrought in their favor truly prodigious favors and he continues to do so every day. Can I not indeed call prodigious the abrupt change which took place in the Brothers' fortunes in France, where all of a sudden everything became favorable to them, and where everything they could have desired and asked for was given to them, as we are about to see?

Chapter XIX

Unexpected Blessings Received by the Institute of the Brothers after De La Salle's Death. They Secure Almost at the Same Time Letters Patent from King Louis XV, and from Benedict XIII a Bull Approving Their Rules and Erecting Their Society into a Religious Order.*

The Brothers, disconsolate over the death of their holy Founder, continued to bewail his demise; and although time soothes the aching heart and dries up tears, it could not make them forget the vastness of their loss or allow them to cease fearing the results it might bring. They were not alone in weeping and in fearing. All who had known the virtuous Founder, all those who felt true concern for the Christian Schools, all the Brothers' friends mingled their own tears with theirs; and all of them, alarmed over the perils threatening the Institute, feared that it might well be buried in De La Salle's tomb.

They might have been correct in apprehending this, if the Institute had been the work of men; but as the sequel will show, the Holy Spirit was its true author; De La Salle was only the instrument. Indeed, we shall see the Institute grow stronger, be firmly established, and assume its final form and perfection, against all probability, after the demise of its father. Perfect union among the Brothers, an edifying subordination to the Directors of the various houses, cordial and unreserved submission to the Superior General, a sincere love for their state and vocation, an ardent zeal which each member of the Society showed for his own perfection, a reflowering of their early fervor and a noble emulation for virtue were the happy dispositions which heaven desired to see, and which it brought about in order to cause this great undertaking to proceed.

The Brothers vied with one another in trying to fill themselves with the spirit of their Founder, and each of them sought to make De La Salle live again in his own person. Though he had been taken from their sight, he remained ever present to them in spirit. They pondered the teachings he had given them in private, the instructions he had imparted to them in public, the heroic examples of virtue which they had witnessed; and the fear of not profiting by these, joined to the desire of imitating him, made them hasten on in his footsteps with even greater ardor after his death than during his life.

It was a further cause of admiration for those who knew the Society intimately to see it not only maintain itself in the state in which the Founder had left it, but even make progress and perfect itself without any human support and with no other resource than Divine Providence. They were surprised to see such an effective type of government in this organization, in the members such total dependence on the head who was a simple Brother, and in all such great unanimity in pursuing the same ends.

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*Blain was no expert in canon law, especially in the Church's legislation concerning religious groups. The Bull, of course, did not make the Institute a religious ORDER!

They saw perfectly accomplished this truth which De La Salle had so constantly maintained and which had drawn down on him so many persecutions, namely, that the proper government of the Society required that one of its members should be at its head; and that an outside superior, no matter how virtuous he might be, would only lead the Institute to ruin because he would never truly possess its spirit and principles; and that since his profession, mentality and manners would be different from those of the Brothers, he would not possess the required resemblance between superior and members. The Prince of Pastors, Jesus Christ, wished to be, sin excepted, like unto men so that they might love and imitate Him, and so that He might guide them with more tenderness and gentleness.

The Brothers had only one heart and one soul. Among them there was no diversity of opinions. All wanted and thought only what the Superior General wanted and thought; and the Superior General himself had no other thought or will than that of the Brothers because all of them, guided by the spirit of their Founder which they seemed to have inherited on his death, were always unanimous in their views of what was best and in the choice of the means to procure it.

De La Salle seemed to be living still in Brother Barthélemy; hence he was the joy of the Brothers, his inferiors. He had so well imbued himself with the spirit of his holy father that he spoke and acted in all things like him. Trained in the latter's school, and for so long his humble disciple before becoming his humble superior, he had never lost the disposition of a lowly disciple with regard to De La Salle. Brother Barthélemy's humility had constantly forced the humility of the Founder to give him advice on all sorts of matters, to share his insights with him, and to rule the Society through him.

Thus, when Brother Barthélemy governed the Institute for two years under the eyes and with the advice of De La Salle, it did not seem that there had been a change of superiors. It was, then, a new blow for the Institute when God took Brother Barthélemy 14 months after the death of De La Salle. Then the tears, which had not yet ceased flowing, welled up again with abundance in the eyes of all the Brothers. They mourned the death of their father all over again in the death of this son who was so much like him, who had taken his place, and who represented him so well in their eyes.

Once again the Society seemed in desperate straits. Consternation seized all hearts, and each member, seeing that God had for a second time taken away their leader, feared for the Institute. Even the least timid and the least humble wondered whether God might be punishing them in His anger and abandoning an Institute whose holiness they thought they had sullied by their infidelity and tepidity. Others thought that they were the causes of God's malediction and that they were obliging Divine Justice to avenge their own particular faults on the entire Community. These humble sentiments redoubled the Brothers' fervor and disposed them to receive the favors which heaven destined for them.

God entertained in their regard sentiments of goodness and mercy. If He took away those who seemed to be the pillars of the Institute, it was only to

convince them that He would be able to preserve it without their help; that since it was His work, He did not need any man to complete it. They all realized this, from the highest member to the lowliest novice. Filled with courage, great confidence in God, and renewed attachment to their vocation, they conceived an extraordinary desire to persevere in it to death, and thus to contribute, by an augmentation of their fervor, to the perfecting of the task that De La Salle had so generously begun and carried through.

Brother Barthélemy's two Assistants, seeing themselves charged with the guidance of the little bark so long agitated by so many furious storms, took the tiller in hand with great courage and guided it like skillful pilots amidst these new dangers. Their concern was to keep everything in good order, and to give to the deceased Superior a successor who would equal him in merit. Without losing time they sent to all the houses of the Institute a circular letter which informed the Brothers in a most touching manner of the death of their Superior, and indicated to the Directors the date of the assembly which would choose the new superior.

The spirit of union, subordination and dependence, which De La Salle and his successor had left among the Brothers at their deaths, maintained them all in due order without letting the grief which overwhelmed them alter their peace of mind. They all welcomed the letter with great respect, and the Brothers Directors of the various houses, all 18 of them, punctually carried out the orders given them.

A canon,* a friend of the Institute who enjoyed Brother Barthélemy's confidence and whom Brother had chosen for his last confession when he realized he was in danger of death, had taken care to ask him which of the Brothers he considered the best qualified to replace him. The dying Superior had indicated Brother Timothy, at that time Director of the house in Avignon, and had added that Brother Timothy was the one who, also in De La Salle's opinion, deserved to be chosen, and that the saintly Founder might have picked him to take his place, even during his life, if Brother had been a little longer in the Society.** In fact, he was at this time only a neophyte in the Community, so to speak; but his prudence, his even temper, his good spirit, his kind, gracious and courteous ways had drawn the Founder's eyes on him and merited the latter's choice to be his successor some day.

Such was the testimony that this canon gave in his favor, relating the statement of the late Brother Barthélemy to some of the principal Brothers who had come for the election. They did not need to be persuaded on this point, for either because of a divine inspiration or of a prepossession in favor of Brother Timothy, they were nearly unanimous in choosing him. All of them were delighted to give their vote to a Brother whom their saintly father himself had singled out, and to find their own judgment on this point in conformity with his.

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*No doubt Blain himself.

**In 1717, Brother Timothy was 35 and had been in the Society since 1700! He was only four years younger than Brother Barthélemy.

The election took place on the feast of the Assumption, 1720. It found only one discontented person in the assembly, namely the newly elected Superior. The satisfaction felt by all the others was equaled by the disappointment of the new Superior. The Brothers had the double joy of seeing in the first place the one whom De La Salle had hoped would occupy it, and of finding themselves in no danger of being called to it; for each of them feared this responsibility as much as he wished to see it entrusted to Brother Timothy. Thus, while the latter was in consternation over his election, the others were comforted and reassured, like men who reach port after avoiding a dangerous shoal.

Such was the attitude that all the Brothers had inherited from their beloved father, with regard to occupying the first place. His example had inspired them with a real horror for it. The Brothers recalled all the efforts he had made during 30 years to escape from it, the pains and unbelievable persecutions he had had to endure while occupying it, the repose and joy he had enjoyed when he had finally descended to the last place, the constant attraction he had for a private and retired life, hidden and unknown to the world. So well had they absorbed his spirit that they felt themselves irreconcilably opposed to being superiors. So, all of them, delighted that they had avoided this position, congratulated themselves on having conferred it on the one who seemed the most capable of occupying it, and whom heaven itself appeared to have indicated by the almost unanimous vote which had taken place, as well as by the choice made by De La Salle.

Their holy joy was troubled only by the tears and sighs of the new Superior. Considering his election at first as a sort of bad dream, he could not believe that they really wanted to place at the head of the other Brothers the youngest man in the assembly, the one who, he felt, deserved it least. He wished to think, and to make others think, that by error they had mistaken his name for someone else's, and that it was simply impossible that the choice should have fallen on him. But finally, when the voting slips made it clear that he was indeed elected and his eyes demonstrated to him that his ears had heard aright, he changed from astonishment to desolation, and acted like a man who has just heard the sentence condemning him to execution. They were obliged to let him bewail his pretended misfortune, and to listen to the complaints he made to the Brothers about their poor choice, as well as to the pleas he presented asking them to revoke their decision.

After these first moments of sorrow, when reason seemed to be drowned in tears, the Brothers did what they could to console Brother Timothy and promised him that they would make his task an easy one by perfect submission to his orders and an exact fidelity to their duties. Such edifying dispositions, far from diminishing Brother Timothy's sadness, only added thereto; for they showed him that such inferiors should be at the head of the Institute, and he himself at their feet; that each of them possessed the merit that the first place required, while he, the only one unworthy of it, could only draw down God's wrath on the Society, put it to shame, and find his own ruin in his elevation.

The Brothers, delighted to discover such edifying sentiments in their new Superior, hoped for all good things from a man who thought of himself what he

should have thought, what the Spirit of God teaches men to think, and what true humility makes apparent. They had made no mistake in their choice, for it was under Brother Timothy's government and thanks to his wise action that the most important undertakings for the good of the Brothers came to fruition, beyond their most sanguine hopes, as we shall see.

The first task was to make sure of their ownership of the property of Saint Yon. That was as difficult as it was important. The Brothers were in great danger of losing title to the estate and seeing it taken over by strangers, even though it had been bought with the Institute's money and De La Salle's. That was because the purchase had been made in the name of two Brothers, the first of whom, Brother Barthélemy, had just died, and the second who was infirm and advanced in age.* His possible death threatened to dispossess the Brothers.

If Divine Providence, which kept watch over Its work, had not preserved this Brother in life when he was so necessary, the domain of Saint Yon would have reverted to another owner, and thus the Brothers would have been reduced once again to their former unsatisfactory situation which had lasted so long and which had caused them so much trouble. They would have found themselves without a roof over their heads, obliged to wander from one place to another, lacking any stable habitation where they could establish themselves in peace and set up their novitiate. They would have been turned out of a house which belonged to them; they would have been in greater difficulty than ever to find another domicile. Where could they have discovered a place like Saint Yon: vast, spacious, healthful, enjoying good air, solitary, and favorable to recollection, yet situated at the gates of one of the richest and most important cities in the kingdom?

It was, therefore, a matter of supreme importance for them to make sure of their ownership of the property. But that was as difficult to accomplish as it was important, for it required Letters Patent. The Brothers, lacking means and influence, hardly dared to plan on setting in motion the machinery for securing the Letters. On the one hand, the difficulty of the enterprise disheartened them; on the other, necessity spurred them on to try and to hope that God would grant them success.**

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*This Brother was Brother Thomas (Charles Frappet), who had for years been the Saint's right-hand man in handling business affairs. He had occupied many key positions in the young Institute, and because he was persona grata to De La Chétardye, had been able to get out of him the money the Brothers in Paris needed. He was born in 1670; so at this time he was only 50---not exactly the aged invalid Blain portrays. In fact, he died in 1742.

**The problem was that the Institute did not enjoy official recognition (which was conferred only through the Letters Patent) and hence could not legally own property or perform any civil act. Saint Yon legally belonged to the two Brothers whose names appeared on the act of purchase; if they died without heirs, the property would revert to whoever had feudal rights over it.

That was the project which the new Superior and his council resolved to undertake. They therefore drew up a memorandum which De Pont Carré, the first president of the parliament of Normandy and the great protector of the Institute, approved and promised to support with all his influence. That pious and illustrious magistrate, a friend of all godly works, did indeed take the first steps. He wrote to Armand De Bezons, the new archbishop of Rouen,* asking him to countersign the Brothers' request and to grant them his protection. Once his cooperation was obtained, the Brothers, with the backing of the first president and of the highest religious authority in the province, took the liberty of presenting their petition to the chancellor who, before proceeding further, wished to know whether the city was in favor of the move. He wrote to the intendant of Rouen, asking him to confer on this matter with the mayor and the councilmen.

The project would soon have been brought to a successful conclusion if other and more important obstacles had not arisen. For at the request of the first president, the city government willingly gave its consent without delay and in due form. The statement by the city authorities and the other necessary documents were forwarded to the minister of justice, who promised to speak of it to the regent. The process seemed well on its way; but as usual, God's projects move slowly and never fail to meet with impediments on the way. That one was halted at the very door of the royal council by the man who could have done the most to make it succeed.

In fact, the Brothers found in the chancellor's secretary, who was also the first president of the fiscal chamber, a redoubtable adversary who knew all the legal tactics apt to cause their petition to be rejected, and who in fact brought it to fail by a very specious, cleverly thought-out and legal maneuver. The pretext on which he based his opposition to the Brothers' request for Letters Patent was that these were not needed for the schools. He defended this opinion very skillfully in the presence of the chancellor and of the two Brothers who had been sent to plead their case. His argument seemed valid and did not admit of any reply. Since the Christian Schools are authorized and recommended by various declarations of the king, even some very recent ones, what need is there, he asked, for Letters Patent to confirm the Brothers' right to conduct them?

Of course, they did not need the Letters to teach in the gratuitous schools; the permission of the bishops was quite sufficient for that. But they needed the Letters to insure their ownership of their property at Saint Yon, to give public recognition to their status, to establish them as a regularly constituted community capable of acquiring and possessing property in the kingdom. D'Aguesseau** did not seem convinced by his secretary's arguments. He answered very kindly, telling the Brothers that he would take

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*He had succeeded to the See of Rouen in January, 1720, but died a couple of years later.

**D'Aguesseau (1668-1751) was one of the outstanding civil servants France had at this time. He was chancellor (minister of justice) several times (1717, 1718, 1722); apparently he was something of a Jansenist sympathizer.

the matter under consideration. He did speak of it to the regent, but the latter, apparently won over by the secretary who had come out in opposition to the Brothers, rejected their request.

Thus the attempt failed in 1721. It was taken up again with more likelihood of success when D'Armenonville was made minister of justice after the disgrace of D'Aguesseau. The change put a whole new face on the matter, and the Brothers did all they could to profit by it. Circumstances could not have been more favorable, because the new minister was known for his great zeal for sound doctrine and for his depth of religion and piety, which made him a friend of all good works.

The Brothers managed to approach him, thanks to the recommendation of De Saint Aubin, Superior General of the Seminaries of Saint Sulpice. He promised them his help and protection. The former chancellor's secretary, who had also lost his post, was no longer in a position to block the Brothers' pursuit of their plans; but he did manage to retard it by constantly refusing to send back the papers which had been left in his hands and which he never returned.

It was, therefore, necessary to begin all over again, which occasioned new expenses, to solicit for a second time the protection of Archbishop De Bezons and De Pont Carré, and to get a second statement of consent from the city authorities. When all that was done, certain highly considered persons, outstanding for their piety, approached those who had the honor of belonging to the king's privy council. All those men were in favor of an Institute so useful to the public and so necessary to poverty-stricken youth. They promised their protection and their votes. The Marquis De La Vrillière, among others, showed himself very active in promoting the affair. Even so, their good will remained ineffective for the time being, because the regent, surprised at seeing the members of his council pleading with him unanimously to grant Letters Patent to the Brothers, was somewhat embarrassed at first. On the one hand, he was reluctant to refuse the favor flatly, but, on the other, he did not want to give in to their petition. The expedient he came up with in order not to grant anything while not refusing anything was to temporize, saying that it was necessary to wait a while longer. Thus he cleverly evaded the request and stymied the project once more.

A year later a third effort was made, which the regent again caused to fail while appearing not to refuse. Once more his entire council along with the prime minister, Cardinal Du Bois, at its head, was ready to grant the Brothers what they were asking for. Other friends, as distinguished by their high birth as by their piety, joined the first ones in pleading the cause of the Institute. The worthiness of their petition was obvious enough; and all agreed that the prince owed his protection to an Institute devoted to the task of Christian and gratuitous education, which had been so strongly authorized and recommended by royal edicts.

But the See of Rouen was vacant at the moment, Archbishop De Bezons having died recently. That gave His Royal Highness a specious pretext for setting aside the petition backed by his whole council. De La Vrillière, irritated at this new delaying tactic, objected that the late archbishop had given his consent; but the Duke of Orléans replied that the agreement of his

successor was also needed. Therefore they must wait. Unfortunately, this successor had not yet been appointed and was not named for a considerable time; thus everything had to remain in suspense for two more years.

The new setback did not discourage the Brothers. Hoping against hope, they multiplied their prayers and did all they could to interest the Most Blessed Virgin on their behalf. Convinced that success would be theirs if she intervened in their favor, they made a vow to fast in perpetuity on the eve of the Immaculate Conception, and solemnly to consecrate themselves to her on the feast itself, if she secured the Letters Patent for them.

Before the regent died, towards the end of 1723, he had named as archbishop of Rouen La Vergne De Tressan, bishop of Nantes. The prelate was a member of the regent's council and had frequently befriended the Brothers since they had started their efforts to obtain the Letters. He gave them new assurances of his benevolence and promised that, as soon as he entered into possession of his archdiocese, he would take their project in hand and bring it to success. However, nobody knew how long that would take; and his gracious words did not guarantee that the sick and infirm Brother who had lent his name for the purchase of Saint Yon would stay alive. If he died, the house would be lost, and the Institute would once more become what it had been previously: unsettled and uprooted, its members unsure of what would become of them.

As it was extremely important for the Letters Patent to be granted before the Brother in question died, the Brothers decided to send him in person to plead for them. He was an excellent choice. Tall, well-built, with a venerable air which won respect, he looked like one of the patriarchs of old, although his pallor and emaciation caused him to resemble one of the desert abbots of old. His candor and simplicity won the favor of those whom he approached. So it was decided to send him in person to promote the affair and to present himself, in the hope that the sight of him might touch the responsible people and hasten the conclusion of the business.

Although he was not feeling well, the Brother left for Fontainebleau where the court was, and he did all that could be expected of him. His pale and drawn countenance, which seemed to warn those he spoke to that his death could not be far off, pleaded more eloquently than his words on his behalf and gave visible testimony that it was urgent to guarantee the possession of Saint Yon to the Institute and to afford the Brother himself this final assurance by the Letters Patent, or else consent to the loss of the property and the death of the Brother.

La Vergne De Tressan, the archbishop-designate of Rouen, found himself urged by so many highly placed persons, all distinguished by their piety, to present the Brothers' request to the council that he finally resolved to do so even though he had not yet been installed. In doing this, he was only following his natural inclination towards kindness; his willingness to oblige everybody. He was even more strongly moved to act by the condition in which he found the Brother whose death would have had such disastrous consequences for an Institute which was precious to the Church, one established at the gates of his archiepiscopal city.

When the petition was presented and read to the council, it won the approbation of the members with no dissenting voice. The king, who by this time was of age, was surprised at this unanimity and looked inquiringly at Cardinal Fleury* who held the Institute in high esteem and was more in favor of the project than anybody else. The prime minister gave His Majesty to understand that this good work was indeed worthy of his protection and deserved the favor requested. Immediately the prince, who had inherited his father's piety and his great-grandfather's zeal for religion, graciously authorized the granting of Letters Patent to the house of Saint Yon, and he directed that mention be made in the state register that the Letters would be delivered once De Tressan had been enthroned as archbishop.

Thus, after four years of negotiations and unsuccessful attempts, the house at Saint Yon definitely became the Brothers' property, and their status, up to then uncertain and unsettled, was consolidated by the Letters issued on September 28, 1724, eve of Saint Michael's feast. Three months later the documents were forwarded, thanks to the archbishop who had by that time returned to Paris after taking possession of the See of Rouen early in 1725. The Brothers are not the only religious group to whom Archbishop De Tressan rendered such an important and necessary service. His interest in Christian schools led him to request the same favor for the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, called Sisters of Ernemont.** They are devoted to the care of the sick in country places and to the gratuitous instruction of youth in the city and diocese of Rouen. Louis XV granted this favor with equal graciousness.

At Rouen, a retirement home for old and infirm priests received the same favor thanks to the same prelate. If he did not do as much for the Seminary of Saint Nicaise, which had already applied for Letters through the former archbishop, D'Aubigné, at least he made sure that that institution, so necessary for the education of young candidates for the ecclesiastical state, received 2,000 écus per year from the funds of the diocesan clergy, money which had been granted by Louis XIV at D'Aubigné's request. In addition, he added to the seminary itself, and at present he is having additional buildings constructed to lodge a larger number of candidates. Thus, thanks to his zeal and his efforts, Archbishop De Tressan procured for the state four sorts of establishments which are among the most necessary for the Church and for the public.

The Brothers' Letters Patent were registered by the parliament of Rouen on March 2, 1725, and by the fiscal office four months later. But this latter formality was concluded only with great difficulty and much opposition caused by the parish priest of....*** The pastor was concerned about the loss he

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*He had been Louis XV's preceptor and bishop of Fréjus; he served as prime minister during the early years of Louis XV's reign.

**Blain was the ecclesiastical superior of that Congregation.

***No doubt, of Saint Sever, the parish where Saint Yon was located. He had given the Founder and the Brothers much trouble before.

might suffer if the arid and sandy area where Saint Yon is situated was withdrawn from the territory on which his revenue was based. On that occasion he used all his influence to prevent the Letters Patent from being registered in court. He was too prudent to try the same tactics with the parliament because he would have had to contend with a redoubtable adversary in the person of the first president, De Pont Carré, the Brothers' declared protector, who was at the same time the magistrate in charge of furthering the acceptance of the Letters Patent.

So, the priest waited very cleverly before trying to oppose the registration of the Letters until they were before the second court, and he did so with consummate skill. He visited all the members of the council and was eloquent enough to make them believe some of the things he stated. Really, the Letters were contrary to the interests of a man who, convinced that the Brother who was the legal owner could not live much longer, flattered himself that in a short while the house of Saint Yon would revert to its former owner, and that he himself would be able to maintain his jurisdiction over a section of his parish so rich in sand and gravel!

X....,* hearing about the intrigues of this opponent of the Letters Patent, was kind enough to pay a visit to De La Rivière Lesdo, first president of the fiscal office, and asked him to use his influence in the Brothers' favor. His action was needed, for almost all the members of this office had allowed themselves to be strongly prejudiced by the Brothers' adversary. He had intrigued so assiduously that one of the main magistrates had promised him to cause the affair to fall through by refusing his consent, which was necessary. But the Brothers' powerful friend, possessing a superior mind and equal authority, acted so adroitly in their support in this complicated matter that they began to hope that things would take a turn for the better.

However, it was not possible, after the reading of the Letters on July 2, 1725, to prevent the procurator, coached by the Brothers' enemy, from advancing all the calumnies suggested to him against the Brothers, and from falsely imputing to them all sorts of misdeeds, quite apt to prejudice the second court against them. His discourse achieved part of its intended effect on judges who were already not too open minded; for if it did not prevent them from registering the Letters, it suggested to them the idea of adding to them some very burdensome conditions, very harsh and very mortifying for the Brothers, in spite of the eloquent address made in their favor by De Captot, the advocate general. However, the conditions were soon declared null by a decree of the king's council, thanks to the appeal made by the pious and influential protector of the Brothers.

In this way, in spite of the surprising intrigues of one man, the Letters Patent were registered in the two first supreme courts of Normandy; and the Institute, which had become a religious Order** through the Bull of the Holy See, which the king's council had accepted as valid, was finally liberated

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*It has not been possible to identify this friend.

**It was not, and still is not, a religious ORDER!

from the dependence and the sort of slavery in which its adversaries had sought to confine it through those special clauses, contrary to the common law and to the privileges of all religious Communities.

We must now speak of the approbation which the Holy See gave to the Brothers' Institute. While the Brothers were petitioning the French court for Letters Patent, they were also at work at the court of Rome, seeking to obtain a Bull of Approbation. About the same amount of time was spent in both these endeavors, and their successful termination occurred almost simultaneously.

To set the second of these negotiations in movement, Divine Providence made use of a Brother of the Society who had been employed by the Prince De Soubise, father of Cardinal De Rohan.* This Brother had been admitted into the Community by De La Salle around 1707. He loved his vocation, was zealous, presented himself well, spoke agreeably, and was beloved and highly regarded by the illustrious family by which he had once been employed. That was what inspired Brother Barthélemy, shortly after De La Salle's death, with the idea of taking advantage, for the benefit of the Community, of the esteem that the Soubise family had for their former employee. The two of them, therefore, went to pay their respects to His Eminence, hoping to win his protection, but without having any definite idea in mind as to how he could help them.

Cardinal De Rohan was happy to see his father's old friend, now dressed in the Brothers' habit. He received them very kindly, and while telling the Brother how pleased he was over his decision to become a religious, inquired if he could be of help to him. The Brother, who was only waiting for such an opportunity, did not fail to seize it, and he begged His Eminence to take the Community under his protection, and to give the struggling and persecuted Institute the support it needed. The Cardinal willingly promised to do so.

After Brother Barthélemy's death, the same Brother offered to go with Brother Timothy and to introduce him to His Eminence, and to solicit his patronage again. They went together, paid him their respects, and enjoyed a long and cordial audience with him, during which the prelate again promised his help and protection. At that time the project of securing a Bull of Approbation had not yet been launched. In fact, the idea of doing so did not come up until some six months later, in 1721, when the news became public that Cardinal De Rohan had been named ambassador extraordinary of France to the court of Rome and was soon to depart.

Who could better serve the Brothers' interests in the capital of Christendom than so mighty a prelate? He had promised to protect them, and his heart did not belie his lips. By character, by his love for all good works, and by his special regard for an aged and faithful employee of his father's, he was entirely willing to help the Brothers. It was a fine

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*Armand Gaston De Rohan, whose mother was la belle Soubise, was born in 1674; he became bishop of Strasbourg in 1704 and a Cardinal in 1712. He was active in diplomacy for Louis XIV and Louis XV, and in 1725 officiated at the latter's marriage with Maria Leszczyńska. He was highly regarded by his contemporaries for his wit, intelligence, perfect manners and genuinely kind disposition. The Brother in question was Brother Honoré.

opportunity to solicit the good will of the Holy See through his influence and authority.

All these ideas, a bit confused at first, began to take shape in the mind of Brother Superior. As they sorted themselves out, they left him with the desire of having Rome approve the Society founded by De La Salle and the Rule he had composed. Brother Timothy informed the old Brother of his plan, and the latter agreed to help. So he and a companion given to him by the Superior General were sent to bring the Cardinal a memorandum drawn up in the form of a placet.^{*} In the document His Eminence was asked to use his influence at Rome to have the Rule and the Institute of the Brothers approved. However, they could not speak to the Cardinal himself, who was on the point of leaving; so they addressed themselves, very fortunately, to Jean Vivant, a priest who was going to Rome as part of Cardinal De Rohan's entourage.^{**}

The matter could not have been put into better hands, nor could it have found another patron better qualified to bring it to success, for Vivant had already been to Rome several times, had lived there for long periods, and knew how things were done there. He was, moreover, a man who favored all good works, one who took pleasure in helping others. As this task of the Brothers was especially to his liking, and as he could see the great good it was capable of accomplishing for the Church, he took the Brothers' interests to heart and promised to promote them with diligence. This he did with a zeal and skill which deserve for him eternal gratitude on the Brothers' part.

It would seem that the Brother of whom we have spoken lived only to do that service to his Community, for not long after he had presented this placet to the Cardinal he died, in August, 1721, at the age of 60. He had lived in the Society for some 15 years as a serving Brother.

Cardinal De Rohan's sojourn in Rome was a short one; on his arrival he found that Clement XI had just died. After taking part in the conclave that elected Innocent XIII, he returned to France. The journey, however, was not without advantage for the Brothers; for Vivant took care to place their Rule into the hands of some of his Roman friends, with a recommendation from His Eminence that they take steps to secure approval by the Holy See. On his return to Paris he commissioned one of his friends, a banker at the Roman court, to negotiate the matter.

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*A placet was a sort of formulary used in presenting petitions.

**He was the brother of a priest, François Vivant, vicar general of Paris who, as mentioned above, had done the Brothers a considerable favor when De Brou wanted to get Cardinal De Noailles to change the Rule. Jean Vivant later became vicar general and auxiliary bishop of Strasbourg under Cardinal De Rohan.

One difficulty seemed to stand in the way, and it took time to resolve it. De Tencin,* today archbishop of Embrun, was at that time in charge of expediting day-to-day affairs concerning French interests in Rome. He ordered the people who were trying to obtain a Bull of Approbation for the Brothers to suspend their attempts until the king had granted the Letters Patent, or until he himself had received from His Majesty a statement in their favor. Thus both the Bull and the Letters Patent, which were being sought at the same time, remained in suspense. Almost four years went by without any progress. But finally the hour chosen by Divine Providence for settling this business came, and the Bull was issued shortly after the Letters Patent, as we have related above.

Innocent XIII died not long after his election.** Cardinal De Rohan returned to Rome for the conclave, and Vivant again accompanied him. During his stay in the Eternal City the latter arranged everything for the granting of the Bull, as he had promised the Brothers before his departure. Thus, on returning to Paris after the election of Benedict XIII and finding that the Letters Patent had been issued, he immediately advised his friends in Rome of this fact and urged them to pursue with the greatest diligence the approval of the Brothers' Rule and their Institute. He was obeyed with zeal and success, and the Bull was issued towards the end of January, 1725, after the ceremony of the opening of the Holy Door for the great Jubilee.

I must not omit here some circumstances which show the attention that God manifested in favoring, after De La Salle's death, all the pious desires of His servant which, during his life, He seemed to take pleasure in denying. De La Salle had always hoped for three things for the well-being and perfection of his Institute: that it would become a religious Order; that the Rule would be approved in its integrity, without addition or diminution; that the Institute not be merged with some other older Order already approved.

His desires were carried out to the letter, without any special effort on the Brothers' part, and even without their having thought of doing so. A year before the granting of the Bull, they had been advised by their Roman correspondents that the Holy See would refuse to approve their Rule unless they were willing to take the three vows of religion. Their Rule spoke only of the vow of obedience; but all of them knew in their hearts what their father had in his, namely, the pious desire to add to the vow of obedience those of poverty and chastity. Several Brothers had already made such vows in private. Thus, delighted over the opportunity that Divine Providence offered them, they hastened to accept this glorious yoke which was being offered to them, and they joyfully presented their hands to the agreeable chains which had been prepared for them.

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*A typical ecclesiastical schemer and politician. Devoted to the regent and acting under his orders, he browbeat Innocent XIII into giving the red hat to the former's favorite, the worthless candidate, Du Bois.

**Innocent XIII reigned from 1721 to 1724.

This holy disposition brought the Brothers to the complete fulfillment of their desires. Their Rule was approved as De La Salle had left it, without additions or restrictions or changes, and without being joined to any other Rule.* This last point was important, and the saintly Founder had greatly feared that approval might not be granted. In fact, he had good reason to be apprehensive on this point, for his Rule could not have been combined with any other of a different nature. Any change, consequently, would have modified its form instead of fortifying it, and it would have ended by destroying it.

The Bull of Approbation of the Institute and of the Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was presented to the royal council and accepted by that body in spite of the opposition of some of the officials of the court; and the Letters (of the king), which gave the Bull official sanction in France, were sent off, sealed, and finally registered by the parliament of Rouen on May 12, 1725.

To all the Brothers of the Institute, who had not been kept informed of the negotiations we have been describing, this good news seemed a heavenly boon. All the business had been carried on in such secrecy, inside as well as outside the Community, that except for the four or five main members of the Society who were in the know, and who were the principal agents, nobody had had the slightest suspicion of what was going on. The first president, De Pont Carré, was himself not aware of the request for the Bull of Approbation; so surprised was he over the complete success it had met with that, in his first moment of astonishment, he remarked: "The Brothers have gone a long way in a short time."

It can be said that the Brothers' ship, for 40 years the plaything of storms and winds because of the persecutions of the world, always enemies of God's works, launched on such a lengthy voyage where it had been a thousand times in danger of shipwreck, had finally reached the desired port. What was the surprise, the joy of the poor Brothers, up to then so maltreated by the world? It is easier to imagine than to describe. At last they were in a more assured condition. They learned that their status had changed into a more perfect and certain one, like men who find a treasure, or recover their liberty, or inherit a fortune on awaking from sleep. They saw themselves at last what they had desired to be without hope of ever becoming such. The great advantages that the papal Bull brought them for the perfection of their Institute in general, and for their own individual perfection, were motives for a renewal of fervor among them; and each one thought of nothing thenceforth save of profiting by the great grace offered him, and of preparing himself to become a perfect religious.

Finally, Divine Providence, as if wishing to show by an evident sign that the Bull and the Letters Patent were God's own doing, provided for the expenses they had occasioned. On this account Providence became more liberal

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*It was not unusual, especially for Congregations of Sisters, to have their particular Rule joined to the Rule of some older Order: Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, Benedictine....when the Congregation was approved by the ecclesiastical authorities.

than ever towards the sons who from the beginning had been entrusted to Its care, and whom It had always provided for and protected even when they had been abandoned and rejected by creatures. God procured for them, by natural and apparently ordinary means, all the financial help they needed. This came about through the large number of boarders that applied for admission to Saint Yon. And to let it be known that it was God's doing, there has never been such an influx, before or since, of students capable of adding to the resources of the house by such large fees.

On August 6 of that same year, 1725, the general assembly of the principal Brothers, both Directors and older Brothers, was convoked to accept Benedict XIII's Bull, in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Bull was received like the Ark of the Alliance had been in Jerusalem of yore by David and the principal men of Israel, namely, with transports of joy, gratitude, praise and devotion which seemed to make this a day of eternal blessedness for the good Brothers. The days which followed, up to the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin, were spent in retreat, silence, close union with God, profound recollection and renewed fervor. This retreat served as a preparation for making the three vows of religion. Brother Superior had wished to give up his position on that occasion; but his humility found so much opposition in the General Chapter on the part of all the members that he was obliged to remain in office, in spite of his pleading and urging.

Morning and evening Bodin, the director of the Jesuit novitiate in Rouen, came to address the assembly. He was a man of rare merit and uncommon virtue. Malesco of the same Society and the directors of the major seminary also spoke on the special grace that heaven was giving the Institute, on the excellence of its status, and on the importance of being faithful thereto. All these talks helped to enkindle the fire of the Holy Spirit in the house of Saint Yon during these days of retreat. The retreat ended by the pronouncing of the three vows of religion, made by each Brother in turn, before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. The profession was on the feast of Our Lady's Assumption. Robinet, canon of the Cathedral and vicar general of the diocese of Rouen, representing and holding the place of the Holy Father, celebrated Mass and addressed an eloquent and touching exhortation to those present.

In that General Chapter, the members, after voting to have the Rule printed so as to make sure it was not altered or changed with the passing of time and the introduction of possible relaxation, also adopted several disciplinary provisions to maintain regular observance in full vigor. One of these points concerned the use of tobacco, the introduction of which it was desired to prevent by specifically forbidding it. It was decided that all postulants would be informed of the Rule forbidding tobacco, and that the doors of the house would be opened to those only who were willing to give up this practice for the rest of their lives.

Since that time, the blessings of the Lord have been multiplied on the house of Saint Yon, as De La Salle had foretold. On the eve of his death he had said, "This house will flourish." Indeed, he would no longer recognize it if he returned to life. Since his death, it has been enlarged by more than half. Every day, to the great astonishment of the public and even of the Brothers themselves, one can see large stone buildings going up, which seem to

be founded on Providence alone. One large wing joined to the original structure runs from west to east. It was built at the cost of some 25,000 livres. This addition was begun thanks to a gift of 2,000 livres donated by the father of a retarded child who entrusted the youngster to the Brothers for the rest of his life. God so generously provided the remainder of the money needed that the Brothers themselves would be at a loss to account for it.

The building of the chapel, which is nearing completion, was also undertaken without reserve funds or resources other than the generosity of our heavenly Father. Here is what suggested this project. In one of the houses of the Society, the Brothers' salaries of 300 livres per year had not been paid for nine years. They had begun to despair of ever collecting this money, so they made a vow to devote this amount, if they ever did receive it, to the building of a chapel at Saint Yon. Shortly after the vow was made, the back salaries were paid; but the amount was not sufficient to cover the expense of laying the foundation of the proposed chapel. However, the Brothers used the funds to start the project, in the hope that the divine hand which had begun it would not leave it unfinished.

Since that time the building has gone ahead day by day, although the Brothers had no special benefactor to rely on, no special funds to draw from. It is true that they build very economically and at the expense of their own leisure time. They received at no cost the foundation stones from the fine house of the deceased President Carel, which was torn down just a short distance from their gate. They can get all the sand they need on the property itself. The architect and a good many of the workers are found in the house among the Brothers.

The Brothers do most of the work themselves. They extract the sand, transport the materials, shape the stones, and do just about everything else. They live mostly on the produce of their garden, a dry and not very fertile spot, situated in a sandy bottom which they water with their sweat, and which they force by their hard and assiduous labor to reward its owners. Moreover, they drink only weak beer and eat only coarse bread. In this way they economize enough on food to be able to build, and their own work represents over half of the building costs. The rest comes from the funds of Divine Providence, causing their task to progress little by little. Up to now public charity, which they serve in Rouen with such unexampled disinterestedness and generosity, has not helped them in any way.

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END OF BOOK III

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